Renegotiating Masculinity: Knighthood in the Late Middle English Romance

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Certified that the Thesis entitled

Renegotiating Masculinity: Knighthood in the Late Middle English Romance submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Sukanta Chaudhuri, Professor Emeritus, Department of English, Jadavpur University.

I hereby declare that this is a true copy of the thesis, and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

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PREFACE

The figure of Gawain, as we find him at the end of *Sir Gawain of the Green Knight*, leaves one confused. I started with this confusing image of the knight presented by the poet. Here is a knight who is the epitome of the Arthurian chivalric ethos, yet by the end of the poem, he comes to diverge so much from the standard courtly ideals. My attempt has been to understand the reasons that lead to such a knight growing so disenchanted with the very ethos of which he himself is the prime representative. In order to arrive at this understanding, I went back to works presenting comparable challenges of chivalric identity, although to varying degrees. The difference in degree was primarily, I concluded, dependent on the nature of the knight's interaction with a woman. My dissertation does not follow any particular line of current Gender Studies. It is an independent inquiry into how the masculinity of a knight is re-formed through his encounter with feminity.

My interest in the figure of Gawain began in college, and my interest in medieval studies grew during the two years I spent at Calcutta University. I was the only student who opted for the 'special paper' in Medieval European Literature. I still congratulate myself for doing so. I then had the opportunity to learn from Professors such as Arun Kumar Das Gupta, Subhadra Kumar Sen, Sukanta Chaudhuri and Amlan Das Gupta. Professor Amlan Das Gupta was later my supervisor for my M.Phil.

Working on this dissertation has been a challenging task, and I would have perhaps given it up but for two reasons, the principle one being the chance I have received to learn from

Professor Sukanta Chaudhuri, who agreed to be my supervisor. I have indeed been fortunate that he did not give up on me, for I know I have tried his patience very often. The other reason I kept working on the dissertation is my elder son, Aranck Veer Kunzang. He knows how difficult it was for me to complete this task, and I hope he learns that one must continue despite difficulties.

I have learnt immensely, and in particular I have now learned how important it is to pay attention to detail. I certainly now also know that I have barely scraped the surface of my field of inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

My thesis discusses the changing notions of heroic masculinity– a term I will define over the next few pages –as presented in the romances of the Middle Ages, culminating in the fourteenth century. I also discuss the romances by Chrétien de Troyes as marking a major stage in this development. I examine Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*, *Yvain*, *Cligès* and *Lancelot*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Knight's Tale* and *The Franklin's Tale* and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to study the manner in which the knights of these romances negotiate the established norms of heroic masculinity and move towards reshaping them into a new expression. My contention is that the knight-hero, in following the established form of masculinity, is under constant pressure, and his experiences often require him to question the ideals of heroism that he is expected to emulate.

I take into consideration concepts of chivalry, courtesy and courtly love that influence the romance narratives of the twelfth century, and examine the role of these concepts in shaping the knight's masculinity. Each of these concepts arises from specific changes in the socio-cultural environment of Western European aristocratic society and contributes to the forming of a new idea of heroic masculinity. I also look at how these concepts, especially courtly love, bring about a relational dynamics between the knight and his lady. This aspect, I argue, is most significant in understanding the

nature of change that is experienced by the individual knights. In the course of my discussion, I will illustrate how none of the above concepts can be satisfactorily explained in simple terms, and that they are intricately linked to form the core values of chivalric society – the society to which the knight belonged and which defined his value system.

The term *chivalry*, which derives from the Old French word *chevalier*, was associated with the knights, the Latin word *caballarius* meaning 'horseman'. This explains the link with knighthood: *chivalry* referred originally to the martial skills associated particularly with mounted warfare. During the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the term began also to refer to certain values and ideals that governed a particular class of society. The chivalric order thus came to indicate a social group which practised such values, including but going far beyond the skills associated with this kind of martial activity. In my discussions, the term is chiefly used to describe the ideals that govern the upper sections of the feudal society, although, at times, *chivalry* is also applied in its primary context of war and combat. My arguments illustrate the gradual expansion of the meaning of *chivalry* to include an intrinsic and personal evaluation rather than a virtue which seeks external validation from society. One of the points I raise in the course of my discussion is that the notion of chivalry is not a fixed idea, and that it is necessary to grasp the changes in its meaning in order to understand the group to which these ideals appealed and applied. The term *courtesy* is related to the Latin word *curia*, meaning *court*. The French derivation *courtoisie* was associated with a measure of decorum and refinement in speech and behaviour, and gradually came to mean an entire code of courtly conduct. During the period that I focus on, this term came to denote an elaborate ethical code.

By the twelfth century, when the concept of courtesy begins to develop in various courts, the knight is expected to be well acquainted with the qualities of refined speech and elegant behaviour. The changing socio-political scene of the early twelfth century, that gave rise to concepts such as chivalry and courtesy, also brings about a significantly different outlook, which, together with the newly developed idea of courtly love, began to have an enormous impact on the masculinity of the knight. My discussions of heroic masculinity demonstrate that the martial ideal, which usually involved certain values of the male-oriented feudal community-- values such as loyalty to one's lord or personal glory --are now either being replaced or put alongside other qualities that are, by the twelfth century, deemed essential for a knight. This results in a multifaceted figure of the knight. Moreover, from this time onwards, not only is his sense of loyalty and honour challenged in military action, but his abilities as a courtier are also tested. Along with the knight's actions in respect to other men, which are still a concern of the romances, his conduct in response to women also begins to define his personality more and more. The twelfth-century romances introduce female characters who engage with the knights in a completely different manner than ever seen before. This is significant as it redefines the rules of engagement that the hero-knight is expected to follow.

In examining the interactions between the ladies and the knight-warrior, I trace the development of a new, challenging and dynamic masculinity in process of formation. I examine the figure of the knight who follows the norms and rules of his aristocratic chivalrous society and, in doing so, arrives at a situation where even the expanded code I indicate above is neither viable nor tenable any more.

After a preliminary look at *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland* as examples illustrating an earlier and simpler masculine ideal, I proceed to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes as marking a crucial early development of the new chivalric ideal. I then take up the above-mentioned works of Chaucer to show how these ideals develop over the following centuries and grow increasingly problematized. My discussion ends with an examination of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which, in my view, raises radical issues questioning the adequacy of the chivalric ideals in a new social order. In my discussion of these texts, I try to show how the protagonist in each of the works moves towards a redefinition of his masculinity. A redefinition in the sense that these protagonists are very much a part of the ethos that valorises the warrior-class, yet their masculinity cannot be satisfactorily defined by the formulations set as ideal by their society. Insofar as it can be defined, it proves unequal to new challenges and demands. I also explain how such ideals exert pressure on the knight-hero and bring about a crisis of identity. This crisis is the result of the complex ramifications that the notion of chivalry has come to acquire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, because of certain socio-economic changes and also because of the vying expectations of chivalry and love. In fact, the idea of courtly love is also by now more complicated not only because of the presence of women, but because some of the women who are brought into the narrative arena of the romance occupy equal narrative space and interact with their male counterparts in a manner that exposes the inadequacy of the knight's own ideals.

The term 'masculinity' implies an opposite concept of femininity, hence a number of theorists speak of masculinity as one element of a binary opposition, femininity being the other; but this may be an over-simple view. It requires us to understand the

relationships and procedures that demand that men and women lead gendered lives. It has been customary until recently to view masculinity as an undifferentiated 'other'; however, it no longer seems possible to study masculinity in such a simplistic manner, nor is it rewarding to approach it as a monolithic construct. Masculinity has to be studied in the larger structural framework in which it is located. R.W. Connell, who has been researching on issues related to men's studies and is one of the founders of masculinity studies, says in her book *Masculinities*, published in 1995, that the new genre of men's studies 'implies a false unity in men's lives. But the conflict that now exists, calls for a fresh appraisal of research and theory about masculinity, and a fresh attempt to connect knowledge with strategies of change.'[1] She makes the statement in light of the fact that the growing popularity of studies about men and masculinity, which was an offshoot of gender studies and feminist studies, often ignores or distorts the research being conducted in this field and presents a confused understanding of masculinity. According to her, the discourse that shapes the study of masculinity must be connected with both psychoanalysis and social research. The structure of personality put forward by Freud and the sociological dimension given to the notion of personality in his writings such as *Civilization and its Discontents*, which speaks of how culture gains power over individual desire, have influenced our understanding of masculinity. Connell details the ways in which the different approaches to the study of character and personality by psychoanalysts such as Karl Jung and Wilhelm Reich have contributed to the understanding of masculinity as fragile, complex and problematic.

[1]R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, ix

Further, by the mid-twentieth century, a group of authors including Theodor Adorno published a collective work *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) that presented masculinity as closely linked to economic and cultural realities. This work presented an understanding of masculinity which was 'particularly involved with the maintenance of patriarchy'.[2]A few years earlier, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his *Being and Nothingness* (1943), had spoken of a different way, not through the unconscious, of tracing one's life history and arriving at self-knowledge. It was Simon de Beauvoir who applied Sartre's existential psychoanalysis, as it came to be known, to gender. In her *The Second Sex*(1949), she spoke of the woman as being constituted as the 'other' to the male subject, and it was through her work that gender emerged as an evolving subject related to social structures, so that we now understand gender as differences in one's social conditioning and way of life and not between fixed character types.

Studies in the field of medieval masculinities developed sometime in the latter half of the last century by drawing on the works of social history and studies of sexuality influenced by Michel Foucault. The collection of essays edited by Claire A. Lees in 1994, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages,* served as the foundation for studies concerning masculinity in the Middle Ages. Works in this collection explore the range of male experiences during this period. Lees, in her influential introduction to the collection, speaks of deconstructing the categories of 'man', 'maleness' and 'masculinity', and the volume expresses the idea that men had a variety of experiences: it is important to discuss the range of these experiences in order to revise our understanding of the 'hegemonic male'. The new direction provided by studies of masculinities in the Middle Ages has encouraged scholarship

[2] Connell, *Masculinities*, 18.

in this field to explore the nuanced experience of the medieval male not in terms of hegemony but as a non-unified range of encounters with a varyingly gendered environment. For example, in *From Boys to Men: Formation of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (2003), Ruth Karras examines a variety of masculinities in different vocational and social locations, such as knights, university students and craftsmen. Similarly, Jacqueline Murray in her *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in Medieval West*, published in 1999, discusses the complexities and the interplay of the varying competing masculinities in the life of the medieval male subject. These works present us with a notion of medieval masculinity which is not always consistent or uniform but always complex and often contradictory. Although my work, as detailed in the following chapters, does not subscribe to any particular theory of masculinity, it does trace the development of a masculinity in the process of formation. I examine the extent to which certain socio-cultural changes, particularly the introduction of women in the field of knightly interactions, moulds the change in the masculinity of the knight. In fact, it is this engagement with the feminine that makes it feasible to talk of the knightly ideal in terms of 'masculinity', though as I suggested above, but cannot apply this distinction in a simplistic way.

The texts that I use in the following chapters cover the period between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries, the period known as the Middle Ages. This period of European history has generally been accepted as the bridge between the world of antiquity, ending in western Europe with the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, and the new world of the European Renaissance in the fifteenth century. The texts I examine cover a period of almost ten centuries, a vast span of time. To examine works belonging to various widely separated points of this span would have

been far more difficult and challenging had not several scholars already paved the way. The arguments I put forward draw material from various disciplines, as my arguments examine the socio-historical basis of the change in presentation of the idea of a heroic masculinity. My understanding of medieval society is primarily influenced by the works of three prominent historians of the French Annales School: Marc Bloch, Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff. I have followed Bloch's division of the development of the European feudal society into the two main phases of the first feudal age and the second feudal age. An examination based on such a chronological division allows one to study and understand the essential characteristics separating the period before the eleventh century from that after, in order to investigate the conditions that bring about the change in the formulations of heroic masculinity. Duby's account of the organization of the aristocratic order and the evolution of knighthood has provided material support for my arguments. However, his presentation of medieval society as divided into the three tiers, of those who pray, those who fight and those who work – drawing, needless to say, on the traditional idea of the three estates -- is not completely satisfying. The social division suggested by Duby has been contested by later historians, Le Goff being one of them. Jacques Le Goff's work quite literally brought the Middle Ages out of the darkness conventionally associated with this period of history. His contention that the Middle Ages in Europe marked the foundation of certain institutions and beliefs that created a European identity and culture, is a position that has widened the scope and significance of medieval studies.

W.P. Ker's examination of works written during the Middle Ages has also greatly helped my understanding of medieval literature. His study of the vast subject of the

Teutonic epic, ranging from Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and Icelandic literature, both oral and written, has aided my understanding of the heroic mentality. I do not, however, agree with Ker's assessment of the genre of romance as lesser than the epic, although one has to agree with the distinction he makes between these two genres. Ker also described the conditions that lead to this division or change in literary tastes separating the earlier epics from the later romances. One of the chief reasons for this change is the concept of chivalry: the introduction of and attachment to certain ethical and cultural values radically modifying the earlier ideal oriented to a more purely martial order. Just as Ker's expansive scholarship contributed to our general understanding of the Middle Ages, the detailed study of the origins of the Arthurian stories provided by R.S. Loomis, must also be mentioned. It is true that Loomis's views regarding the Celtic connections of the Arthurian legend were criticised in later years, but some of the connections he had drawn between the Celtic origins of the Arthurian tales and their representations in the romances are still accepted and form the basis of our understanding of the Arthurian ethos prior to the introduction of the concept of chivalry.

Chivalry as an expression of martial values, its ceremonial role, as well as its cultural implications are themes that I discuss at length. In this regard, I have been mostly influenced by the view of chivalry presented by Maurice Keen, Richard Kaeuper and Richard Barber. However, a number of critics, including those named here, usually emphasize the violence associated with the career of the knight, which illustrates the martial aspect of chivalry. My point is that while violence is certainly an essential part of the knight's personality, this aspect is under pressure to change with the introduction of female characters and the concept of courtly love. Vern L. Bullough's

Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women (1973),besides other works such as Marty N Williams and Anne Echols' *Between Pit and Pedestal* (1994), have shown that women were not completely excluded from narratives of various kinds during the period, but these critics discuss works that present women in the more customary, traditional roles. My study presents women as an important factor in bringing about the re-shaping of the knight's masculinity. My ideas regarding masculinity in the Middle Ages are closely related to views expounded by Clare. A Lees, Ruth Karras and Jacqueline Murray, who, in their respective works: Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages (1994); From Boys to Men: Formation of Masculinity in the Late Medieval Europe (2003), and Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men In the Medieval West (2013), highlight that medieval masculinity is neither static nor single, but that it is dependent upon various changing notions of social and other factors.

I begin my thesis with two popular and representative expressions of early medieval heroism, *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland*. My attempt here is to examine how much these heroic poems influenced the institution of knighthood. Both these poems deal with events that happened earlier than the period I focus on. Roland's battle with the Saracens is said to have taken place in the eighth century, and Byrhtnoth fought the Vikings at the river Punta in the tenth century. Both poems project the quality of valour and level of courage that came to be taken as the standard for the future knight-hero. Byrhtnoth and Roland belong to a society where the chief occupation of the ruling class is warfare, and the two men set an example of heroism with a display of indomitable spirit in the face of formidable odds. Byrhtnoth and Roland also reveal the expectations that their society had from such men: they exhibit

the ethos of an early feudal society that survived on ties of dependence. The two texts emphasise loyalty as a supreme virtue.This is certainly a quality of the heroic warrior that continues to be an integral part of the knight's personality during the later Middle Ages, however radically it may be modified and supplemented by other elements. Byrhtnoth's action of allowing his enemy to cross the river instead of attacking them while he himself was at an advantage, and Roland's refusal to call for Charlemagne's help when the twelve peers are outnumbered by the enemy, have been criticized as errors in judgment. These actions of the two warriors have also been questioned on grounds of military judgment and qualities of generalship. The poems themselves, however, do not criticize the decisions of the warriors; rather, they celebrate the warriors as heroes despite the defeats they suffer. Actions such as these give birth to memorable songs as commemorating actions that are worthy of honour. Both warrior-heroes display a desire for glory to be achieved by serving their lord loyally. The 'excess' or 'inordinate pride' with which later critics have charged the two warrior-heroes is in fact a quality valued by their own respective cultures.

I have tried to illustrate this ideal of honour by citing other works of the period, works that display a certain sense of magnanimity mingled with the pride one takes in risking one's life for the sake of one's *comitatus* or lord. What leads these men to such fearless acts is their desire to be remembered with honour, as displaying the loyalty that is the backbone of the feudal social structure. Roland does not wish to put his liege lord Charlemagne in danger, and Byrhtnoth's thanes cannot think about returning home without avenging the death of their lord. Courage and valour are indeed necessary qualities that make a warrior, but it is the sense of honour and

example of loyalty displayed in these two early medieval works that turn such qualities into superior virtues.

The romances of the following centuries show that similar ideals of valour, honour and loyalty continue to be expected from the figure of the knight. However, there is a crucial difference between Byrhtnoth and Roland on the one hand, and on the other, the knights that appear in the romances of the following centuries. According to my thesis, Roland and Byrhtnoth depict a masculinity that is static and idealized, whereas the masculinity of the later knights is dynamic, a masculinity in the process of formation.

The second chapter is based on the works of Chrétien de Troyes. His works are important to the development of romance, particularly Arthurian romance, as a genre. Chrétien'sromances also introduce us to the courtly traditions that were to influence the writing style and content for the next few centuries, since it was his model of romance narrative that popularised the figure of the knight. I discuss four of his romances: *Erec and Enide*, *Cligès*, *Yvain*, and *Lancelot*.

In this chapter, I also examine the concepts of chivalry, courtesy and courtly love. I study how these ideas came to influence western European aristocratic society of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. I argue that it is owing to the new cultural and social expectations from the warrior-knight, and because of the entry of women into the romance narratives, that the knight seems to be struggling to achieve a new balance of qualities. My discussion shows how Erec, Yvain and Lancelot, each of them differently, find their bearings between the older ideals of honour and valour on one hand and the newly introduced norms of courtesy and love on the other.In my

discussion of each of the romances, I try to show how the new concepts that comprise chivalry, and the larger role granted to women, affect the personality of the knight. Erec's incessant search for assurance through physical feats and Yvain's self-imposed exile both indicate the struggle they face in learning to work alongside their female counterparts. The introduction of the woman, which was a result of the socio-cultural changes of the period, begins to exert its influence from now onwards on the figure of the knight. The tensions created by such a development are revealed in more detail in the story of Lancelot. This is a romance Chrétien left unfinished, and it has been suggested that the incomplete story is the result of the author's inability to resolve the question of love and honour. This by itself illustrates what I try to argue in this chapter - that the competing demands of love and valour reveal the limitations of the code of conduct imposed on the knight. I argue that it is the knight's failure to meet the demands of these conflicting norms of knighthood that lead him to redefine his masculinity, and might lead the reader to question that ideal still further.

The third chapter, on Chaucer, comprises a discussion of *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Knight's Tale* and *The Franklin's Tale*. The story of Troilus' love for Criseyde and how he confronts Criseyde's infidelity brings to the fore the pressures experienced by a knight who is also a lover. Troilus, who is cast in the role of a courtly lover, is said to be a Trojan warrior second only to Hector. However, it is his role as an obsessive lover, and the agony he experiences when Criseyde betrays him, that provides the staple subject of the romance and hence of my chapter. Unlike any other knight, he seems to be defeated in love from the start by being unable to take decisions. Chivalric literature linked the institution of knighthood to love in order to show that love for a lady could inspire a knight to nobler and braver deeds, but Troilus does not

show any ennobling effect of love. So too in the case of the two friends Arcite and Palamon from *The Knight's Tale*, love does seem to change them, but only for the worse, and to set them against each other. They both worship Emilye, who knows nothing of their love for her, but turn bitter enemies of each other. The situations that Troilus, Arcite and Palamon find themselves in are multilayered, and cannot be satisfactorily assessed by any single contemporary code of conduct. Again, in *The Franklin's Tale*, it is the difficulty of addressing the opposing demands made by the various knightly codes that lies at the centre of Arveragus' dilemma. It is also, I think, important to understand that the predicament Arveragus faces is an extremely personal one, similar to Gawain's in my next chapter.

By the fourteenth century, one finds that the narrative space occupied by the women characters is larger than found in earlier works. The knights have to now interact with a different component of the narrative over a longer duration. This by itself calls for a new approach on the part of the knight. Other socio-economic factors that shape the period further add to the complexity in the presentation of the knight. For example, Troilus is not just a warrior in love; he is now endowed with a language of love which is entirely new. The intensity of love he expresses for Criseyde requires us to recognize this. Criseyde too is not like any other female character we might have met so far; her decisions and indecisions have repercussions on the figure of Troilus as a knight. Criseyde's role is instrumental in revealing the untenable nature of the courtly love tradition. She, together with Dorigen from *The Franklin's Tale*, demonstrates how each of the knights they come in contact with must now re-adjust their responses in order to engage with the women. This in turn leads the knights to formulate a masculinity which is more versatile, even if not adequately so.

In the last chapter, I discuss the anonymous poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The chapter begins by tracing the development of the figure of Gawain in earlier works, from the earliest mention of him in Celtic myths up to the thirteenth century, by which time he emerges decisively as a hero celebrated for his outstanding qualities as a warrior and a knight. I discuss how his adventures at the Green Castle and the Green Church lead him to doubt the nature of his accomplishments. It is this doubt and realization that, I argue, lead him to revaluate his masculinity.

In the figure of Gawain, we arrive at a completely internalized presentation of chivalry. In this romance, we find for the first time that behind the protagonist's encounter with the Green Knight, his true adversary is a female. Gawain has to here confront something he had never expected. The challenge posed by the Green Knight at the beginning of the story tests his external commitment to the ideals of chivalry; but what is really being tested is Gawain's integrity, a personal ideal of chivalrous behaviour. In this romance, more than in any other discussed here, we find that the virtues traditionally comprising the ideal of chivalry are rigorously assessed, and the norms that lie at the foundation of the feudal idea of knighthood, and the knight's personal understanding of his integrity, are questioned. Gawain re-evaluates his conduct and his ideals not in consequence of any failure of physical prowess, but because he finds that the ideals he follows are inadequate at handling the intricate situation he finds himself in. It is significant that this situation is the result of Gawain's interaction with two women: the lady of the castle more directly, but Morgan le Fay no less albeit indirectly.

Through my discussions in these chapters, I attempt to show how the knights in question engage in experiences or adventures that lead them to recognize the

limitations of the traditional knightly code of conduct, though that too has changed and adapted. I propose, especially in my last chapter with respect to Gawain, that the romances are not mere tales of love. From Chrétien onwards, the figure of the knight now appears more human. He is searching for a balance, looking for a firm footing so to say, as he has to satisfy the expectations of the various and conflicting demands made on him. His experiences in the battlefield or at tournaments, his conduct at court and in love, as well as his relationship with his lady lead him towards a greater awareness of his own personal identity. The dilemmas faced by Lancelot and Arveragus, the experience of failure encountered by Yvain and Troilus, and the manner in which Gawain handles his apprehensions even as he doubts the value system he endorses, make these figures convincing individuals on a human plane. The changes that have taken place in the society around them compel the knights to emerge in this more human, less idealised fashion. One may say that their dilemmas lend an existential dimension to their predicaments.

Each knight operates within an ideal of what a man of his class should be; each knight comes to recognize that these ideals are limiting the definition of his masculinity. They follow the code of conduct expected of the knightly class, but the same code also seems to restrict a fuller expression of the self. Their specific understandings may be different, but in every case, the knight is impelled to strive for a new multidimensional masculinity, as opposed to the unidimensional masculinity of the earlier heroes. It is this that makes these knights of the late medieval romances different from earlier figures like Byrhtnoth and Roland; for though we find them engaged in the traditional male pursuits, what each knight experiences or expresses lies beyond all gender rules and stereotypes as defined by his class and society. Their

unique situation and experience require them– or at least some of them – to negotiate with the existing standards of masculinity, leading them to re-formulate their terms. The knights of the texts in question thus express a more dynamic masculinity which enables them to represent themselves more fully and more truly as men, not idealized icons: a masculinity which allows a more expansive and inclusive expression of a selfhood.

CHAPTER I

Ic wyll æþelo ellum gecyþan

The two poems which I study in this chapter, *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland*, present the figure of a warrior-hero as constructed in early medieval writings. These texts deal with events that took place in the eighth and tenth century respectively. The event that is the subject of *The Song of Roland* took place in 778, whereas the battle at Maldon was fought between the English and the Danes in 991. However, I discuss *The Battle of Maldon*, written in Old English, before I take up the French *The Song of Roland*, because it is likely that the English poem was composed before the French work was actually written down. It is accepted that the poem on Maldon was probably written shortly after the date of the battle. Whereas the accepted date of the composition of *The Song of Roland* is 1100. More importantly, my decision to discuss Byrhtnoth before Roland is based on the different phases or nuances of heroic masculinity presented in the two poems: *The Song of Roland* has a wider scope of reference and more sophistication of conception. Roland's actions have a political, religious and intellectual scope that bears directly on the ideal of the warrior-hero that I am trying to trace.

The two poems help us understand the characteristics of the typical warrior-hero as conceived in the early Middle Ages. Byrhtnoth and Roland represent a 'heroic' civilization which is distinct from the 'chivalric'[3]culture of later centuries. The two

[3]W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance,* New York: Macmillan Press, 1987 (first published 1889). Ker makes this distinction in his introduction.

periods are differentiated not only by time-- the early feudal age which ends with the tenth century and the late feudal age which is marked by a wide ranging changes socially and culturally beginning in the late eleventh century-- but more importantly, by two very distinct attitudes towards the figure of the warrior. An examination of *Maldon* and *Roland* enables one to identify the basic values that gave shape to the masculinity of the warrior-hero in western European society in the Middle Ages. Roland and Byrhtnoth, though they come from different historical and cultural backgrounds, stand out as striking examples of the martial prowess and heroic spirit that continues to inspire the chivalry of the two following centuries, but is subsumed by that time among a host of other elements.

Byrhtnoth and Roland are separated from each other by more than two centuries, and yet their deeds are recorded in broadly similar terms by poets from their respective nations. Both warriors exemplify courage and physical prowess, both uphold ideals of loyalty to their lord and comrades, and both poems speak of largesse and gift-giving as an important aspect of their community life. In both poems, the narrative concentrates on the fight between the protagonists and a formidable enemy. However, their actions are differently motivated, for Byrhtnoth the battle at Maldon is part of his duty to protect his people and serve his king. The action of the battle of Roncevaux has to be viewed in a larger context, for here Roland, a Christian warrior, fights a more powerful opponent of another religion. The introduction of religious antagonism is an explicit factor in *Roland*, without any corresponding element in *Maldon*. [4]But a still more important similarity between the two warriors is Byrhtnoth's *ofermode* and

[4] George Clark, 'Vir Pius et Strenuus', *Speculum*, 54 (1979), 257-282.

Roland's *démesure*. [5] Old English *ofermode* and old French *démesure* both imply inordinate pride or rashness of action-- the first term, perhaps, conveying more of pride, the latter more of rashness and excess. The two words and their implications are important, and will be discussed later in the course of my argument. They have often been used by critics to adversely judge the actions of the two warriors. However, I argue that it is this very quality that establishes Bryhtnoth and Roland as exemplary heroes. They subscribe to an ethos where military valour was primarily considered an attribute of the ruling or empowered classes; this point has been sufficiently established by various scholars. The point I wish to add is that the heroic masculinity associated with noble or martial activity alone did not consist solely in physical prowess in battle. Certainly, skill in warfare or any other kind of armed encounter was an important aspect of masculinity, but the hero was a person with some further qualities of honour and nobility. It should also be noted that we cannot really apply the gendered term 'masculinity' to this historical point of time, since we do not have a notable female presence in either work against which to define the term 'masculinity'. Nonetheless, the heroes of the two works discussed in this chapter embody characteristics that were patently and emphatically masculine, the governing values of a male-dominated feudal society. My argument is that although it was one's success in battle that made a warrior of more or less service to his lord, this Teutonic ideal associated martial prowess with certain ethical qualities, loyalty and the desire for honour being the most cherished among them. Bryhtnoth stands out as an exemplary leader; his courage in battle inspired his men to fight on even after his death. Similarly, Roland's refusal to put the entire French army in danger is an expression of his loyalty towards his king and his peers, and his commitment to the greater safety of

[5] C. Clark, 'Byrhtnoth and Roland: A Comparison', *Neophilologus,* 51 (1967), 288-293.

the realm. He wishes to protect Charlemagne from any harm and, to ensure this, puts his own men at risk. Both poems present the defeat of the protagonists, Bryhtnoth's at the hands of the Vikings and Roland's of the Saracens. Even so, both poems are celebrations of the spirit of heroism. They do not mourn the hero's defeat in battle, despite the questions raised by various critics regarding Byrhtnoth's *ofermode* and Roland's *démesure*. Such strategic or even moral failings, as they seem to be considered by some, do not diminish the heroic masculinity of these heroes, but may indeed be regarded as intrinsic to their conception of heroism. In this chapter, I begin by examining this defining standard of masculinity, as established by warriors like Roland and Byrhtnoth, that became the norm for a heroic warrior. In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate how the warrior-heroes of later literature re-form and re-mould this standard.

The subjects of the two poems belong to different centuries and separate societies; however, the value systems upheld by their respective cultures seem closely related. The historical events that form the basis of the poems, together with the outlook illustrated in them, hark back to the earlier phases of Germanic culture and society. The Roman Empire had already begun to withdraw from Britain by the fifth century, and this departure coincides with the earliest settlements of the Germanic people in England. The two poems seem to share a value system that was basically Teutonic, although the works themselves belong to different historical epochs and the two heroes are also very differently portrayed. The period of migration, as it is now referred to, is the time when the Germanic tribes were spreading over much of the European continent and founding new settlements. Gildas'540 work *De excidio et conquest Britanniae,* (The Ruin and Conquest of Britain) recounting the history of the

Celtic Britons before the arrival of the Saxons, deplores the unrest caused by Germanic settlements. Other sources confirm this scenario of military and political turbulence caused by the migrating tribes across western Europe. This socio-political disorder continued till the eighth century, even though some personalities from Teutonic history left their mark on the public imagination by their strength and courage, to emerge as heroic figures. One such personage to pass into legend is Ermanaric the Ostrogoth, from a somewhat earlier period than the migrations. His rule is said to have stretched from the Ural Mountains to the Black Sea. He is said to have valiantly embraced suicide rather than submit to the rising power of the Huns. [6] His death in 375, by immolating himself in his palace in the face of a victorious enemy, earned him a place in Germanic legend. Theodoric the Great, king of the Ostrogoths (d. 526), is celebrated in German legend as Dietrich, and King Alboin the Lombard, who led his people from the Elbe to conquer and rule over Italy in 572, is celebrated by Saxon and Bavarian poets. Figures such as these certainly left an impression on the popular imagination, and qualities they possessed came to be valued and became a part of the Teutonic culture.

The heroic ideal of the warrior to be strong and courageous in fighting loyally for the lord, and by doing so to win fame for posterity, finds its roots in the Germanic code of the warrior, a code shared by both Roland and Byrhtnoth. The same heroic tradition celebrated the culture of the war-band, a close-knit society of peers, the *comitatus*, centred around the lord's hall, whose most prized virtue was loyalty to the lord and to each other. Both Roland and Byrhtnoth amply exemplify these ideals, but on two different scales of social and political structure: Byrhtnoth's within a small kingdom,

[6] See Chapter II, 'The Teutonic Epic', in Ker, *Epic and Romance*, 65- 70.

Roland over the wider base of an expansive polity. Both are popular and representative expressions of early medieval heroism. We might take the characteristics they embody as the accepted model of the medieval warrior in the first phase of the feudal era. These two early heroic personalities figure a type of martial masculinity. The heroic code of conduct that developed at this time survived as an important constituent of the model of knighthood that evolved later in the twelfth century. However, other socio-cultural demands that set in during the following centuries required the future warrior-hero, or knight, to revise and re-formulate this idea of heroic masculinity.

My purpose in this chapter is to discuss the norms of valour and loyalty established by these two representative heroes of the early Middle Ages. In my later chapters, I examine how such norms are problematized for the warriors of the later Middle Ages. I argue that the knights of the later period find themselves constrained by these older ideals, even while they continue to value them. I also examine the new course they seek in order to confront and manage the challenges posed by the new order of things. In the course of my arguments, I will try to show how their negotiation of such crises generates a different and more complex idea of masculinity.

Byrhtnoth

The Battle of Maldon commemorates the heroic resistance of Byrhtnoth and his men against the Viking invaders in August of the year 991. It is generally agreed that the poem was written immediately after the battle in order to commemorate Byrhtnoth's death as he was an important nobleman, Ealdorman of Essex and leader of the English

army. An ealdorman was a person of rank, often belonging to the nobility with some military influence. In other words, Byrhtnoth commanded both civil and military authority over the region, and his family must have been wealthy and well connected. It is possible that the poem served as Byrhtnoth's funeral song. [7]

The poem's only surviving copy is in fragmentary form. The manuscript was lost in the fire that engulfed the library of the Cotton family in London in 1731. The damaged remains are now preserved in the Cottonian Collection of the British Library, London. David Casley, a former under-keeper of the Cotton Library, had, however, made a transcription of the poem a few years before the fire that destroyed the original poem; it is this transcription on which the modern reader relies. Even this, the only part of the poem to have come down to us, is fragmentary in nature: the beginning and the end were already missing when the transcription was made.

The entry for AD 991 in all five manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle presents a brief record of the events surrounding the battle of Maldon. The Parker or Winchester Chronicle (MSA of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), is the only one that provides us with some additional information:

> Her ondissum geare com Unlaf mid Þrim hund nigontigon scipum to stane forlaged on Þæt onytan for dad anon to Sandwich swa danon to GipeswicÞæt eall oferode swa to Mældune; hin d dær com togeanes Byrhynoð aldorman mid his fyrde;…8

[7] Janet Cooper, *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, London: Hambledon Press, 1993.
[8] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Tony Jebson, (XML edition of Anglo-Saxon Chronicles) 'url' asc.jebbo.co.uk/ accessed 21 September 2016; with translations from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, trans. Rev. James Ingram and J.A. Giles, London: J.M. Dent, 1912.

> [Here in this year came Olaf with ninety-three ships to Folkstone and raided around it, then went to Sandwich, then to Ipswich, and further onto Maldon; and then came Byrhtnoth with his army.]

From this we learn that a Viking named Olaf led the raid, that his fleet comprised 93 ships, and that before descending on Maldon, he attacked Folkestone, Sandwich and Ipswich. However, this account is suspect as it is entered under the year 993. In most other versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, we learn simply that Byrhtnoth was killed at Maldon and tribute was subsequently paid to the Vikings:

> Her wæs Gypeswic gehergod, æfter Þon swide wæs Brihtnoð ealdorman ofslegenæt Mældune. OnÞam geare man geræddeÞæt man gealdærest gafol Denescum mannum for Þam miclan brogan Þe hi worhtan be Þam særiman, Þæt wæs ærest x ðusend punda Þæne ræd gerædde ærest Syric[9]

> [In this year Ipswich was sacked and very soon after that Ealdorman Byrhtnoth was killed at Maldon. In the same year it was decided to pay tribute to the Danes for the first time because of the great damage they were doing along the coast; at first it was ten thousand pounds.]

This bare historical record is somewhat amplified, with an account of Byrhtnoth's valour and magnanimity, in some other accounts. Records of the battle are preserved in a few Latin works, the earliest being the *Vita Oswaldi* dating between 997 and 1005, written by Byrhtferth, a monk from the Abbey of Ramsey, and the *Liber*

[9]Ms. Cotton Tiberius C I (XML edition of Anglo-Saxon Chronicles asc.jebbo.co.uk) accessed 21 September 2016.

Eliensis, completed between 1169 and 1174. For instance, the one cited below from the *Vita Oswaldi*, writes of Byrhtnoth as a known nobleman and well respected personality:

When not many months passed another violent battle took place in the east of this famous region. The glorious leader Byrhtnoth together with his retainers was in the front of the battle, who by relying on elegance alone could portray how glorious how manfully and how bravely he urged on his warlords to the front there he himself stood tall in stature, towering above others… When the peerless leader of the battle saw his enemies rush forward, bravely fight his men and kill many of them, he began to fight for his country with his whole strength. An enormous number of their men and ours fell in battle. Byrhtnoth himself was killed and the rest fled. The Danes, however, were so extensively mauled that they hardly had enough men to man their ships. [10]

The *Liber Eliensis*, alternatively, gives us the longest account of the battle, but its details conflict with more contemporary evidence:

> The most noble man was indeed very valiant leader of Narthumbrians, who, on account of the marvellous wisdom and physical fortitude with which he defended himself and his people, was given by everyone the title of Ealdorman…

The reference to Byrhtnoth as Ealdorman of Northumbria may be incorrect, since we otherwise know of him as Ealdorman of Essex; but it is possible that Byrhtnoth occupied some land in the north, apart from being Ealdorman of Essex: the poem does mention a Northumbrian hostage who fights for Byrhtnoth in lines 265-7 of the poem.

[10] *The Histories of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, trans. J. Raine, London: Longman, 1879, 456.

The *Liber* mentions not one but two battles that Byrhtnoth fought against the Danes who were plaguing English lands. It reports the first battle of Maldon, fought a few years earlier, (Date not provided in the Liber) in which Byrhtnoth was victorious. According to this source, the Danes returned to England in order to take revenge on Byrhtnoth in 991:

> [the Danes] made haste to England and in the fourth year landed at Maldon again to avenge the killing of their leader… Incited to daring by their messenger Byrhtnoth summoned his former comrades together for this venture and led on by the hope of victory and his exceedingly great courage, he set out on his way to battle with a few warriors, both taking precautions and moving fast, lest the enemy should occupy so much as one foot of land in his absence. [11]

The *Liber* reports that the battle lasted a fortnight, until Byrhtnoth's fall. There is another source, a tapestry in the monastery at Ely depicting the brave deeds of Byrhtnoth. The *Liber* mentions that this tapestry was given to the monastery by Byrhtnoth's widow.

The sharp contrast between the bare historical record in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the poem that we now know as *The Battle of Maldon* clearly demonstrates the working of the heroic ethos and its impact on the popular imagination. The other sources offer a better reflection of the emergence of Byrhtnoth as a hero, and provide an incomplete poem of about 325 lines epic status. The heroic spirit which the poem expresses more customarily distinguishes the characters of an epic: the oath taking,

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[11] *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth,* trans. Jane Fairweather, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005, 161-63.

the mention of weapons, references to gifts given by the lord, the loyalty that binds the men together as well as a larger-than-life leader. [12] The historical and other sources, however, do not mention anything about Byrhtnoth's followers being ready to die for their leader, whereas the poem (or the fragment that we have) , concerns itself largely with how Byrhtnoth's thanes react to their leader's death, and collectively seek vengeance even at the cost of their own lives. This portion of the poem shows that loyalty is a quality of all the warriors at all levels: Byrhtnoth's towards his liege, his followers' towards Byrhtnoth. It is this aspect of the poem, Byrhtnoth's brave actions and the reaction of Byrhtnoth's thanes to his death on the battlefield that is significant as it highlights the heroic spirit.

The poem opens with a large contingent of English warriors riding to the Pante river, now the Blackwater, to confront a force of Vikings. The English forces led by Byrhtnoth have come prepared for battle, and he arrays his troops to fight the enemy. Byrhtnoth stands among his *hearð werod* or hearth-band, usually consisting of warriors who were closest to the lord, such as his kinsmen. A Viking messenger brings him an offer of truce in exchange for a ransom in gold; the offer is promptly refused. Instead, Byrhtnoth says that the enemy will have to face *guð plega*, 'battle-play'. An armed battle between the two sides is now imminent. The two sides are divided by the tidal river, then in flood, so that the Vikings can only attack the English army after crossing a narrow causeway. The Vikings ask to be allowed across, and Byrhtnoth magnanimously allows them passage. This decision by Byrhtnoth proves catastrophic for the English army, but it also indicates the degree of confidence that Byrhtnoth has in both himself and his men. He has been criticised for this action,

[12] Ker, *Epic and Romance,* 5-10.

which critics consider a wrong military strategy. I would argue that this bold decision on Byrhtnoth's part is a sign of nobility in an ethos that admired such acts of valour.

It is possible to go further. Most readings of the poem have taken its historicity for granted, [13] and scholars have often tried to assess Byrhtnoth's action in terms of either good or bad military strategy. They assume that Byrhtnoth was tricked by the Vikings, and that it was his pride that brought the English army to disaster by a decision that makes us question his leadership and find it strategically flawed. The reason behind such a reading is the result of the words *lytegian*in line 86 and *ofermode* in line 89. *Lytegian* is glossed as 'to act cunningly' and *ofermode* as 'pride, arrogance, overconfidence'. [14] However, the poem, or what we have of it, does not elaborate the 'trick' used by the Vikings, which leads at least one critic to observe that if Byrhtnoth was indeed tricked by the Vikings, 'unfortunately the poet does not give us any such detail of speeches that must have been exchanged,'[15] at least not in the fragment of the poem that survives. Moreover, the statement that Byrhtnoth allowed the Vikings passage and therefore jeopardized his men's lives is substantiated neither in the Chronicles nor in the other sources that mention the battle. The fact that this crucial detail may be a fictional addition by the poet, in this case, may actually significantly add to Byrhtnoth's honour. It implies a compulsion to heighten Byrhtnoth's nobility and sense of honour by showing him as wanting to engage in a fair fight.

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[13] See George Clark, '*The Battle of Maldon*: A Heroic Poem', *Speculum* 43 (1968), 52-71; N.F. Blake, 'The Genesis of *The Battle of Maldon'*, *ASE* 7 (1978), 119-29; G.R. Petty Jr. and Susan Petty, 'Geology and *The Battle Of Maldon'*, *Speculum* 51 (1976), 435-46.

[14] Joseph Bosworth and T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary and Supplement,* www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/books/asd/

[15] A.D. Mills, 'Byrhtnoð's Mistake in Generalship', *Neophilogische Mitteilungen* (1966), 14-27

This brings us to the question about Byrhtnoth's *ofermode*, a term one cannot afford to ignore while studying the poem simply because so much has been said about it. Tolkien's interpretation of lines 89-90:

> Ofer Þone ford faran, feÞan lsædan
> ðe se eorlongan for his ofermode

as 'then the earl in his overmastering pride actually yielded ground to the enemy, as he should not have done'[16]suggests that *ofermode* is a word of disapproval. According to him, it is the following lines: *lands to fela,* meaning 'left too much land' that suggests the poet's implication that no ground should have been given. It is on the basis of this that Byrhtnoth's decision to allow his enemy to cross the river has been severely criticised as it seems Byrhtnoth is giving up a tactical advantage 'at the risk of placing his *heortwerod*, all the men dear to him, in a truly heroic situation, which they could redeem only by death'. Further, Helmut Gneuss, [17] with his philological study of the word, has conclusively proved beyond any doubt that *ofermode* meant pride and that Tolkien was right to see it as pejorative. But the heroic stance taken by the warriors here cannot be dismissed because of this interpretation of Byrhtnoth's *ofermode*, nor can one ignore Byrhtnoth's courageous and magnanimous gesture towards his enemy. Byrhtnoth's choice to allow the Danes passage could actually be the result of his desire to engage in a fair fight with his opponents. This would certainly be both heroic and an act deserving honour. Everything else in the poem, be it the response of Eadric and Offa's kinsmen to his commands, his exchange with the

[16] J.R.R. Tolkien, 'The Homecoming Of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's son', *Essays and Studies* 6(1953), 1-18

[17] Helmut Gneuss, '*The Battle of Maldon*: Byrhtnoth's Ofermode Once Again', *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), 117-37

Viking messenger, and the manner in which Byrhtnoth arrays his men for battle, all contribute to his stature as an exemplary leader, both ideally and strategically.

At the beginning of the poem, we find Byrhtnoth getting his men ready for battle. He counsels them and directs them on how best to hold their weapons:

> ða Þær Byrhtnoð ongen beornas trymian
> rad and rædde, rincum tæhte
> hu his sceoldon standan and Þone stede healden (18-20)
>
> [there Byrhtnoth began to array his men,
> rode and gave counsel, taught them
> how to stand and hold their stead]
> After this Byrhtnoth takes his place among the most loyal of his men:
> he lithe Þa mid leodan Þær him leofast wæs
> Þær he his heoðwerod holdost wiste (23-24)
>
> [he dismounted and stood among them who loved him most
> Where his hearth-band were]

The poem shows Byrhtnoth as an extremely able leader who is constantly directing his men:

> stihte hi Byrhtnoð,
> bæd Þæt hyssa gehwylc hogode to wige
> Þe on Denon wolde dom gefeohtan (l127-129)
>
> [Byrhtnoth directed them,
> bade each young man think on the battle
> who against the Danes would win glory]

Byrhtnoth fights bravely, encouraging his men. Even when he is wounded, he moves forward and kills the Viking who inflicted the wound:

> wod Þa wiges heard, wæpen up ‘alof,
> bord to gebeorg, and wið Þæs beornas stop
> Eode swa anræd eorl to Þam ceorle,
> ægÞer hyra oðrum yfeles hogode
> sende ða se særinc suÞerne gar
>
> Þæt undod wærð wigena hlafford; (130-135)
>
> [then as one strode, battle-hard, lifted his weapon
> His shield as defense, and against that man stepped.
> So the earl moved toward the curl:
> Either to other evil intended.
> Then hurled the sea-warrior a southern spear]

A little later, Byrhtnoth is wounded in the chest. The wounded Byrhtnoth fights even more courageously and thanks God for the events of the day (‘*sæd* method *Þanc*’) . He then falls, wounded once again by an enemy arrow and a Viking comes towards him to steal his ring and sword. Byrhtnoth, though fatally wounded, fights back and manages to defend himself and when he falls to the ground, dying, he continues to urge his men to fight bravely:

> Feoll Þa to foldan fealohilte swurd;
> ne mihte he gehealdan heardne mece,
> wæpnes wealdan. Þa gyt Þæt word gewæð
> har hildernic, hyssas bylde,
>
> bæd gangan forð gode geferan; (166-170)

[then to the ground fell the fallow-hilt sword
Nor could he hold hard blade,
Wield weapon. Then yet his words spoke
that hoar battler, encouraged the young men
bade them go forth in good company]

At this point, we are told of the deceit of Godwig and Godwine, whose flight from the battlefield on Byrhtnoth's horse leads many English soldiers to think their leader isretreating, making them follow suit. As Byrhtnoth lies dying on the battlefield, Wulfmær, a young boy, immediately kills the Viking who gave his lord the death blow.

Wulfstanes bearn, Wulmær se geonga,
forlet forheardne faran eft ongean;
ord in gewod, Þæt se on eorÞan læg
Þe his Þeodan ær Þearle geræhte. (155-158)

[Wulfstan's son, Wulfmaer the young
He let tempered shaft fare back again:
The point sank in so he on earth lay
Who had his lord so grievously reached]

A notable feature of the *Battle of Maldon* is the loyalty shown by Byrhtnoth's thanes towards their dead lord. The last section of the poem speaks of the brave stand taken by Byrhtnoth's loyal retainers, who urge each other to stay on and fight to avenge their lord. The devotion and loyalty shown by Byrhtnoth's thanes distinguishes them from most other warriors, but show that the heroic ideal in question is not exclusive to a single leader. There are similar examples in other stories reflecting the same

Teutonic ethos, as I discuss later in this chapter. [18] Of the 325 lines of the poem that survive, the last 125 (200-325) are the exhortations of the loyal retainers as they encourage each other to remain on the battlefield and fight to the very end. Since the confusion caused by Godwig and Godwine has caused the English numbers to shrink, only a small number of Byrhtnoth's hearth-companions remain. The words uttered by some of these retainers such as Aclfwine, Leofsunu and Byrhtwold contribute to our understanding of the notion of heroic masculinity as constructed and expected from warriors in early heroic poems. Ælfusime speaks first, reminding the others of the speeches they made at the mead-hall. He speaks of making his æþ*ello ellum gecyþan,* 'nobility known to all'. This, he will accomplish by remaining on the battlefield and fighting for his lord even in the face of certain defeat. He continues to say that no one will be able to blame him – *Ne sceolan me on* Þ*aere* Þ*egenas* æ*twitan* – of having run home from the battlefield, instead, he will remain where his lord lies and fight for him, since Byrhtnoth was ægð*er min mæg and min halaford* - 'my kin and my lord'. Leofsunu says that he will not flee but instead advance and avenge his *winedrihten,* his gracious lord.

> Stedefæstehælæd
> Wordumætwitan, nu min wine geranc
> Þæt ic hlafordleasham siðice
> Wende fram wigeac me sceal wæpen niman
> Ord and iren (249-253) [19]

[18] See B.S. Phillpotts, '*Battle of Maldon*: Some Danish Affinities', *Modern Language Review* 24 (1929), 172-90; Rosemary Woolf, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in *Germania* and in *The Battle of Maldon'* in Art *and Doctrine: Essays on Medieval Literature*, London: Hambledon Press, 1986, 175-97.
[19] *The Battle of Maldon,* ed. and trans. Donald G. Scragg, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.All citations from *The Battle of Maldon* from this edition.

> [steadfast heroes need not reproach me with words, now
> my friend fell, that I journeyed home lordless, turned from
> the battle; but weapon must take me]

Similar sentiments are expressed by Dunnere. About Offa, the poet says that he lay 'thanely' – near his lord – he læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende, suggesting that this would be the most appropriate way to die. It is then that the old retainer, Byrhtwold, encourages the men by reminding them that their 'thought must be the harder, heart the keener, mind must be the stronger, heart the greater, while our strength lessens'.

> Hige sceal Þe heardraheorte Þe cenre
> Mod sceal Þe mareÞe ure mægen lytlað
> Her lið ure ealdoreall forheawen (ll 311-315)

The heroic stand taken by Byrhtnoth's thanes reflects Byrhtnoth's own courageous leadership. The portrayal of Byrhtnoth as a confident general who scornfully rejects the Viking demand for tribute and who dies exhorting his companions to fight on, epitomizes the heroic spirit. One half of the poem shows how heroically Byrhtnoth fights the enemy and the other half displays the loyalty of his thanes.

As argued above, in no way does the poem indicate that the English forces suffered the loss owing to Byrhtnoth's decision to allow the Danes passage. However, if we accept this explanation of the defeat, we must read Byrhtnoth's military decision as something that would augment his reputation. The highest achievement or most important goal for a warrior, according to the heroic ethos, is lasting reputation. In other heroic works of the time, such as *Beowulf*, we also find that the yearning for reputation implies, at the same time, a warrior's hope of immortality. Beowulf is

praised by his men because he is *lofgeornost*, 'most eager for praise. '[20] The entry for 937 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle marks the victory of Athelstan and Edmund in the battle commemorated as the *Battle of Brunanburh*as they achieved 'lifelong glory' *ealdorlange tir*. The goal of heroic conduct is *dom*or *lof*; to be able to live on in the memory of the community, and to gain honour for ones glorious deeds.

The events in the poem, as well as the issue of Byrhtnoth's *ofermode*, can perhaps best be understood in the context of the North European Germanic ethos rather than a Christian one. For example, in the *Atlakvida* when Attila the Hun sends an invitation to the Burgundians Gunnar and Hogni, the only reason why they accept is that they see a wolf's hair twisted in the ring their sister (who is married to Attila) sends them. The wolf's hair signifies treachery, which therefore turns the invitation into a challenge, and the two brothers accept the invitation because danger is certain. Now that the brothers know the invitation could prove dangerous for both them and the Niflung hoard, which is the treasure hidden by the Niflungs (Gunnar and Hogni), they are all the more eager to prove equal to the task. Attila does indeed wish to use the arrival of the two brothers as an opportunity to get them to disclose the treasure of the Burgundians. As the brothers enter Attila's fortress, their sister, Gufrun, rushes to them and orders them out. She rebukes their folly at having come so defenceless. Both Gunnar and Hogni are then held in fetters and confined separately by the Huns. Attila offers to spare Gunnar's life if he discloses the secret of their treasure. Gunnar then bargains that he will disclose the location of the treasure only if he is assured that his brother Hogni is dead. Attila brings him a heart, trembling as it lies on the platter.

[20]*Beowulf*, ed. Frederick Klaeber, 4th edn, and Rev. R.D. Fulk, R.E. Bjork and J.D. Niles, Toronto: University of Toronto press, 2008, line 3182. Also see Raymond P Tripp Jr, 'Beowulf 3182B: Leofgeornost, 'Most Eager to Praise', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 106 (2005) 425-42.

Gunnar says that it is not Hogni's heart. The Huns then cut out Hogni's heart while he laughs at the pain. Gunnar recognizes this heart to be his brothers because it hardly quivers as it lay on the platter. Gunnar does all this only to cheat the Huns. He made them kill Hogni so that he would now be the only person who knew the secret location and so it would be safe. He distrusts even his brother, though he knew his courage to be boundless. He asked for such a cruel death for his brother, and was ready to die himself, only because such a death would bring them both unforgettable heroic glories:

> Then Gunnarr said,
> leader of men,
> 'Here I have the heart
> of Hialli the coward,
> unlike the heart
> of Hǫgni the brave:
> it quivers much
> as it lies on the platter—
> it quivered twice as much
> when it lay in his breast. '
> Hǫgni laughed then
> as they cut to the heart
> the living sculptor of scars—
> to cry out never entered his thoughts.
> Bleeding, they laid it on a platter
> and brought it before Gunnarr.
> Glorious, Gunnarr spoke,
> spear-skilled Niflung:
> 'Here I have the heart
> of Hogni the brave, [21]

[21] *Atlakviða*, ed. and trans, Ursula Dronke, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

Gunnar is then put into a snake-pit by the Huns. Here, we are told, he played musical instrument to while away the time until the snakes did their work. Gufrun, their sister then avenges her brothers by poisoning her husband Attila. The manner of Hogni and Gunnar's death is stark and daunting; it is also something they could easily have avoided. The readiness with which the Niflung brothers welcome danger and then face it and the fearless manner in which Byrthnoth yields access to the Vikings are both actions of a Germanic hero. Such acts often do, as in both these cases, result in the death of the hero, but it is a death the heroes proudly and bravely embrace. This is what composes the heroic ideal.

Byrhtnoth's own loyalty towards his overlord Æthelwine, and his king, Edgar. is also to be noted. Scragg tells us that by 956, Byrhtnoth was already one of the more important eastern ealdormen. [22] The heroic ideal brought out by his own conduct and speeches in the poem certainly suggest that he was a man of repute and stature. The regard his thanes express for him also attests to the degree of his valour and reputation. Nowhere else in Old English literature do we find retainers who are ready to give up their lives for their lord. There are, however, mentions of loyal retainers who are praised for avenging their lords: Beowulf avenges Hygelac's murderer Dæghrefu, and Hnæf's retainers are willing to kill Finn for Hnæf's death (in *The Battle of Finnsburg*); but in both cases, the vengeance is not taken immediately. In fact, from the Finn episode in Beowulf, it is clear that after Hnæf's death, his followers make peace with their lord's slayer '*pa him swa gepearford wses'* 'as they were thus forced by necessity'. Hnæf's followers are compelled to make peace because they were fewer in number, and also because they think that although the

[22] Scragg, *Maldon,* 11-17.

prospect of fighting till they all die was something they could consider, a better alternative would be to live and avenge their lord later.

Another entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (A version) for the year 755[23]offers a story of loyalty, valour and vengeance. Cynewulf becomes king of the West Saxons according to the ruling of the witan that expelled Sigebryht his kinsman for *unryhtum dædum* 'unjust deeds'. A few years later, Cyneheard, Sigebryht's brother, seizes an opportunity to attack Cynewulf when the king is not protected by his guards while he is visiting his mistress at Merton in Surrey. Unguarded and surrounded, the king mounts a valiant defence and even wounds Cyneheard, but is finally overpowered. Cynewulf's guards are late to arrive, and when they do arrive, Cyneheard makes them an offer of *feoh* and *feorh* 'property and life' as settlement if they agree to follow him as king. The guards refuse to serve their lord's *bana* 'slayer' and are slaughtered, save for one of them who was gravely wounded.

Scholars have also drawn attention to a strong resemblance between the code of heroism found in *Battle of Maldon* and the account given by Tacitus in his *Germania.* In his account of the Germanic world, Tacitus reports that the Germanic people considered it a disgrace to survive their leader in battle, or even retreat from the battlefield. [24]It is advisable to consider *Germania* with some caution since one is not able to verify the information provided here because of the poor documentation of early kingship among Germanic tribes during those centuries. *Germania* is a work of the late first century CE, and in chapters 14 and 15 Tacitus gives us a general outline of the behaviour and expectations of Germanic war-bands. A number of qualities that

[23] Anglo Saxon Chronicle, asc.jebbo.co.uk/ accessed June 2012.
[24] Tacitus, *Germania*, ed. and trans. J.G.C. Anderson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938.

Tacitus describes in his account of the Germanic comitatus are traditionally associated with a warrior society, and are similar to the heroic conventions found in Old English literature. Tacitus speaks of generosity and feasting, feud and settlement, the valour expected of chieftain or leaders. According to Tacitus, the retainer's duty is to defend and protect the lord. It is a lasting shame for a retainer to survive his lord in battle. Modern scholars, however, draw attention to a lack of historical precision in *Germania* in general, and especially to the fact that the concept of dying with the lord is not a common theme of Old English heroic poetry, but so little survives, of literature from this period in England, that one cannot conclusively state either way.

The evidence one may collect from lays and sagas, and of historical accounts of Teutonic cultures, may help one to arrive at a better understanding of poems such as these. There are a number of Scandinavian lays and sagas that demonstrate a similar kind of heroism, which could be considered 'excessive' but was a feature that expressed the quality of honour and nobility to the Germanic ideal of a warrior. A connection has been suggested between *The Battle of Maldon* and *Bjarkamal*, a poem of probably the first century, although one cannot say with certainty that the poet of *The Battle of Maldon* was familiar with the *Bjarkamal*, one can find a similar expression of heroic masculinity in the two works. Our knowledge of the Danish story derives from the fragments of the work in Latin translation of the original by Saxo Grammaticus. The story of the *Bjarkamal* recounts the fight put up against the enemy by two retainers after their king has been killed: the scene of Hrolf's fall during the struggle at the castle with his enemies. Beside king Hrolf, two other main characters are mentioned: a young warrior Hialti, and an old warrior by the name of Biarki. At the time of the struggle, Biarki is induced by the enemy's magic to sleep. When Hialti

tries to awaken the old warrior so that they may avenge their lord's death, he reminds him of all the gifts their king and lord Hrolf bestowed upon them. Hialti rouses Biarki by telling him

> Now their last cup
> for king's men is poured,
> after his liege-lord
> shall no one live
> but he show him fearful
> and shrink from blows,
> or be too listless
> his lord to avenge. [25]

These lines clearly reveal that failing to avenge the death of their lord will bring the retainers dishonour. The only alternative to killing the murderer of their lord is to die attempting to take revenge. Dramatic and poetic expressions of scenes such as this from the *Bjarkamal*, the defence of the Burgundians in the *Nibelungelied* or the courageous death of Byrhtnoth and the brave last stand taken by his retainers, illustrate a heroic ethos. One has to accept Byrhtnoth's decision to give access to his enemies as an aspect of this ethos, not in strategic terms. His *ofermode* must be understood as a characteristic that makes him a great warrior. His followers' decision to die, then, implies not just their individual understanding of loyalty based on a general principle current in their society, but also the honour they collectively associate with such extreme loyalty. What the poet does for us, consciously or unconsciously, is to show us the driving force behind such acts of valour, a sense of unstinted loyalty and a desire for lasting honour. It is the sense of absolute allegiance

[25] Axel Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, trans. Lee M. Hollander, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919, 91.

to one's companions and one's lord that makes the defeat at Maldon inspire glorious song in memory of the men who become, through their acts of valour and faithfulness, epitomes of a heroic masculinity. I will now examine how the defeat at Roncevaux, as narrated in *The Song of Roland*, is to be interpreted in the same spirit.

Roland

The Anglo-Saxon story of Byrhtnoth and his loyal thanes finds a qualified parallel in the French poem, *The Song of Roland*. Both, *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland,* depict the courage and fortitude displayed by a chosen band of warriors. In the case of the French poem, Oliver, Roland and the twelve peers of Charlemagne are the warriors whose fight against their enemy is celebrated. Roland is one of medieval Europe's most popular and celebrated warriors. The *Song* commemorates the brave stand Roland takes in the face of certain defeat as he faces the Saracens at Roncevaux. The poem about Roland's fight and death in the Pyrenees was well remembered through the ages, not only in France but also in neighbouring countries where Dante, Ariosto and Cervantes mention this legend. This popular poem got its title as we know it today: *The Song of Roland*, only in the nineteenth century. In 1835, Francisque Michel, a philologist, was sent to England to transcribe a number of medieval works when he came upon this poem on the battle of Roncevaux, to which he gave the present title. Roland was already a celebrated figure before this incident brought the now well-known Oxford manuscript of the poem to light. The story of Roland's death was kept alive by popular tradition. Not only did the author of the French national anthem, Rouget de Lisle, draw on Roland's story for another

revolutionary song, 'Roland à Roncevaux', in the period of the French Revolution in 1792, but later, in 1870 during the siege of Paris, the figure of Roland and his feats at Roncevaux spurred the French during the Franco-Prussian war. It was during this time that Gaston Paris, the well known medievalist, spoke of Roland as a figure who symbolized the greatness of France even at a time of doom. Paris presented a lecture, 'La Chanson de Roland et la nationalité Français', during this time of national humiliation. He reminded the French about Roland and his brave men, and how Roland's actions showed that the national sentiment was alive in France even at such an early stage of their nation's history. According to Paris, Roland's exalted concern for the honour of the country is expressed in his refusal to call back the main body of Charlemagne's army. Speaking of Roland as a symbol of loyalty to France, he urged that the people must now 'recognize [ourselves] as the sons of those who died at Roncevaux and of those who avenged them'. [26]

The above lines very closely echo the lines spoken by Roland. In the poem, Roland expresses a similar attitude towards his country when he sees so many of the French soldiers lying dead, and laments, 'O dearest land, fair nursery of the French'. [27]And again, when Roland urges his men to fight despite imminent death, saying

> Full well I know we cannot long survive.
> Fail not, for shame, right dear to sell your lives.
> Lift up, my lords, your burnished blades and fight!
> Come life, come death, the foe shall pay the price,
> Lest we should bring fair France into despite! (1923-27)

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[26] Quoted in *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth Century Europe*, P.J. Geary *et al*., Leiden: Brill, 2003, 288.

[27] *The Song of Roland,* trans. Dorothy Sayers, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957. Line 1861. All citations to this translation.

The sentiments evoked by *The Song of Roland* continued to influence Roland's nation even during the German occupation of France. During1940-43, Raoul Mortier is said to have published in secret all the extant versions of the poem. More than ten centuries after the actual events of the battle of Roncevaux, the poem about Roland's heroic battle is still considered by a number of critics to be the Iliad of the French. [28] The poem is a repository of martial valour for later medieval warriors, as the actions it celebrates endorse an idea of masculinity which inspired later warriors. It must be clarified here that the ideals projected in the two poems I discuss in this chapter are ideals of heroism which are self-evidently masculine even though the masculinity is not consciously brought out. It is our very different understanding of gender in our times that makes us consider ideals of heroism in this light.

The Song of Roland begins with the French siege of Saragossa. Having spent seven years in subduing the Saracens in Spain, Charlemagne is suddenly faced with a crucial decision: King Marsile, the ruler of Saragossa, the only remaining enemy stronghold, offers to become Charlemagne's vassal and a Christian by a certain date if Charlemagne raises the siege. Charlemagne discusses Marsile's proposal with his lords who offer conflicting advice. Charlemagne's nephew, Roland, urges that there be no let-up in the fighting until total victory is achieved. He argues that there is no reason to believe that the Saracen ruler will keep his word. Ganelon counsels to accept the Saracen's terms. Charlemagne opts for a cessation of hostilities and wishes to know from his lords who would be the best person to carry his message to the Saracens. Roland recommends Ganelon's name. This enrages Ganelon as he feels this

[28] Lecture on *Chanson de Roland* by Paul Lehugeur in *L'arméeà travers les âges: Conférences faites en 1900*, Paris, 1902, 65, quoted in J. Benton, 'Enculturation of a Warrior Class', *Olifant*, 6 (1974) 237-58. Also see P.J. Geary *et al.*, *Manufacturing Middle Ages*, 288.

to be Roland's ploy to get him out of the way, since any person entering the Saracen's territory would be risking his life. However, Ganelon agrees to go as the messenger and also vows to have his revenge on Roland. At Saragosa, Ganelon convinces the Saracens that Charlemagne will be rendered powerless if they get rid of Roland:

> Danger of death day by day he incurs
> If one should slay him some peace might be preserved (ll 390-91)

Ganelon offers a way to end the siege as well as put an end to Roland. He suggests that Marsile send gifts to Charlemagne, assuring him of the offer of vassalage and conversion. Ganelon says that he will ensure that in the rearguard that Charlemagne leaves behind are the two most valiant of Charlemagne's warriors, Oliver and Roland, and he advises Marsile to attack and kill them. This plan is put into action as Ganelon successfully manages to convince Charlemagne of Marsile's surrender and the French troops set out for France, leaving Oliver and Roland in charge of the rearguard. At Roncevaux, with the main body of the French army at a safe distance, the Saracens ambush the French rearguard as arranged by Ganelon and Marsile. The rearguard is outnumbered, and Oliver urges Roland to call for the emperor's help by sounding his horn. Roland refuses to do so, saying that it would put the emperor as well as the French army in danger. The rearguard is soon reduced to a small number. Roland now sounds his horn, the Olifant, but before Charlemagne can arrive at the battlefield, the entire rearguard is wiped out. Roland too is mortally wounded. Charlemagne crushes the remaining Saracens as they flee. As the emperor is preparing to return, Marsile's ally, Emir Baligant, arrives with a huge force, the battle resumes, and both sides incur heavy losses. The emperor is then aided by the angel Gabriel who enables the French

victory, as Charlemagne defeats Baligant in single combat. Saragossa surrenders to the French and Charlemagne returns to his capital at Aix. Ganelon is tried for treason.

The actual events narrated in the poem took place in the year 778, about three centuries before the poem was composed. To understand the event of 778, one has to go back a few more decades to the year 723, when Charlemagne's grandfather, Charles Martel, had decisively stopped the Saracen advance at Poitiers. Later, by 778, Charlemagne had amassed an army and entered Spain in order to establish a buffer state. It was then that Charlemagne had to abruptly lift his siege of Saragossa owing to a Saxon uprising in the North. As the Franks were making their way back across the Pyrenees, some *Wascones* or Gascons, tribesmen of the southern Pyrenees, ambushed the rearguard, killing all its defenders. Charlemagne was unable to avenge this defeat at that moment, but returned a few years later and established a zone of Frankish influence in the northern parts of Spain known as the Spanish March.

The earliest account of Charlemagne's Spanish campaign of 778, the *Royal Frankish Annals*, does not mention Roland's name. This source alludes to the negotiations at Paderbon with the Muslim envoys in revolt against the Emir of Cordoba. It also speaks of Charlemagne's movements in Spain and his decision to re-cross the Pyrenees. The chronicler mentions that as the French rearguard is ambushed by 'Wascones' and that though the French were superior to them in number and courage, the 'Wascones' were able to get the better of them because the 'Wascones' were

familiar with the mountain terrain and were able to also get away aided by the darkness of the approaching night. [29]

A better known source is the *Vita Karoli*. The events here are recorded by Einhard, one of Charlemagne's biographers. Einhard enjoyed a long career at the Frankish court and wrote the *Vita Karoli* between 829 and 836, about half a century after the ambush at Roncevaux. His account is similar to the one given in the *Royal Frankish Annals* but mentions the name of Roland, a Prefect of the Breton Marches. Speaking of the French rearguard, Einhard says

On this occasion the Wascones had the advantage of light armament and control over the terrain; the Franks were greatly hindered by their heavy armaments and lower position. In this battle were slain Eggihard, the royal seneschal; Anselm, Count of the palace; and Roland, prefect of the Breton March and many others. This reverse could not be avenged immediately because the enemy, having done the deed, dispersed in such a way that no one could even tell in which direction they might have been sought[30]

Einehard's account is most significant as it provides the names of the illustrious members of the rearguard, particularly the name of 'Roland, prefect of the Breton March'. In this account, we are not given the reason for Charlemagne's invasion of Spain and are told that the ambush takes place after he had conquered all towns and castles in his path to the Spanish peninsula. According to Einhard, the defeat was occasioned by Wascone treachery.

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[29]Bernhard W. Scholz and Barbara Rogers, *Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories,* Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1972, 58.

[30] Einehard, *The life of Charlemagne,* trans. Samuel Epes Turner, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880.

The *Annales Mettenses Priores*[31] written shortly after 805 states that Charlemagne responded to appeals from the oppressed Christian community in Spain. This is confirmed by a letter from Pope Hadrian, dated May 778; implying that Charlemagne's Spanish campaign was the result of both political as well as religious considerations. It has been suggested that Saracens as well as *Wascones* participated in the ambush of the Frankish rearguard. The story of the 'deeds' of Roland has just this humble beginning:

> In which battle were slain Eggihard, the royal seneschal; Anslem, Count of the palace; and Roland, prefect of the Briton March and many others. [32]

The incident at Roncevaux in 778 goes on to become one of the most memorable battle scenes of French literature, and the hero of Roncevaux has come to represent one of the finest examples of medieval warrior masculinity. In the poem which glorifies Roland's brave stand, the *Wascones* become the Saracens, who were introduced to the story of the battle at Roncevaux probably after the *Annales Mettenses Priores* mentioned Charlemagne's response to the Christian community in Spain. This adds a religious dimension to the battle at Roncevaux, something that was not present in the original incident recorded in the *Royal Frankish Annals* or in Einhard's account later. The incident in the Pyrenees between the French rearguard and the 'Wascones' was a skirmish in which the local Gascons, referred to as 'Wascones' in the records earlier mentioned, probably only intended to loot the French army. The ambush was not likely politically motivated. However, since the poem itself was written much later, the accepted date of the 'Oxford Roland' being

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[31] *Annales Mettenses Priores*ed. Bernhard von Simon, Hannover: Bibliopoli Hahniani, 1905.
[32] Einehard, *The life of Charlemagne,* trans. Samuel Epes Turner.

1100, [33]a period close to the time of the first Crusade (1096-1099), one may infer how the religious element finds itself into the historical event of 778 and turns it into an event having larger connotations.

The stories about the ambush of the French forces in the Pyrenees and Charlemagne's Spanish campaign are likely to have been in circulation since immediately after the events of 778. Given that the battle takes place between the peers of Charlemagne and the ambushers, we find the inception of what was to become, in a few years, *The Cycle of France.* A change in fact and proportion happened, one may assume, a few years after the ambush when a song was made about Charlemagne's rearguard, and in the course of time the deeds of the day developed to become one of the most popular poems. The myths which started to grow around Charlemagne during this time in various cantilenae, or short lyrical narratives, and continued to spread for about two centuries after his death, are also perhaps responsible for transforming the Breton Prefect into the idealized hero Roland. The tales of Roland's exploits would have gained popularity from his association with Charlemagne. The numerous conquests of Charlemagne would become material for song and develop into an elaborate legend by the eleventh century, the time when *The Song of Roland* is accepted to have been written. Some of these songs would have included the incident at the Pyrenees and the name of Roland.

There has been considerable speculation concerning the ancestry of the *Chanson de Geste,* the song of deeds mainly of a heroic nature, in general and *Chanson de Roland* in particular. It is generally believed the oral renditions were first transcribed into

[33] See Gerald Brault, *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition: Introduction and Commentary*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010, 4.

Latin by clerics and probably circulated in monastic circles as did the various Saint's Lives. There are a large number of medieval French poems, most of them anonymous, the action of which takes place in Carolingian France, and even though we may find some relation between the events they narrate and the facts of history, most of the narrative is fiction. It was the popularity of certain heroes and stories that led to the development of this body of poems. In the late twelfth century, the poet Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube refers to three major cycles or groups of epics. Evidently, the figure of Roland had grown in importance before *The Song of Roland* took its present form. In the poem describing the fight between the rearguard and some local miscreants, the rearguard skirmish has been magnified into a great battle against the mighty Saracens. [34] The Prefect of the Breton Marches, now becomes one of Charlemagne's twelve peers. Roland also receives a rise in social status, as would be fitting for a hero like him, and he is now said to be of royal blood and the nephew of the Emperor Charlemagne. The idealized hero that Roland has now become can only be overcome by the treachery of one of the Franks themselves: Ganelon. The figure of Roland is able to attain his larger-than-life literary status on account of the popularity bestowed upon the story of Roland's courage and loyalty by various *jongleurs*, professional storytellers or wandering minstrels, and clerics alike, who were responsible for circulating the story among the masses. We find that over the course of time, other details were added to enhance the stature of Roland. Roland's grave at Blaye, his horn, the Olifant, kept as a relic at Bordeaux and it was also claimed that a cross was erected by Charlemagne at Port de Cize, all these places became popular sites of pilgrimage, including Roncevaux, which is on the route to San Jago de Compostella,

[34]Gerald J. Brault, *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*. I have used this for the general references in this and the above paragraphs.

and has been suggested as the site of the disaster. [35]All this indicates that the idea of *The Song of Roland* was, for the medieval French writers and audience, much more than just a tale.

Although my discussion of the poem focuses on the feudal and heroic aspect *of The Song of Roland*, there is certainly a strong religious side to the poem as indicated earlier. Like most other *chanson de gestes*, this poem too contains references to Christ, conversion to Christianity, and appearance of angels. Roland has also been viewed as a martyr who dies fighting the enemies of Christianity. [36] All these elements were evidently put together by *jongleurs* at different points of their renditions of the tales surrounding the historical battle at Roncevaux. The dissemination of the story of Roland's battle with the enemy, connected with Charlemagne's return from Moor-occupied Spain, must have found a wider scope with the religious temperament encouraged by calls for the first Crusade. The text does exhibit such religious overtones:

> Now beat your breasts and ask God for His mercy:
> I will absolve you and set your souls in surety.
> If you should die, blest martyrdom's your guerdon;
> You'll sit on high in Paradise eternal (ll 1132-35)

The above lines are spoken by the Archbishop Turpin, before the final fight against the 'Paynims'. The Archbishop urges the remaining French soldiers to fight on. The poem also describes Roland's death in apocalyptic terms:

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[35] The *Nota Emilianense*, a brief late 11th century addition to a Latin Chronicle composed in Spain, is the first source to specify Roncevaux as the site of the event: see Matthew Bailey, *The Poetics of Speech in the Medieval Spanish Epic*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010, 37.

[36] Gerard J. Brault, 'The Religious Content of the Chansons de Geste: Some Recent Studies', in *Continuations: Essays on Medieval French Literature and Language*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Gobrie Torrini-Roblin, Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1998, 175-86.

Throughout all France terrific tempests rise,
Thunder is heard, the stormy winds blow high,
Unmeasured rain and hail fall from the sky,
While thick and fast flashes the Levin bright,
And true it is the earth quakes far and wide.
Far as from Saintes to Michael-of-the-Tide,
From Besancon to Wissant Port, you'd find
There's not a house but the walls crack and rive
Right at high noon a darkness falls like night,
Save for the lightening there's not a gleam of light;
None that beholds it but is dismayed for fright,
And many say: 'This is the latter time,
The world is ending, and the Great Doom is nigh'
They speak not true, they cannot read the signs:
'Tis Roland's death calls forth this mighty cry. (1423-37)

These lines, which show the magnitude of the French loss as well as Roland's personal greatness, also draw a parallel with the Christian pattern of an apocalypse: darkness, storms, earthquakes and general sense of doom. However, just as it would not be correct to characterize *The Song of Roland* as religious literature, it would similarly be a mistake to say that Roland commits a sin of pride, as suggested by Pierre Le Gentil, [37] who mentions Roland's *démesure*, which in old French means 'excess', generally associated with an over weaning ambition or pride. Le Gentil further mentions that Roland is, however, finally absolved of the sin of such pride by God at the end, because Roland sacrifices himself to protect Charlemagne.

In the poem, when the rearguard is passing through the Pyrenees, Roland and his men come under attack from the 'Paynims'. This ambush had actually been planned by

[37]Pierre Le Gentil, 'A Propos de la Démesure de Roland', in *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 11 (1968) 203-9.

Ganelon, Roland's step-father, with the enemies. On seeing that the French rearguard was at a disadvantage, Oliver asks Roland to sound the Olifant and call for Charlemagne's help. Roland refuses to do so, and finally sounds the Olifant only when almost the entire twenty thousand men of the rearguard have been killed by the enemy. Roland's decision not to sound the Olifant is criticized by Oliver in the poem and has also been commented upon by various critics through the ages. [38] A number of critics argue that in not listening to Oliver and not sounding the Olifant, Roland is guilty of an excessive or inordinate pride. This, according to them, is Roland's *démesure*. Oliver blames Roland for the catastrophe suffered by the French rearguard and these critics echo Oliver's sentiments. Once the French grow aware of the approaching enemy, and Oliver sees the large opposing army marching towards them, Oliver says to Roland:

> huge are the Paynim hordes,
> And of our French the numbers seem small
> Companion Roland, I pray you sound your horn
> That Charles may hear and fetch back all his force (1049-52)

Roland refuses to do so, saying that if he were to call Charlemagne for help now, his 'fame would suffer scorn'. The twelve Peers continue to put up a brave front against the enemy. The poem makes no comments on Roland's refusal to sound the Olifant. Instead, Roland's actions are praised, both as a warrior and leader. He moves swiftly on the battlefield 'with Durendal, good sword, he stabs and slices, and he also urges

[38] See A. Poulet, 'Is Roland Guilty of démesure?', *Romance Philology* 10 (1957) 145-48; William Kibler 'Roland's Pride', *Symposium* 26 (1972) 147-60; and, Pierre Le Gentil, 'A Propos la Démesure de Roland'.

the dwindling French army to stay on and fight instead of fleeing in the face of danger:

> Barons, my lords, these shameful thoughts put by;
> By God I charge you, hold fast and do not fly,
> Lest brave men sing ill songs in your despite.
> Better it were to perish in the fight.
> Soon, very soon we all are marked to die,
> None of us here will see to-morrow's light;
> One thing there is I promise you outright:
> To you stand open the gates of Paradise,
> There with the holy sweet Innocents to bide (1537-50)

Roland is seen to be encouraging his men to fight even in the face of certain death, and he convinces them by boosting their confidence with assurances of a better afterlife. Utterances such as these by Roland indicate a feature of *The Song of Roland* which is very different from *The Battle of Maldon*. The religious aspect is an important addition to the historical material. In the poem about the battle at Maldon, there is only a single reference to anything religious: Byrhtnoth, we are told, *sæde metode þanc/ ðæs dægweorces*, that is he thanked God for the day's work. The religious connotations that are given to the actions of Roland add significantly to his stature. Roland uses a similar sentiment while encouraging his men to fight their enemies when he says: *Paynims are wrong, Christians are in the right!* The poet adds to this kind of religious attitude when he says:

> The Paynim falls flat down with all his weight.
> Then Satan comes and hales his soul away. (1268-69)

However, a little later, when he finds that their numbers have further decreased and only 'Sixty alone by God's grace preserve'; Roland asks Oliver whether he should blow his horn now. Oliver angrily tells Roland: *Companion you got us in this mess/ There is wise valour, and there is recklessness*. He tells Roland *you have destroyed the French*, that is why he says that Roland's prowess is *a curse on our heads*. These are strong words indeed, and one can imagine the resentment Oliver feels at that instant. So many good men were put to death only because Roland feels *Ill tales of me shall no man tell, say I.*

Even if one accepts that the French rearguard is destroyed owing to Roland's stubborn pride, one has to concede that Roland's refusal to blow the horn in the first instance, may, at worst, qualify as a tactical, not moral, error. But the question is: was Roland entirely wrong not to blow his Olifant? If, indeed, Roland was at fault not to call for Charlemagne's help, why is he still one of the most celebrated of warriors of the European Middle Ages? The poet certainly does not find Roland blameworthy. The poem is viewed as Roland's glorious feat despite the loss of the French rearguard. Roland's acts are presented to us a laudable action, and it is his defiant pride that gives him the quality that is admired as heroic. His decision to not call for help has to be understood in the context of the feudal socio-political system in which his actions are set. Once Ganelon returns from the enemy camp and tells Charlemagne that king Marsile has agreed to the French terms and conditions, Charlemagne announces the return journey of his army. At this point, when Charlemagne questions as to who shall take charge of the rearguard, Ganelon proposes the names of Roland and the twelve peers. Roland is aware that his step-father, Ganelon, is challenging him. He accepts the duty of protecting the French army. Roland then promises Charlemagne that the

French shall not suffer the *loss of steed or palfrey thereby, I warrant you*. Roland takes full responsibility of the French army and tells his liege lord that under his protection, the French king and his army will reach their country unharmed. Having made this promise to his king, it is only expected that Roland does not call the king and his army back in order to assist the rearguard, at least not till he and his men can defend themselves. Such a call for rescue would indeed bring him shame. Charlemagne himself is not at ease with Ganelon suggesting Roland's name for the position of the rearguard, since Charlemagne was aware of the rivalry between the step-father and son, and also because he had a disturbing dream the night before the departure of the French troops from Spain. Charlemagne hesitates to allow Roland to take charge of the rearguard. On Roland's insistence that the king allow him to lead the rearguard, despite the king's misgivings, Charlemagne relents, but bids Roland to take extra men from the king's retinue. Roland declines that offer as well. Later, when Roland refuses to blow the horn even when Oliver advices him to, it is because Roland does not wish to be shamed in France for endangering the king and the army he had sworn to protect. His decision is dictated by his position as Charlemagne's vassal. Byrhtnoth's thanes, who are almost in a similar position, choose to die fighting because of the allegiance they owe their lord who has been killed by the enemy. This is the kind of service that connects the chain of dependence in a feudal system. This is also the spirit of the warriors that held their *Comitatus* close together among the Germanic tribes, from whom both the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks descended.

The poem is quite clear about the figure of Roland: he fights fearlessly:

> Then his bare brand, his Durendal, he takes;
> Against Chernubles he spurs his steed in haste,

> Splits through the helm with carbuncles ablaze,
> Through steel coif, and through scalp and through brain
> Twixt the two eyes he cleaves him through the face; (1324-28)

Roland is also seen leading his men with courage, telling the French soldiers under his command that their king chose each of the twenty thousand of them for the purpose of guarding the rearguard, and that they must now '*endure much hardship for their liege'*. He is indeed an ideal warrior and leader. The matter of *démesuer*, which has been generated by Oliver's remark about Roland's obstinate refusal to sound the Olifant, does not have any moral or ethical implications. The excess or immoderation that Oliver speaks of is certainly not a sign of Roland's arrogance; such excess or immoderation is a characteristic of a warrior. In fact, it is the degree of such an excess or the extent of the immoderation that makes the warrior noteworthy. Byrhtnoth's '*ofermode*' and Roland's '*démesure*' must be understood against the background of the Teutonic culture. The relationship between the liege and the vassal as evident in the feudal era is something that develops from the similar bond between the warrior and his lord during the pre-feudal times. The lack of moderation exhibited by the protagonists of the two poems may be compared to the similar characteristics displayed by other heroic figures belonging, generally, to the Germanic culture. Some of them have been mentioned in my discussion on *The Battle of Maldon*. It is characteristics such as these, at both a feudal and a personal level, that make Byrhtnoth and Roland both popular and representative figures of this period.

The celebrity gained by Roland's character traits as presented in the poem can also be assessed from the number of versions and manuscripts, not only in French but in most

other European languages as well. [39]In the French language alone there are many *Chanson de Roland*. The most famous and well known of the various extant versions is the Oxford *Roland*. This text is preserved in the Bodleian Library's manuscript Dig by 23. Beside this standard version of the poem, as mentioned at the beginning of my discussion, there are six other manuscripts and three fragments. [40]The Oxford Roland is generally considered to be the most authentic in terms of its narration of events since there are substantial narrative differences between the Oxford text and the others. A number of additions were made to the original material during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries to suit certain political interpretations or public tastes. [41]Characteristics displayed by Roland, such as his loyalty, his courage and his sense of honour are celebrated and become so popular that we find Roland feature in texts of other languages and in a completely different cultural setting. For example, in the fifteenth century reworking of Roland's story by Boiardo: *Rolando Inamoratos*, Boiardo's tale is the story of Roland's love, but one may detect the same excess here as well, as in the French *The Song of Roland*, Orlando's tale displays the character's excessive love and jealousy, so intensely does Orlando experience these emotions that he is driven insane. In Boiardo's story, Orlando (Roland), chooses to pursue Angelica, with whom he falls in love, rather than seek honour in battle. It is while he is following the ever elusive Angelica (she has a ring which makes her invisible) that Orlando is so overcome with jealousy for Medoro, whom Angelica is in love with, that it causes him to lose his mind. Aristo, in taking up the incomplete work of Boiardo, continues writing of Orlando's 'madness' or 'furore' of love in his work

[39] Middle High German *Rolandslied* by Konrad der Pfaffe, *Karlamagnus Saga* in Old Norse and the 15th century Occitan verse poems of *Ronsasvals* are some examples.
[40] Joseph Duggan, *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
[41]Joseph Duggan and A. Rejhon, *The Song of Roland: Translations of the Versions in Assonance and Rhyme of the Chanson de Roland,* Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012.

titled *Orlando Furioso*. These stories written centuries after the *The Song of Roland*, portray Roland as a warrior who resembles the Arthurian knights that I discuss in the following chapters of my thesis. In fact, the entire presentation of the story by the fifteenth century Italian writers receives a very different treatment, where the story of Roland is staged on a grander scale.

The fact that a mere skirmish of 778has been magnified into a patriotic and religious battle in a matter of two centuries, indicates how certain qualities of heroism that were associated with Roland began to influence later warriors and knights. We are told that during the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the invading French forces marched to the beat of song of Roland's deeds at Roncevaux:

> Taillefer, a very good singer, rode before the duke on a swift horse, singing of Chelemagne and Roland, of Oliver and of the vassals who died at Rencesvals. [42]

He is called 'Fair France's Flower' more than once in the poem. He makes sure that he faces France as he falls dying on the ground, and Charlemagne buries him facing France as that was how he had wished to be buried. All these qualities augment his reputation and create a figure of a warrior who then becomes the epitome of the heroic spirit and therefore a figure to be emulated by other aspiring heroes. The presentation of Roland as a Christian warrior fighting "infidel" forces and his sacrificing himself for his king raise the poem to a different level. Roland's actions are then seen in a broader perspective of nationhood. The fact that this poem inspired the Norman forces during the Battle of Hastings reinforces the political scope of the poem. The political scale of *The Battle of Maldon* is more local in comparison,

[42] Wace, *Roman de Rou*, trans. Glyn Burgess, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004, 181.

whereas the knights I discuss over the next few chapters are not involved in any such political action, their exploits following a very different course.

The Battle of Maldon and *The Song of Roland* present military actions through which the heroic qualities are defined. It is not by the final outcome of their action, a defeat in both cases, that the two warriors achieve a heroic status, they are both remembered because of the code of heroism upheld by each of them. Their deeds are celebrated as glorious because their actions endorse the standard of heroic-masculinity their societies expect from a warrior. The manner in which the two historical events, which by themselves are not of any political consequence, are turned into grand examples of valour, illustrate for us the heroic ideals upheld by the two societies, which though different, evolved from a similar ethos. The conduct of Byrhtnoth and Roland has often been questioned: their risk-taking acts are actions they adopt on the basis of their most cherished ideals, a quality that makes them memorable figures. Byrhtnoth's *ofermode* and Roland's *démesure*, are indeed self-destructive pride, but it is the same quality that leads them to test their own limits. In not being willing to call for Charlemagne's help when outnumbered by the enemy, Roland shows the same indifference towards danger and death as does Byrhtnoth when he allows his enemy passage instead of fighting them when they are at a disadvantage. The two warriors also uphold the feudal framework of the societies they represent. Their loyalty and service makes them exemplary figures. It is this that makes their actions worth commemorating. *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland* speak of battles that have been lost. Both Byrhtnoth and Roland perish on the battlefield along with their men; and yet both are accepted as the embodiment of medieval heroism and the kind of masculinity that was expected from a warrior. Both poems celebrate the values

upheld by their protagonists: valour and faithfulness to the liege-lord, and an indomitable adherence to an ideal of personal honour in battle and in general conduct. Roland and Byrhtnoth become representative figures of early medieval masculinity; models of military virtue based on a strong ethical code even more than physical prowess in battle, epitomizing everything that their societies endorsed as heroic masculinity.

The knights of the texts I discuss in the subsequent chapters share the same ideals of valour and knightly honour as Roland and Byrhtnoth, showing great courage and fortitude in the face of danger. They also display a similar disregard for caution, as when Lancelot jumps into the cart, or Gawain stands up to accept the challenge of the Green Knight. In the case of Lancelot, his action do not involve physical danger, it is more a matter of social regard and honour. The disregard for caution, however, is the same, although it is exercised differently in a different social context. It is the complex nature that loyalty takes on with the development of 'chivalry' from the latter half of the twelfth century that tests the limits of the accepted norms of masculinity. The knights of my later chapters, such as Troilus, Lancelot and Gawain, find themselves in the midst of complications and contradictions imposed by complex and ambiguous codes of chivalry and loyalty. By the late twelfth century, we find that women begin to appear more prominently in literature. The relationships these warriors share with women and the feminine also become an important influence shaping their masculinity. In the following chapters, we will find that it is not the battlefield alone, as here in the earlier texts, that is instrumental in shaping their masculinity. The warriors or knights operate in more than one dimension and the

manner in which each knight deals with the stress and tensions of such complex societal expectations, is what defines or redefines their masculinity.

CHAPTER II

Chrétien's Knights: At Odds with Love

In this chapter, I discuss some of the works of Chrétien de Troyes. There are two main reasons that influence my choice of works written in the French language rather than those written in English: first, there is no major English work of comparable importance for my purposes following the Norman conquest, at least not till the time of Chaucer; second, and more importantly, Chrétien's presentation of the knight-warrior demonstrates how the idea of heroic masculinity embodied in the figure of the knight is being re-formed. The figure of the warrior presented in works of the earlier periods is the ideal that knights of the twelfth-century romances look to as examples of heroic masculinity, but the knights of the romances in question can also be seen asmoving in a direction quite different from those set norms of an earlier age. By the twelfth century, the time of the romances I discuss, the figure of the knight comes to stand for a more complex ideal as compared to warriors of the earlier period. The values exemplified by Byrhtnoth and Roland continue to be deeply relevant for later warrior heroes, since loyalty and honour are as much the foundation of heroic expression as they were earlier. But I argue that the wide-ranging social and political changes that swept over Europe, especially in the two centuries following *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland*, radically affected the presentation of heroic masculinity, as is evident in the depiction of the knight in the works I will now discuss. The notion of heroic masculinity, as presented by Chrétien de

Troyes, becomes problematized, for we find that there is no stable criterion to evaluate it. This is primarily because Chrétien's knights display a masculinity which is shaped by their experiences and hence dynamic, in contrast to the static ideal endorsed by the previous heroes. The social context of the knight has become much more varied and complex, and the various levels of social expectations now brought to bear on him result in a more fluid masculinity. The earlier warrior-heroes discussed in my previous chapter lived on in public memory as having been loyal and courageous. But with the knights in the romances that evolve from the late twelfth century onwards, we find that the knight's personality is so interlinked with the different social, cultural and political roles that he must fulfil that it becomes difficult to gauge his masculinity by applying only the traditional parameters of loyalty and courage. It becomes necessary for us to consider their actions beyond the stereotype available so far.

The social and cultural changes in late eleventh and early twelfth-century European society bring about a change in attitude that is responsible for this new view of heroic masculinity. Not only are the romances of the period poetically very distinct from the earlier expressions of the Teutonic spirit, but they also introduce a concept of heroism which extends beyond the sole criteria of loyalty and prowess. The two periods, differentiated by historians as the first feudal age and the second feudal age, or the heroic age and the age of chivalry, are marked not only by socio-political changes but by a vast difference in ethical and cultural outlook. Roland and Byrhtnoth are remembered for the service they perform, and their prowess and loyalty is celebrated in song. They are themselves anxious to be remembered as exponents of the values they hold precious. In the case of the knights that I discuss in this chapter, the understanding of loyalty and

prowess is recast by a new concept of chivalry that goes much further than the physical and martial prowess and loyal service to one's overlord that sufficed for the earlier heroes.

Romance literature is closely connected to the social elite. It evolved from their milieu and catered not only to their literary tastes but their socio-political outlook. Yet most scholars of this period accept that the romances often question the social ideals and practices of their times. It is also agreed that the knight's adventure leads him towards self-realization. My argument is that it is this aspect of the romance, its questioning of the very culture it represents, that gives the figure of the romance protagonist or knight an unusual complexity and dynamism. In the following discussion, I attempt to consider how the various changes surrounding the figure of the knight-hero and aiding his self-realization lead to a new expression of masculinity.

The rise of the romance was the result of a general change experienced in the later Middle Ages in Europe. The passage from an earlier 'heroic' age to the age of chivalry, as W.P. Ker classifies the two periods of medieval literature, is marked by transformations in almost every sphere of medieval life. The growth and popularity of this genre may be seen in the number of adaptations and translations of some of the romances into almost every European language during this period. This is in keeping with the evolution of the romance narrative, which is itself the outcome of the rise of the vernacular languages, especially French. The term *romanz* or 'en roman' meant that which is written in a romance language, that is to say a language derived from Latin, rather than in Latin itself. The term comes from *Romanic* or Romanicus, meaning derived

from the Romans. It was applied to vernacular languages derived from Latin (as opposed to the language of the Romans themselves, i.e., Latin). The romance narratives came to be so called as the most typical or familiar works written in these languages. Hence, other works that were translated from Latin into a vernacular were also termed romances, for example Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia rerum Britanniae*, which was translated into Anglo-Norman by Wace and titled *Roman de Brut*. The earliest translations of Latin epics and chronicles into the vernacular were composed in the Angevin court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Shortly after this, a number of classical stories were retold and rewritten in the vernacular, both in England and on the continent. Popular among such adaptations into the romance format are the *Roman de Thebes*, *Roman d'Eneas* and Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. In course of time, even original vernacular works not based on a Latin source came to be called 'romances'. The medium of the vernacular certainly made the narrative material more accessible and popular, but what made it far more relevant and significant to the times was the fact that the genre of the romance addressed the growing desire of the elite audience for a new type of tale.[1] By the end of the eleventh century, especially in western Europe, we find that the aristocracy had grown far more sophisticated in their cultural tastes than ever before. The birth of romance and its ascendency as a new genre is traditionally attributed to the refined tastes of this social class. It is their idea of chivalry, courtesy and love that finds expression in the new type of narrative, and it is to these new ideas of chivalry, courtesy and love that we owe the shaping of a different perception of masculinity.

[1]W.P. Ker, *Epic and Romance*, London: Macmillan Press, 1931. First published 1897.

In *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century,*[2]Haskins argues that this period is characterised by a rise in academic learning, artistic expression in architecture and literature, and scientific endeavours. This, he says, was manifested in institutions like the early universities in countries such as Italy and France. R.N. Swanson, in his 1999 work *The Twelfth Century Renaissance*, elaborates on the reason behind this blossoming of culture and science. Unlike Haskins, who limits the growth to north-western France and Italy, Swanson includes other European countries like Spain and Germany. For Swanson, the key feature of the change was economic transformation: 'a fundamental transformation, perhaps best summarised as commercialism',[3] which, he says, was the result of an agricultural revolution owing to new technologies and better climatic conditions. A remarkable rise in productivity and population, and a significant rise in urbanization, he adds, contributed to the emergence of a new Europe which, owing to its enhanced trade, was fast becoming a monetary economy:

> With the more rapid growth of towns, the barter economy recedes and a mixed economy develops; more diverse services are required and offered, and money increasingly replaces payment in kind. The use of money, and the development and diversification of services, draw more and more people into a 'web of interdependence'.[4]

Development of this kind was possible because during this period, Western Europe saw the end of a long phase of external invasions. This led the different countries to collect

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[2] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955.
[3] R.N. Swanson, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, 7.
[4] Ann Buckely, 'Elias on Minnesang: Reception and Reassessment', in *Zivilizationstheorie in der Bilanz*, ed. Annette Treibel, Helmut Kuzmies and Reinhard Blomert, Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2000, 188.

themselves into a community of polities. The Papacy, which was already strong, and had now for some time influenced the shaping of various European communities both politically and socially, had been advocating wars against the 'infidels' even during the eleventh century, as reflected in works like *The Song of Roland*; but it was in the twelfth century that we find the church actually propagating armed aggression against the 'infidel enemies'. The Crusades, or the 'just war,' against the oppressors of Christians and usurpers of the Christian Holy Land, are crucial to the formulation of the masculinity of the medieval knight, even if relatively few knights in romance are actually shown as participating in them. The fervour of such religious campaigns and the esteem attached to them considerably added to the status of a knight, as it gave a much stronger ethical, indeed explicitly religious, dimension to the chivalric ideal. This, together with certain economic and political developments, brought about a marked change in the image of the knight. The concept of knighthood was further developed and reshaped by the notions of courtesy and courtly love, generated by an ethos developing in the aristocratic courts of the period.

The modern English word *knight* traces back to its West Germanic origin *knecht*, in Old English *cnint* meaning boy, servant or simply a youth. *Chivalry* comes from the Old French word *chevalerie*, which itself was derived from Latin *caballarius* meaning *horseman*. The connection between the horse and the knight is clearly seen in the etymology of the word 'chivalry', which from the twelfth century onwards went on to acquire a different connotation, but its association between the horseman and knight remained as well. The two words, *chevalerie* and *knight*, were linked to warfare around the tenth century. The term *knight* came to be closely associated with the Latin *miles*,

meaning soldier, and was often linked by scholars to professional soldiers of the Roman period, groups of *militia* mounted on horseback used by the wealthier and upper class for personal protection. However, we know that a number of Germanic tribes were also accustomed to fighting on horseback and during a campaign in 507, the Merovingan king Clovis is known to have passed an edict regarding water and food for the horses taken on the campaign.[5] The socio-political changes of the tenth and eleventh centuries transformed the meaning of 'chivalry' the knight is supposed to practise: the words acquired much more complex and elevated associations. The concept of knighthood or chivalry was thus radically altered between the tenth and the twelfth century. This happened with the strengthening of the feudal structure that gave shape to medieval society in large parts of Europe.

The feudal system was a network of relationships based on personal loyalties in return for land tenure. These ties of dependence between various sections of society resulted in a hierarchy of ranks shaping a pyramidal socio-economic structure. The same hierarchy formed the basis of political and military power. One may see the emergence of a feudal society from the early years of the ninth century, what Bloch[6] calls the first feudal age. This period coincides with the growing need for mounted warfare, as wars were now being fought with newer equipment and a mounted soldier could cause faster damage to larger areas. The tenth century also sees the emergence of warrior-service or vassalage. This is nothing like the band of warriors the Germanic leader would earlier

[5] Richard W. Barber, 'When is a Knight not a Knight' in *Medieval Knighthood V: Papers from the Sixth Strawberry Hill Conference*, ed. Stephen Church and Ruth Harvey, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1995, 4.
[6] See Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon, London: Routledge, 1962, 60-71.

surround himself with for protection or warfare. The warrior-service was a military service provided to an overlord in times of war or even during local raids. In return, the warrior who provided such service was given land or a fief. 'The fief is the pay of the knight,' says *Sachsenspiegel*, a German law-code of the thirteenth century.[7]

It is during what Bloch calls the second phase of feudal society, which begins in the latter half of the eleventh century with the growth of population, commerce and urbanization, that we may perceive a change in the status of the knight. One important factor that came to distinguish the knight from the *miles* or simple soldier was the greater demand in terms of equipment. The cost of equipping a soldier with armour, weapons and a steed would be considerable. Such equipment was sometimes provided to a soldier by some person of substantial means.[8] In such a case, the knight would owe allegiance to the lord who was his provider. But equally, the knight could provide his own horse and equipment; the lord would grant him land to ensure his income to meet this expense. The relation between the feudal overlord and knight could be compared to that between the Anglo-Saxon *eorl* and his *thegns*. Like the *thegns*, the knights too would probably have belonged to the upper section of society, though not necessarily to the aristocracy like the *eorl*; at least during the early days of knighthood, the knights were more likely to be in the service of noblemen but not of noble birth themselves. Georges Duby, who has intensely researched the ideology and practice of knighthood, offers some clues to the changing status of the knight. According to him, though the pattern differed from region

[7]Quoted in Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 168.
[8] Barber, 16.

to region, men who claimed the new professional title were mainly members of old, established families of substance. He tells us that

> A degree of differentiation began to appear within a homogenous social group in the course of the eleventh century merely because political events allowed some men to enrich themselves from the profits of 'exactions' raised from peasants and to become leaders of local *militia*. A small dominating layer, the *sires*, emerged by degrees from the upper ranks of the aristocracy. They were wealthier and more powerful than their cousins. It is true, but they were not thought of as being more noble, because from about the year 1000 they had all assumed the same title-- that of knight.[9]

Duby informs us that the title of knight did not extend to everyone bearing arms or holding a fief; it described certain specific members of an already existing social group. Nor did the title affect the social structure; it merely changed 'the way men saw themselves'.[10]This change in the status of the knight from a simple professional, like a *miles* or soldier, which took place in the later part of the eleventh century, is crucial to my argument. It is also important to remember that the knights were not the only warriors found in the households of great lords. Very often, powerful kings and aristocrats had in their service other men who bore arms, such as the marshal, the chamberlain or the butler. They were paid a salary and primarily carried out managerial or administrative tasks, but their fighting skills were useful during war. The figure of the knight comes to bear the stamp of honour once it is embellished with an ideology that gives a new meaning to

[9]Georges Duby, *The Nobility in Medieval France: The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cythia Postan, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, 79.
[10] Ibid. 80.

chivalry. Chivalry is no longer to be understood only as the practice of riding a horse or conducting mounted warfare, but more importantly as conveying an ethos and a set of ideals. The figure of the knight is now invested with certain values, since it is from this time onwards that one comes across the phrase 'to make a knight',[11] implying not just the rituals associated with the ceremony of 'knighting', as Barber suggests, but other features of the new cultural transformation. The emergence of this new figure, a warrior who is much more than the traditional fighter, a worthy successor of model warriors like Byrhtnoth and his men or even Roland but further endowed with a new set of values, is seen in the works of Chrétien de Troyes.

From the early decades of the twelfth century, the figure of the knight is empowered with a significance not solely military in nature, for now we find many members from the landed nobility also adopting the title of 'knight'. In other words, at this time, knighthood clearly gains in stature and attracted men from the upper ranks of society. This may have resulted from the aristocracy being compelled to reinvent their social role in order to retain their position vis-a-vis the emerging merchant class. In any case, the outcome of all these transformations was that the knightly class became a hereditary nobility, endowed the knights with a new eminence whose spirit was summed up in the concept of chivalry.

> [A]bout 1150, we begin to notice some of them [landlords]being distinguished by a special epithet - they were decorated by the title of chevalier or 'knight.' Apparently mounted military service was an honour. The prince had need

[11]R. Barber, 'When is a Knight not a Knight', 10.

> of them; at all events they appear to be in comfortable circumstances.[12]

Besides this change in social status, finally manifested in the constitution of a separate class or social category, the notion of *miles Christi* (soldier of Christ) formulated by the Church authorities also added to the knight's stature. Previously, the knight had been a threat to the property of the Church as they often plundered religious estates. Through the Crusades, the ecclesiastical powers now sought to divert their violence towards the infidels. This new strategy of the Church, promoting the idea that violence was not sinful if it was against the enemies of Christendom, added religious overtones to the concept of the warrior or knight. Such religious sanction greatly enhanced the position of the knight in later medieval society, as seen in the significance Chaucer places on the figure of the Knight, who had been actively involved in the Crusades, in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Maurice Keen, observing the documented careers of the twelfth-century knights Arnold of Ardes and William Marshall, tells us that by this time, a 'pattern of chivalrous living with a defined style of its own was established.'[13] The knights mentioned were associated with the courts known to Chrétien de Troyes: Arnold was placed under the care of Philip of Flanders as a youth, and William Marshall was associated with the Angevins. Keen derives most of his information on knighthood and chivalry from three treatises: the anonymous *Ordene de chevalerie*, Ramon Lull's *Book of the Order of Chivalrye* and Geoffrey de Charny's *Liver de chevelerie*. The first two treatises are from the mid-thirteenth century and the third from the mid-fourteenth century. Although these works are later in date than Chrétien de

[12] Georges Duby, *The Nobility in Medieval France: The Chivalrous Society*, 95.
[13] M. Keen, *Chivalry*, 21.

Troyes, they define an ideal of chivalry which was very much rooted in his romances. The accounts of the knights provided in these works reflect the careers of the knights of courtly romance, and define the framework on which the masculinity of the new warrior, the knight, is constructed. Keen's research also extends to 'the first systematic treatment of chivalry' in Etienne de Fougeres's *Livre de manieres*. Etienne is said to have written this work around the same time as Chrétien, and since it was also written in the vernacular, one may presume that that the concept of chivalry which both Chrétien and Etienne present in their respective works was available to a large number of people, especially the court audiences, among whom would be knights as well.

Georges Duby, in his book *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, speaks of fighting men or young knights participating in tournaments and courtly games. These young men, according to Duby, were also an important part of the audience for romance. He further says that the interests of such knights largely influenced and governed the 'development of aristocratic values'.[14] These young males of the court, who were admired and imitated during the second half of the twelfth century, were known as *juvenes*, a Latin word basically meaning 'youths' and here applied specifically to unmarried knights. Both Arnold of Ardes and William Marshall, mentioned earlier, were good examples of *juvenes*. Such young unmarried knights who inhabited the various courts were often on the lookout for prospective marriage alliances. No doubt it was not the young men alone who would hope for prospective marriage alliances, but young ladies at court and their families too would be similarly inclined. The treatises on chivalry

[14] Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jane Dunnet, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 16.

examined by Keen and Duby attest to the fact that such young knights fought in the various games and tournaments in order to honour the lady they professed to serve. This indicates the role women played in shaping the masculinity of the knight. This feature is prominently reflected in the romances, as I will treat in detail in my discussion of Chrétien de Troyes. Keen further emphasises that chivalry involved a constant quest to improve upon one's achievements, and a knight was not to rest from action or adventure. This need or desire to continually engage in trials and challenges becomes an essential aspect of the knight's character.

Chivalry with its newly formed implications, together with courtesy and courtly love, make up the essential features that comprise the masculinity of the medieval knight. The term *courtoisie* is related to the Latin *curia*, meaning *court*. In its French derivation *courtoisie*, the term was associated with a measure of decorum and refinement in speech and behaviour, and gradually came to mean an entire code of courtly conduct. The knight was expected to master the code of behaviour that regulated life at court, and the values underlying them. Courtesy evolved in the expanding feudal and princely courts of the eleventh century. Most European courts, particularly those of England and France, had become centres of a refined and polished culture, and by the end of the eleventh century, one finds them regulated by this code, which gradually acquires an ethical dimension.

> The western consciousness of courtliness was shaped by educated aristocratic clerics...The worldly clergy admired and

> practised 'courtliness' well before this became embodied in the knight and the lover of courtly romance and lyric.[15]

According to Jaeger,[16] one important source of this ethic was the courtly ethic that originated from the imperial bishopric of the German royal court, as the chaplains there could secure good positions at court on account of their academic and intellectual training. Jaeger emphasises the importance of the cathedral schools in the early formation of courtly conduct, and also says that courtesy was a product of the German rather than the French or English courts.[17] Aldo Scaglione, on the other hand, tells us that by the time the concept of courtesy reached Germany as a fixed code through minnesingers, the German singers and performers, who learnt of this practise from the courts of France, the notion they expressed had already been established in Provençal poetry by the troubadours.[18] Whether it was the courts of Champagne and Flanders in the north or of Aquitaine in the south of France, or the Ottonian royal courts of Germany that were the birthplace of courtesy is not important to my argument. What matters is that this range of venues shows how pervasive the idea of courtly conduct was during the period. Courtliness or *courtoisie* was so well established by the twelfth century that both lay courtiers and clerics accepted it as an ideology, and its practice regulated the manners of both the male and female members of the court. The code of courtesy covered almost all aspects of grooming and behaviour including hairstyles, table manners, how to speak and

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[15] C.S. Jaeger, *The Origin of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, 157.
[16] Ibid.
[17] C.S. Jaeger, *Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
[18] Aldo Scaglione, *Knight at Court: Chivalry and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to Italian Renaissance*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 61-3.

how to dress. The concepts of chivalry and courtesy recast the masculinity of the warrior, whose martial aggression was now tempered by a cultural and, ideally, ethical code. Thus courtesy becomes an order of conduct that determines the knight's actions. The chivalric knight is a far more sophisticated warrior than his counterpart from the earlier centuries. At the same time, the elaborate rules that the knight of the twelfth century is expected to observe often make him vulnerable to confusion and disappointment.

The multifaceted new warrior has yet another code to fulfil before he can become a complete knight: the motivation to act and to gain honour by serving love. Love for a lady, together with chivalry and courtesy, is an essential factor that transforms the warrior into the knight. The idea of such love came to be a pivotal component of chivalric literature, especially the romance. Its beginnings are said to lie in the lyric poetry of the troubadours of Southern France. The troubadours, whose earliest surviving works date from the twelfth century, usually belonged to a wealthy and leisured society where they found time to develop a culture that was both elaborate and secular. The lyrics composed by such troubadours often consist of materials from the mingling of that had, by then, grown common throughout Europe. What is significant about troubadour poetry is that it almost always concerns itself with a man's desire for a lady's love, the object of the poet's longing being absent, distant or even unattainable. Although such lyrics objectify women, they bring the woman into prominence (if only through the male desire for her) and even grant her precedence, at least in some respects. Such love for a lady had a great impact on literary works all across western Europe in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

> I still remember one morning when we put an end to our warring, and she gave me so great a gift, her love and her ring. May god let me still live long enough to have my hands beneath her cloak[19]

The above lines are from a poem by William IX of Aquitaine. They give us an idea of how love was perceived and expressed as an earthly experience, unabashed by its physicality. Gradually, this earthly, sensuous nature of the courtly love-lyric changed at times, and in varying degree, to a more rarefied spiritual vein. William IX was a French duke who was both a powerful political figure and an early troubadour. His lyrics display a highly secular vein, although he was also one of the leaders of the 1101 Crusade. It was lyrics such as these and figures such as William of Aquitaine that contributed to the emergence of the figure of the amorous knight, now also acquainted with the pain and suffering experienced by the lover. For instance, in the poems of Marcabru:

> Worse still is the love that deceives, that stings like a wasp, cruel, burning and treacherous, hot freezing, for man who is scourged by this love suffers great ill and turns yellow (with jaundice).[20]

This is certainly very different from the pain or suffering that warrior-heroes of the earlier period were expected to endure. The earlier warrior-heroes only endured physical pain and injury: they did not experience or express pain caused by love, as we find knights like Lancelot experiencing or Troilus expressing. Topsfield, in his work on the troubadours, speaks of the impact such courtiers and poets had on the chivalric romance,

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[19] L.T. Topsfield*, Troubadours and Love*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 27.
[20] Topsfield, 79.

although he explains that early troubadour poetry 'is not normally tied down by courtly ideas or behaviour'. Instead, he says, it is concerned with a personal quest for joy, and more with the 'absolute ideal of an ultimate happiness than with conformity to social convention'.[21]Itis during the second half of the twelfth century that the Provençal lyrics acquire a courtly tone and begin to define and celebrate the contemporary courtly ethos. In the poems of Bernart de Ventadour, one finds the merging of troubadour sentiments with courtly expectations. Ventadour was perhaps the first troubadour whose poetry was extensively imitated by the northern poets, and it is in Ventadour's poetry that love is, for the first time, presented as a courtly custom with its own rules and practices. It is also in his lyrics that one may see, perhaps for the first time again, the lady placed on a pedestal:

> Noble lady, I ask of you nothing that you should accept me as your servant, for I will serve you as I would a noble lord, whatever reward may come to me. Behold me at your command, you who are noble, kind, joyous and courtly.[22]

He also talks about the service of love which we find later in Chrétien's romances, where too the knight has to be an ideal lover to be an ideal courtier:

> Anyone who desires to love must obey the wishes of many people; and it is incumbent on him to know how to perform pleasing deeds and to take care not to speak uncouthly in court.[23]

[21]Topsfield, 2.
[22] Topsfield, 115.
[23] Guilhem de Peitieu quoted in *The Troubadours*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay, London: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 30.

The notion of courtly love, or what the troubadours termed *fin amor*, cannot be simply explained by a single set of rules. The concept is as complex as the other two ideas, of chivalry and courtesy, which came to shape the personality of the knight. Whether in romance literature or in reality, courtly love was a mixture of elegant deportment, refined manners and a sense of spiritual as well as physical beauty: a love strongly charged with ethical overtones, which grow more and more intrinsic to it. Such refined love came to be accepted as the ideal mark of aristocracy as well as a characteristic of the knight-warrior. The experience of love found in Chrétien de Troyes as well as in other romances of the period indicates the influence of Ovid's works, particularly *Ars Amotoria*. Together with the psychology of love and the physical stress that love was supposed to exert on lovers, which the romancers borrowed chiefly from the Latin poet, the new experience of love included qualities such as patience, submission to love's demands, and the willingness to perform service for the beloved. The lover also had to be pleasing in action as well as polite in speech. Andreas Capellanus, composed his very influential rules of courtly love between 1180 and 1184, and both his rules of love and Ovid's classic account form the foundation of the notion of love expressed in the romances of the time. Gaston Paris first used the term *amour courtois* or courtly love, with reference to the love between Lancelot and Guinevere. He made this remark specifically in connection with *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, (written around 1170) saying that the treatment of love in troubadour poetry was similar to that in Chrétien's *Lancelot* because of its adulterous nature (though it is disputable how far this is a necessary feature of courtly love).[24]Ever since Paris, this term 'courtly love' has been

[24] Gaston Paris: 'Etudes sur les romans de la Table Ronde', *Romania*, 12, 1883, 459-534. Quoted in Walter

used to describe the love found in chivalric literature. The nature of such love has become a topic of much debate and discussion.[25]C.S. Lewis, once an influential authority on love in the twelfth-century romance, describes courtly love as a

> whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is always abject...There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a feudal vassal owes to his lord.[26]

Lewis's comments on courtly love have indeed been influential; however, he is not entirely correct about 'adultery' as one of the essential characteristics. Like Gaston Paris, he may be thinking specially of the love between Guinevere and Lancelot, a story that was popular through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

It may seem that this kind of love, which places the knight in a position of servitude to the lady, indicates a feminising of the court; but Duby argues that far from feminising the French court, the literary trope of courtly love can be seen as having traditional masculine values at heart. He explains that it depicts male-bonding as manifested in the games the knights play, as does 'indeed the whole literature which revealed the rules of the game and which exalted only male values'.[27]Duby elaborates by saying that such games were actually played between vassal and lord rather than between man and woman. They were the exact counterpart of the tournament in which the young

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Kudrycz, *The Historical Present: Medievalism and Modernity*, Bloomsbury: A&C Black, 2011, 192-93.

[25]See C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study of the Medieval Tradition,* London: Cambridge University Press, 1936, 2; *Meaning of Courtly Love,* ed. F.X. Newman, Albany, 1968; Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, Manchester, 1977; Keith Nickolaus, *Marriage Fictions in Old French Secular Narratives,* Routledge: London, 2002; Herbert Moller, 'Meaning of Courtly Love', *The Journal of American Folklore* 73, no. 287 (1960) 39-52.

[26] C.S. Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 2.

[27] Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage*, 33.

man was risking his life in the hope of improving himself, of enhancing his worth, his price.[28]If indeed, courtly love is seen as a competition, where the best man is he who serves his lady best, then serving the lord was also the duty of a good vassal. Magda Bogin, in the introductory section of her book *The Women Troubadours,* tells us that the love described by the troubadours of southern France, the place of origin of courtly love, can be interpreted as an expression of the lord-vassal relationship. She argues that these court poets were dependent on wealthy patrons and had to satisfy a diverse audience at court, which included the lord and his peers, his wife and her attendants, along with a diversity of lesser nobles. Describing courtly love as *'*a patrimony any man could have if he was 'courtly','[29] Bogin informs us that at the centre of the predominantly male court was the wife of the lord who made cultural decisions or who, in the lord's absence on Crusades or other military adventures, presided over the court on her own. One may further argue thatthe entire practice of courtly love is peripheral to the highly patriarchal structure of feudal society, but within the framework of that love itself, the woman is given the role of overlord that she could scarcely achieve otherwise.

Chrétien makes mention of such a court and patron as the audience of two of the four romances that I consider in this chapter: *Erec and Enide* and *Lancelot, The Knight of the Cart.* He identifies the court of Champagne in his introduction to *Lancelot* and says that his story of Lancelot is written at the behest of Marie de Champagne, who provided both the 'matter and meaning'. Marie, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitane and Louis VII, presided over the court of Champagne as a regent from 1181 to1187 and again from 1190

[28] Ibid., 57.
[29] Magda Bogin, *The Women Troubadours*, Norton, 1980, 51.

to1197, when her husband, the Count of Flanders, was participating in the Crusades. Bogin states that it was in such a milieu that the troubadour would present himself as a courtly lover:

> With his image of the noble lady deigning to receive the low-born poet as her vassal, the troubadour extended to these footloose men the possibility of membership in the new aristocracy, an aristocracy based not on noble birth or feats at arms, but on nobility of spirit.[30]

Duby also speaks of the bond of *amor* or friendship, like that which strengthens the bond between vassal and lord. This, according to Duby, reinforces the political foundations of the social structure. He further adds that in such a scenario, the mistress often becomes identified with the lord.[31] Bogin, similarly, calls the lady 'a convenient stand-in for her husband', bridging the gap in social status between men in a way that could not be done directly. Both Duby and Bogin suggest that this literary convention, with its obvious parallels of lord and vassal played out by the lady and the knights serves as a vicarious male-bonding ritual.

Courtly love, as argued by scholars like Bogin and Duby, does begin as an extension of a male-oriented patriarchal feudal ethos, but it goes on to emphasise the love relationship between the knight and his lady. As it develops, it becomes something very different, not only allowing the woman characters a narrative space, but also granting her a limited but unprecedented power over the male in certain respects, modified to whatever degree the otherwise deeply patriarchal structure of society and the court. All

[30]Bogin, 51. Short title? You give one for all other repeat refs.
[31] G. Duby, *Love and Marriage*, 33-58.

these factors fundamentally change the way in which masculinity is constructed in the romance. The intermingling of these factors brings about a crucial feature of the romance narrative: the predominance of women.

All this coincides with another important factor in generating the kind of romances that Chrétien writes. Geoffrey of Monmouth's 1138 work, *Historia rerum Britanniae,* which included King Arthur among the kings to have ruled Britain, brought the narrative cycle of the Arthurian legend into prominence. Sometime after, in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, Jean Bodel in the preface to his epic *La Chanson de Saisnes*[32]made the distinction between the three principal 'matters' or bodies of legendary narrative, of France, Rome and Britain. The *chansons de geste,* which celebrated the deeds of French heroes in song, comprise the matter of France; certain events attributed to antiquity make up the matter of Rome; and Breton or Arthurian material constitutes the matter of Britain. The medieval romance is largely based on the substance of these three cycles. By the time Chrétien wrote his romances using material from the 'Matter of Britain,' tales about Arthur were already being circulated at court and among aristocratic circles. These works captured the imagination of the audience with their blend of history and fantasy, elements that were woven together by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his history of the Kings of Britain.

Geoffrey of Monmouth embellished the 'facts' surrounding the figure of Arthur by blending Celtic chronicle records with Celtic folklore, but it was vernacular translations such as Wace's Anglo-Norman *Roman de Brut* (1155) that popularized the Arthurian

[32] Jean Bodel, *Chanson de Saisnes*, ed. Annette Brasseur, TLF. Geneva: Droz, 1989, lines 6-10.

stories. Wace's *Roman de Brut* is an important landmark after Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, as Wace's rendition freely included materials that 'are so often told about Arthur that they have become the stuff of fiction: not all lies, not all truth, neither total folly nor total wisdom'.[33]Wace tells us of the twelve-year period of peace after Arthur's many victories. His narrative indicates that oral stories about the adventures of Arthur and his court existed and circulated even at this early stage of development of the Arthurian legend. One of the earliest indications of the knowledge of stories related to Arthur is the early twelfth-century sculptural depiction of a scene that may be traced to one such story. The archivolt on the north portal of Modena Cathedral in Italy is clearly marked as an episode from the Arthurian tales.[34]William of Malmesbury, in his 1125 work, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, reports the discovery of Gawain's grave, which according to him is fourteen feet long.[35] Both, the Modena sculpture and Malmesbury's work predate Monmouth's account of Arthur's life and reign, implying the early popularity of the Arthurian narrative cycle.

These early stories were later collected in *The Mabinogion*, which is an important source of a number of Arthurian figures, including Arthur, Gawain, Kay and Guinevere. It is this Celtic association of the Arthurian tales that links the narrative of these knights, like Arthur and Gawain, to a wider mythological context. Itis evident from Chrétien de

[33]Wace, *Roman de Brut*, ed and trans Judith Weiss as *Wace's Roman de Brut: A History of the British (Texts and Translation),* Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002,lines 9787-95.See also Ad Putter, 'Finding Time for Romance: Medieval Arthurian Literary History.' *Medium Aevum*, 63,1994,1-6.

[34]Norris J. Lacy, 'Arthurian Legend before Chrétien de Troyes,' in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tusker Grimbert, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005, 45. Also see R.S. and Laura H. Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, London: Oxford University Press, 1938. and M. Whitaker, *The Legends of King Arthur in Art*, Arthurian Studies 22, Cambridge: Brewer, 1990.

[35] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed and trans R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thompson and M. Winterbottom, 2 Vols, London: Oxford University Press, 1998, 26.

Troyes' romances that he knew some of these tales, since his *Yvain* and *Erec and Enide* both have features similar to the Welsh tales. Chrétien de Troyes is certainly not the first writer of romances, but he is undoubtedly the first creator of the Arthurian romance, and what makes his rendition of the Arthurian material unique is that he shifts his narrative away from Arthur and focuses on individual knights. He uses material related to King Arthur, which would have been available to him through oral tales, to create a kind of narrative that was completely different. We do not know much about Chrétien, and scholars are not in agreement over the details of whatever little we do know. Even the date of his works is debated. Some scholars place them in the 1160s and 1170s, others in the1170s and 1180s. However, since *The Knight of the Cart* is dedicated to his patroness Marie of Champagne, scholars assign to it the probable date of 1159, since she acquired the title of Countess of Champagne after her marriage to Henry the Liberal, Count of Champagne in that year. Regarding the chronological sequence, it is accepted that *Erec and Enide* was his first work, followed by *Cligès*, then *Lancelot* and *Yvain* almost simultaneously, and finally *Perceval*. The last-mentioned romance, *Perceval*, is not relevant to my discussion, as it initiates a different category of romance narrative.

The chronology of Chrétien de Troyes and his works coincides with the emergence of the new concept of knighthood, as detailed earlier. A number of crucial social and cultural changes take place at the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century. The court of Champagne, where Chrétien composed his romances, was a major Centre of cultural activity and social change. It was a milieu where knights mingled with clerics, imbibing their learning, imitating their sophistication and expanding

their own outlook.[36]In a close study of the court of Henry the Liberal, a court that Chrétien is known to have attended, Ad Putter explains how the mingling of clerics, laymen and knights at the court 'paved the way for a positive and powerfully attractive ideal, designed to appeal to an audience that comprised both clerics and knights'.[37]

It is also significant to my discussion that four romances out of the five attributed to Chrétien are concerned with individual knights and their relationship with women. The influence of the troubadours and the treatment of love by twelfth-century writers allowed the entry of women characters with prominent roles in the romance narratives. The ambience of love, of pleasant manners and the new model of chivalry together create an atmosphere where women seem not only to belong but, more significantly, to contribute to the re-shaping of the knight's masculinity. This occurrence of women in important roles can undoubtedly be related to the presence of women at court, where a number of important women may have been patrons of the writers. This was perhaps the first time that an educated courtly class of women, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne, presided over courts that encouraged literary and other cultural activities. In fact, we know from Chrétien's own account that his romance about Lancelot's adventure of the cart was influenced by his patroness, the countess Marie de Champagne. Chrétien mentions at the beginning of the romance that it was his patroness who provided him with 'its subject-matter and treatment'.[38]

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[36]See Ad Putter, 'Knights and Clerics at the Court Of Champagne: Chrétien De Troyes's Romances in Context, in *Medieval Knighthood V*, ed S. Church and R. Harvey, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995, 243-62.
[37] Ibid., 243.
[38]*Lancelot (The Knight of the Cart*), trans. D.D.R. Owen, London: J.M. Dent, 1994, line 28.

The introduction of women in romances becomes an important means of constructing the persona of the chivalric knight, and the integral role some women play in the romances often challenges the model of masculinity traditionally available to the warrior. In the heroic literature of the earlier period, the heroes are praised and remembered for their actions against their enemies and their friends – that is to say, other men. The masculinity expressed by Bryhtnoth and Roland is held up as an ideal, but it is a masculinity which has no connection at all with the feminine, hence not consciously or explicitly a 'masculinity' at all, however male-oriented and even patriarchal its premises might be. There is no mention of Bryhtnoth's wife in the poem that sings of his heroic deeds, nor does the context even remotely permit such mention. In the 4,000 lines of *The Song of Roland*, Aude,[39] Roland's betrothed, is mentioned only once by name when we are told how she questioned Charlemagne about Roland and died in a swoon on hearing of his death.

Chrétien's romances are not the first to introduce women as important characters. The *Roman d'Eneas,* written about a decade before Chrétien's first work, has a number of additions made by the vernacular poet to the narrative found in Virgil's famous original, the *Aeneid*. It is the treatment of love that sharply distinguishes the *Roman d'Eneas* and Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* from the *chanson de geste* or any other kind of literature of the period. The internal dialogues that we find characters like Chrétien's Yvain, Cligès, Alexander or Soredamors engaged in, recall the debates about love in the *Roman d'Eneas* and the yearnings of love expressed by Lavine for Eneas. This feature, along with the very influential rules of love set down by Andreas Capellanus in his

[39] *The Song of Roland*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957, lines 3706-23.

treatise on courtly love, also composed for the court of Marie de Champagne, are important factors that now enable writers such as Chrétien not just to include women in their narratives but to give some of them roles which are as central as their male counterparts'. As a consequence, the role of the woman is considerably augmented in the future development of the line, particularly in vernacular retellings of the Arthurian stories which often take the lead from Chrétien's romances. In the hands of Chrétien, not only does the Arthurian material become more flexible as he casts historical details into the romance genre, but we also see how the concepts envisioned by twelfth-century society bring a complex dynamics into play between these knights and the women they interact with.

EREC and YVAIN

Erec and Enide, written around 1170, is the earliest of Chrétien's five romances. In the prologue to this romance, Chrétien tells us that the story is taken from 'Erec, Son of Lac' in the *Mabinogion*. It is, he says, a tale

> which the professional story-tellers habitually fragment and corrupt in the presence of kings and counts.[40]

In this story, the warrior-knight explicitly negotiates the newly introduced features that must now define his masculinity. The first 2,700 verses of the romance narrate how he meets Enide, wins her over and marries her. Here, Erec is presented as the perfect

[40] *Erec and Enide*, 1-26, *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances*, trans. D.D.R. Owen, London: J.M. Dent,1991. All subsequent references to the tales are taken from this translation and edition.

knight and warrior. He not only defeats his opponent Yder, in the prestigious tournament of the sparrow hawk, but also wins the sparrow hawk for the lady of his choice: Enide.

The romance begins with Erec choosing to stay behind with the queen Guinevere, rather than join the knights for the hunt of the white stag. The hunt was an annual event at Arthur's court and considered prestigious as the winner of the hunt would be then able to declare his beloved the most beautiful. Erec's decision to stay behind, however, results in a different adventure. Erec then has to pursue an unknown knight, in order to defend the queen's honour, this leads him to Enide and to the tournament of the blue sparrow hawk, Erec also learns that the knight he has been pursuing has won the tournament for the two previous years. The hawk is to be presented to the most beautiful lady present, and so far Yder, the name of the knight Erec is in pursuit of, had gone unchallenged, and had won the hawk for his lady. Erec's decision to remain with the queen might cause one to question his chivalry, but his pursuit and defeat of the arrogant knight, who turns out to be Yder, removes all doubts about his intentions and prowess. Thus, in the very first section of the story, Erec's commitment to the knightly ideals is firmly established; yet he still undertakes an arduous journey involving numerous adventures.

This second part of Erec's tale introduces a crucial variation from the customary stories of warriors: Erec is so engaged with his new bride that he forgets to follow the practices of chivalry–that is to say, he neglects participating in tournaments and games or any such active knightly pursuit. So engrossed is he in nuptial bliss that the couple's seclusion from society leads the noblemen of the court to criticise such negligence. Enide overhears the court gossip one day and blames herself and weeps, as she correctly feels

that she is the cause of her husband's fall from chivalric renown. Erec, who had been asleep till then, hears her lamentations and immediately decides to depart from his kingdom. He orders Enide to come with him and instructs her not say a word till he asks her to speak. The couple encounter a number of adventures, in which Erec is able to overcome each of his adversaries. Two incidents are here worth mentioning, as they illuminate the character of Enide. The first occurs when the couple spend the night at Count Galoain's castle. The Count makes advances to Enide and wants her to marry him, even as he plots to kill Erec. Enide, whom Erec has been forbidden to speak to him, plays along with the Count in order to gain time, but somehow warns Erec and the two manage to escape unharmed. The Count pursues them, and Erec defeats him but is also wounded himself. By the end of this episode, we find that Erec and Enide have reached an understanding and are reconciled.

Their trials, however, do not seem to end there. Erec becomes entangled in more encounters with other adversaries, and is quite exhausted from the number of wounds he incurs. After his fight with the giants, he is so tired and hurt that he falls into a swoon. Enide's desperate shrieks as she sees her husband fall draws the attention of the Count of Limors. They all think Erec is dead. Limor then woos Enide, and even though she rejects his advances, he arranges to marry her by force. It is at the moment when Enide screams as the Count compels her to give in to his demands, that Erec recovers from his swoon. He recovers and fights the Count till he strikes the latter down with a mortal blow. Erec has by this time displayed exceptional prowess and commitment to chivalry, enough to satisfy his critics at court who had earlier been scandalised by his indulgence in love. Yet he is still not ready to put an end to the trials he has imposed on himself.

The episode with Count Limors finally reunites the couple, but Enide's worries are far from over. On the way back to their court with Guivert, a knight Erec had befriended during one of his adventures, they come upon the fort of Brandigan. Guivert warns Erec against entering the fort by telling him of the 'dangerous passage' within the ramparts of the fortress. We learn that for some seven years, many knights met with shame and death due to this 'dangerous passage'. Later, King Evrain of Brandigan tells Erec that the adventure is named 'Joy of the Court'. Paradoxically, this adventure has so far brought only despair to the people of Brandigan since no knight who ventured there has returned alive. Erec enters this enchanted garden to find himself amid a row of stakes. All the stakes, except one, bears a helmet and a human head, and on the last hangs a horn. As he moves further, he sees a damsel reclining beneath a sycamore. As he approaches her, he is accosted by a knight of immense stature. Erec is subsequently able to defeat the formidable knight and blows the horn to declare the 'Joy of the Court'. We learn that the knight whom Erec has defeated here is Mabonagrain, King Evarain's nephew. The damsel under the sycamore is Mabonagrain's lover, to whom he had granted a boon when he was a child. The nature of the boon was only revealed to him after his knighting ceremony. The boon compelled him to remain with his beloved in the enchanted orchard and slay every knight who entered until a contender defeated him. This adventure of the 'Joy of the Court' is the final trial undertaken by Erec in Enide's company; after this, they return to Lac, and are crowned king and queen after the death of Erec's father.

The adventure at Brandigan is often seen as the turning point in the chivalric education of Erec, the argument being that so far, all the adventures he faced were for personal gains whereas the 'Joy of the Court', as the name of the adventure suggests, is

an act for the benefit of the entire society. Mabonagrain's release from the enchanted garden and return to court is joyously celebrated by all in Brandigan. The evergreen orchard and the exile-like life led by Mabonagrain and his lady remind one of the secluded life led by Erec and Enide immediately after their marriage. The rejoicing of the people of Brandigan, not to mention Mabonagrain's own relief at being defeated by Erec and thus released from the bond made to his childhood beloved, also, in a way, brings about a favourable response in the nobility at Carrant, the people who found Erec's role as a lover objectionable. This emphasizes that for a knight to withdraw from society and live exclusively in a private world of love is reprehensible and needs to be corrected. Perhaps that is why Erec must reaffirm his masculinity as a warrior and prove his prowess through a series of adventures: he has to dispel public criticism. However, it does not explain his conduct with Enide. Why does he command her not to speak at all as they depart from Carrant? Why, in fact, does he insist that she accompany him on his sudden adventure? The Mabinogion, the compilation of early Welsh tales that were collected and edited in years between 1838 and 1849, includes the story of *Gereint Son of Erbin*, a tale that would be known to Chrétien as well, since he uses almost the entire Welsh tale in his account of Erec and Enide. In the Welsh story, however, Erec, after his marriage to Enide and return to his father's kingdom, does continue to take part in knightly activities such as tournaments and games that display his prowess. He also makes sure that his kingdom is secure and that his domain faces no threat from either outside or within. It is only after he has proven his prowess in every way possible that he begins to spend more time with his wife Enide. Erec's father Erbin does not approve of Erec's life of leisure, when he learns of it from some scoffing courtiers. It is Erbin who

speaks of Erec's unknightly behaviour towards Enide, who is so distressed when she hears of it that she cannot sleep or rest, and is found by Erec murmuring to herself of the shameful situation. According to the Welsh version of the tale, Gereint (as he is here named) thinks that Enide says all this 'because she was meditating love for another man in his stead'.[41] So angered is Gereint that he has no peace of mind and calls for his squire to ready his horse. He then commands Enide to

> arise and dress thee the worst dress thee and have thy horse accoutred, and bring with thee the worst dress to thy name, to go riding. And shame on me, said he if thou come here till thou know whether I have so utterly lost my strength as thou reckonest, and further, whether it will be as pleasant for thee as was thy desire to seek dalliance with him thou wert thinking of. (251).

Unlike Chrétien's Erec, Gereint does not confine himself indoors immediately after his marriage to Enide. Moreover, in Chrétien's tale, Erec does not harbour any suspicion of Enide. In fact, he does not sound overly disturbed in any way:

> Lady, he says, you were right, and those who blame me for it are right. Get ready at once, and prepare yourself to go riding! Get up from here, put on your most beautiful dress, and have your finest palfrey saddled! (2580-83).

It may seem uncertain whether Erec's motive in undertaking the journey is to punish Enide or to prove his prowess and commitment as a knight, but the directions he gives to Enide regarding 'beautiful dress' and 'finest palfrey', in contrast to the 'worst

[41]'Gereint son of Erbin', *The Mabinogion,* trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, London: J.M. Dent, 1992.

dress' that Gereint asks his Enide to wear, suggests that Erec is out to prove his critics wrong by demonstrating that active chivalry and martial feats may go hand in hand with love for a woman.

The code of chivalry as depicted in *Erec and Enide,* though far from the spirit of the earlier heroic warrior, can still trace its ideal of masculinity from that period. Enide's role in the story provides us with an important female character, and perhaps for the first time, she shares equal space in the narrative with her male counterpart; but that is all. Enide may share the title of the story with her lover and husband, but the focus of the narrative is solely on the reaffirmation of Erec's masculinity according to the accepted tenets of a warrior and dominant male. His dauntless adventures speak of a masculinity which would be accepted by the warriors as flawless. At the same time, itis a masculinity that is now, perhaps for the first time, trying to define itself against the presence of the feminine. Erec, as we see him echo the injunction made by Gereint to Enide to remain silent, does not seem completely at ease with his new role of a lover. Only after the fight with Count Limors does he reveal a masculinity that incorporates elements of the new courtly culture of love. This is when he fights the Count to protect Enide, even though he is grievously wounded.

In *Yvain* or *The Knight with the Lion,* we find Yvain facing issues not too dissimilar from Erec's. Erec is criticised by the court for spending too much time with his wife and neglecting the duties of a knight. Yvain, on the other hand, suffers because he is so engrossed in tournaments and jousts that he forgets to return to his wife in time. Chrétien begins the tale by criticising the lack of chivalry in his own times, and deplores how love

is much debased. He speaks of the reign of Arthur as a powerful and flourishing age, and speaks of love saying:

> For those who used to love had a reputation for courtliness, integrity, generosity and honour; but now love is made a laughing- stock, because people who feel nothing of it lie by claiming to love; and they make a deceitful mockery of it when they boast of it without having the right. (11-14)

In the narrative, however, we see that it is Yvain, a knight from Arthur's court, who makes a 'deceitful mockery' of love. Nevertheless, the plot does rest on the love between Yvain and Laudine. Yvain, on having defeated and slain Esclados the lord of the marvellous spring, wins over his widow Laudine and marries her to become the protector of the marvellous spring. He has to defend the spring when Arthur and his knights come to seek adventure in the forest of Broceliande. Yvain defeats Kay at the adventure of the spring and reveals his identity to Arthur's company. Laudine and Yvain then host Arthur and his knights. While the royal company is encamped in Laudine's kingdom of Lnaduc, Gawain persuades Yvain to join the company as they prepare to leave. He reminds Yvain that without attending tournaments and jousts, Yvain will not only lose his chivalric reputation, but might also lose Laudine's love. Yvain seeks Laudine's permission to leave and she grants him a year's release, saying that if Yvain does not return by the given time, her love for him would turn to hate. After his departure from Lnaduc, Yvain is so immersed in knightly games that he forgets to return within the time Laudine had granted him.

Love is the point of discussion at the start of the narrative, since Chrétien speaks of the kind of love that prevails 'now' as compared to 'then'; but the progress of the story leads one to question the extolled chivalric values as well. First, Yvain embarks on the adventure of the marvellous spring on hearing Calogrenant speak of his humiliating defeat at the hands of the knight Escaldos. Yvain leaves the court without informing anyone and does not take the king's permission. He impetuously ignores such protocols only to be able to give Kay a fitting reply for having taunted him and his cousin Calogrenant. Yvain's reason to fight the Knight of the spring is undoubtedly selfish. He challenges the Knight not only to avenge Calogrenant but also to silence Kay. The combat that follows is also unworthy of any knight. The fight between Yvain and Esclados in the forest of Broceliande begins in a chivalric manner with neither of them wishing to hurt the other's horse. At the decisive moment, however, when Yvain deals Esclados a mortal wound, Yvain suddenly seems to lose all control and chases mercilessly after the wounded knight. He pursues Esclados even though he can hear the agonized moans of his victim, only because he is

> afraid he would have wasted his efforts unless he takes him dead or alive, remembering as he does the taunting words Kay had spoken to him. (885-6)

Yvain is merely bent on gaining a token of his victory to show Kay. There is an element of callousness in the militancy shown by Yvain. Later, after Yvain marries Esclados' widow Laudine, it is once again his reckless chivalry that brings about the couple's separation. In fact, one would not be far wrong to say that Yvain's madness following Laudine's rejection is a result of his inordinate attachment to chivalry. The

psychological trauma he suffers leads him to forsake all company, even giving up the trappings of social life such as clothes and speech. He spends his days in the solitude of the woods, living like the other creatures of nature. His mental breakdown as a result of his beloved spurning him may not find an equivalent in Capellanus' treatise on courtly love, but it certainly echoes Ovid's *Art of Love*. For example when he watches Laudine at her husband's funeral, Yvain is so overcome with the pain of love that it is described as a 'sword-blow' and we are informed that 'Love's wound, though, grows worse the nearer it is to its doctor' (1371-2) One can find Ovidian influence elsewhere in the romance as well. For instance, when Yvain is brought to the presence of Laudine for the first time through the mediation of Lunete, he trembles in the presence of his beloved (1406-1461), even though otherwise fearless even in the face of the gravest of dangers. When he speaks to her, he reveals how love has entered through his eyes to his heart. This is similar to the manner in which love is spoken of in *Cligès* as well, and shows once again the influence Ovid's discussions on love had on Chrétien's work. A few verses later, around lines 3,490, we are told that 'lord Yvain almost went out of his mind a second time.' This happens after Yvain recovers from his madness and returns to the magic fountain. Here he is so grief-stricken at the thought of Laudine that

> A thousand times he calls 'Alas!' voicing his grief, then falls
> in a swoon, such is his anguish. (3490)

Roland swoons too in *The Song of Roland*, but it is not for the same reason as Yvain. In fact, in the case of Roland, who swoons after the death of his friend Oliver on the battlefield, we are told that even while unconscious he sits upright on his

saddle,[42]whereas Yvain almost kills himself by falling on his own sword. But Yvain's swoon is not less 'manly' because it does not occur on a battlefield. In fact, it is in keeping with the masculinity envisioned by twelfth-century expressions of chivalric love. The intensity of love revealed by Yvain's swooning at the combined thought of his beloved and his separation from her is, in a way, an anticipation of the intensity of love that Petrarch will speak of a century later. Yvain's experience of love, and his suffering for it owing to his distracting quest for knightly renown, demonstrates the tension under which the warrior operates if he is simultaneously in love.

The three-order division of medieval society[43]determined that clerics prayed for the society, peasants worked to feed them all, and warriors or knights protected society from both internal trouble and external harm. A man's masculinity was expected to embrace the accepted norms that defined his particular estate. Yvain is a knight and the chivalry that he demonstrates is an accepted part of his personality, but to what extent? His tale explores the knight's commitment to love as much as to chivalry. The twelfth century, which constructed the concept of chivalry as we understand it today as incorporating a martial as well as an ethical ideal, was also a time of widespread scepticism concerning the role of chivalry in society. True though it was that the knights were responsible for maintaining public order, it was also this very section of society that caused much internal insecurity. It was often found that the chivalric class, supposed to follow the

[42]*Yavin,* 2033, 308.

[43] Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982. The traditional division of medieval society into three estates is also adopted by other recent scholars such as Swanson.

elevated ideals of *prouesse, loyaute, largesse, courtoisie, franchise*[44]along with Christian values, was corrupted by self-division and vanity.[45]

> The fighting, let us remember, was not merely defensive, not simply carried out at the royal behest in defence of recognized national borders, not only on crusades, not really (despite self-deception) in the defence of widows, orphans, and the weak, never (so far as the historian can discover) against giants, ogres, or dragons. They fought each other as enthusiastically as any common foe; perhaps even more often they brought violence to villagers, clerics, townspeople, and merchants.[46]

The lines quoted above are the analysis of a modern historian, Richard W. Kaeuper; but there are similar concerns voiced by medieval contemporaries to bear this out. One of the more famous medieval voices criticizing the disruptive actions of chivalry was that of Bernard of Clairvaux, who advocated a new kind of knighthood that would be more ascetic, altruistic and semi-monastic, with the knights organized as the Knights Templars. Suger of Saint Denis, the biographer of King Louis VI of France, was another such voice. He had no interest in the Crusades but wanted the restoration of royal authority, which was undermined to some extent by the more powerful knights.

The violence that Kaeuper associates with chivalry is amply illustrated in the romance. Yvain's killing of Escaldos and the destruction that he brings upon the people and kingdom of Landuc are examples of such violence. Both the incidents happen early in the narrative, but Yvain resorts to the same form of aggression even towards the end of

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[44] M. Keen, 2.
[45] Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
[46] R.W. Kaueper, *Chivalry and Violence*,8.

the tale when he wishes to win Laudine back, although by this time he has apparently cast away his former aggression. In fact, at this point of the romance, he is not his former self or Yvain at all; he is the Knight with the Lion. After Yvain suffers the loss of his sanity and regains it with the help of the ointment provided by the lady of Noroison, he continues to wander in the forest. One day, as he is contemplating taking his life driven by the sorrow of his estrangement from his wife, he comes across a lion fighting a serpent. Yvain helps the lion overcome the serpent. In return, the lion begins to follow Yvain everywhere. This friendship with the lion changes Yvain.

Following this encounter with the lion and the snake, Yvain becomes a true knight. Even though he continues to participate in various violent adventures, he now does so not for personal reputation or selfish pride but in order to bring justice to others. As the Knight with the Lion, Yvain's motives for violence are more unselfish and therefore more acceptable socially. The lion embodies a combination of opposites. Throughout the Middle Ages, the lion was thought to unite two attributes: humility and meekness alongside ferocity and pride. Yvain symbolically sided with the good and the righteous when he chose to fight on the side of the lion rather than the serpent. Consequently, Yvain's relationship with the lion and his taking up the cause of the meek indicates the understanding he has now reached regarding both chivalry and knighthood. Moreover, the lion is introduced in the romance after Yvain had been crushed by his insanity and then cured by the lady of Noroison. He is, at this point, ready for rehabilitation in society. His decision to now appear in society as the transformed Knight with the Lion expresses his growth as a knight and a person. He is now ready to re-enter society, and will also attempt to win back his love through his fresh understanding of a socially beneficial

chivalry. One way of reading the text is to see it as Yvain's growth through his developing perception of chivalry. Such a reading, however, would not be a complete understanding of Yvain's dilemma, since it does not take into consideration his love for Laudine. The focus of the romance is not chivalry alone, but also love. Admittedly, the narrative barely discusses love, except at the point when Yvain sees Laudine for the first time. Yet every action that Yvain undertakes after his recovery from his mental breakdown is directed towards winning Laudine back. As the Knight with the Lion, Yvain does everything in his power to be the perfect knight. He fights the wicked giant called Harpin of the Mountain, rescues damsels in distress, and even jousts against his best friend Gawain, although neither of them knows who he is fighting. Yvain is so eager to redeem himself in the eyes of his lady that he throws himself into a flurry of action, so much so that there is a time when we find him rushing from one fighting assignment to another. He proves himself to be heroic, and does all this to win back the one thing left for him to conquer: his wife.

> Yvain whose heart was irrevocably set on love saw clearly that he could not go on, but would in the end die of love unless his lady took pity on him, pining away for her as he was. So he decides to leave the court on his own and go on the warpath to her spring, where he would cause such lightning, wind and rain that she would of necessity be compelled to make peace with him, or he would never stop the commotion at the spring, with the wind and rain. (6510-27)

Yet Yvain thinks in the only manner he is accustomed to, that of a warrior. He can only think of coercing his beloved into forgiving him by bringing destruction on her land

and people. His plan seems more like a scheme of retaliation than of love. In fact, there is a detailed account of how the general populace of Landuc suffers for Yvain's action:

> The boldest man would rather be captive in Persia in the hands of Turks than within those walls. The people are so terrified that they execrate all their ancestors, saying: 'A curse on the first man to build a house in this land and on those who founded this town! For they could not in all the world have found so detestable a place, when a single man can assault, torment and harry us.' (6536-40)

Yvain is finally reconciled with his wife only through the clever intervention of Lunete, a maid attending upon the queen Laudine. She was earlier responsible for uniting Yvain and Laudine after Yvain had slain Laudine's husband and was being hunted by the knights of Landuc. On both occasions, Lunete uses her wits to effect a turn of events. She saves Yvain the first time, and then again by reuniting him with Laudine. Yvain's interaction with Lunete is not explored in the romance even though she clearly plays an important, albeit brief, role in the unfolding drama; but this role is worth highlighting. Yvain refers to Lunette as 'my sweet friend'. (1550). This is possibly the first time a woman is spoken of in terms of friendship or as a 'friend', terms that hitherto a man would reserve only for other men. Her friendship with Yvain is remarkable not only because it stands alongside the amatory relation of Yvain and Laudine, but also because it suggests a certain degree of empowerment of women. It should also be noted that Lunete is an attendant, not a lady of the nobility; she tells Yvain that she was not 'courtly', which is why nobody at Arthur's court would speak to her. It was Yvain who came up and addressed her then, and it is for this reason that she is willing to help Yvain at Landuc.

Lunete's role in the romance is certainly significant because of the way she influences events in order to help Yvain out of the two extremely difficult situations, even putting her own self in danger for the friendship she shares with Yvain. Yvain, as the Knight with the Lion, rescues her when she is disgraced and put to trial by Laudine and the people of Landuc. In this way, Yvain repays Lunete for the help she gave him earlier. The figure of Lunete is important not only because it is her manipulations that bring about the final resolution,[47] but more importantly because, although the qualities she represents are conventionally feminine, the narrative endorses them as a necessary presence balancing the masculinity to be embraced by the lover and warrior, making him a more complete man. Yvain's predicament demonstrates the limited scope of the established model of chivalric masculinity. Lunete on the other hand

> is the positive representative of another way of handling conflicts and solving problems, in direct opposition to the chivalric or courtly representatives in the text.[48]

Yvain and Erec are renowned knights, and their adventures teach them the difference between personal glory and public good. It is possible to read the two romances as tales showing the growth of the knight, a rite of passage of sorts[49]. Interpretations such as these are certainly supported by the text. It is also correct to say that the predicaments of Erec and Yvain, in varying degrees, result from their inability to

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[47] For more on Lunete see Ellen Germain, 'Lunete, Women and Power in Chretien's Yvain', *Romance Quarterly ,* 38, 1991, 12-25. Also see J.M. Sullivan, 'The Lady Lunete: Literary Conventions of Counsel and Criticism of Council in Chretien's Yvain and Hartmann's Iwein', *Neophilologus*, 85, 2001, 335-54.

[48] Jorgen Bruhn, *Lovely Violence. Chrétien De Troyes' Critical Romances,* Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, 75.

[49] See Tony Hunt, 'The Lion and Yvain' in *The Legend Of Arthur in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to A.H. Diverres by Colleagues, Pupils and Friends*, ed. P.B. Grout, Cambridge, 1983.

satisfactorily respond to the feminine; they are constricted by the norms of masculinity dictated by the warriors of an earlier age, heroes whose feats of valour set standards of glory for the knight to pursue. But the crises faced by the two knights reveal new tensions that only arise once their heroic masculinity comes in contact with a cross-current of forces introduced during the twelfth century. In *Erec and Enide* and *Yvain* we see the transition from one culture, ethos and value system to another. Both the romances, in their respective manners, show the knight negotiating with new as well as older norms that formulate the masculinity of a warrior. We see here the emergence of a new type of masculinity, which evolves into a complex presentation of the knight-warrior in the works that follow.

Cligès and Lancelot

In *The Knight of the Cart,* Lancelot seems to eliminate all such tensions by simply subordinating everything else to love. He is taunted throughout the romance as the Knight of the Cart for willingly stepping into a cart for the sake of his love. In those days, the text informs us, carts were used as 'pillories' for those guilty of treason or murder, and for thieves:

> Anyone caught committing a crime was put in the cart and led through all the streets, thereafter losing all his legal rights and never again being heard or honoured or welcomed in any court. (331-33)

Lancelot uses the cart as a means to follow his beloved, Queen Guinevere. The tale begins with the events that take place on Ascension Day when King Arthur was holding court at Camelot. A knight suddenly enters the court, fully armed. He informs Arthur that he holds in captivity several knights, ladies and maidens of Arthur's kingdom. This knight, named Meleagant as we learn a little later, then says to Arthur:

> King, if there is in your court so much as one knight whom you trust enough to dare hand over to him the queen, to be taken after me into those woods where I'm heading, I'll promise to wait for him there; and, if he can win her from me and manage to bring her back, I'll return to you all prisoners held captive in my land. (68-73)

Kay, who is obviously not competent enough for such a task, manipulates the situation in such a way that Arthur is forced to send him to the woods with the queen. The news of the queen's predicament reaches Lancelot. It is while Lancelot is in pursuit of Meleagant, Kay and the queen that he comes across the cart and a dwarf. Gawain, who also accompanies Lancelot on the same mission, continues his chase on horseback, since for Gawain the thought of riding in the cart was 'sheer madness and refused to climb in' (380). The next morning, as the two knights set out, they meet a damsel who informs them about Meleagant and the queen. They learn that in order to reach the queen they will have to enter Gorre by crossing one of two bridges, the Bridge under Water and the Sword Bridge. Gawain chooses to take the Bridge under Water, leaving Lancelot to use the Sword Bridge. Before Lancelot can come to the Sword Bridge, he has to overcome a number of adventures: combating the guard at the ford, crossing the cemetery containing the future graves of Arthur's knights including his own, and the defeat of Orgueilleux. At

the cemetery, Lancelot discovers a tomb set aside for the knight who will rescue the queen and liberate the prisoners in Gorre.

Lancelot is also the lover par excellence. He sets out to pursue his beloved who has been abducted. He grabs the horse nearest to him and even rides the cart so as to get closer to rescuing his beloved. The cart, as mentioned earlier, carried a social stigma and riding in it could get him barred from aristocratic society.

> But Reason, who is at odds with Love, tells him to avoid getting in, warning and instructing him to do and engage in nothing that might bring him shame or reproach. Reason, who dares tell him this, is not in the heart but the mouth; but Love, who bids and urges him to climb quickly into the cart, is enclosed within the heart. It being Love's wish, he jumps in regardless of the shame, since Love commands and wills it. (369-75)

His devotion to love is also evident in Gorre while he is fighting Meleagant. From the moment he sees that the queen is present to witness the fight, he does not take his gaze off her, but continues to fight with his back to his opponent while fixing his eye on the queen. Clearly, this romance follows the dictates of the courtly love tradition more closely than Chrétien's two earlier romances. Both *Erec and Enide* and *Yvain* deal more with marital love, although it does incorporate elements of courtly love. The two kinds of love, courtly and marital, are not necessarily exclusive: in the romances of Erec and Yvain, we see the convergence of the two, as later in Chaucer's *The Franklin's Tale*, although this kind of marital love, touched by courtly convention, seems to be more the exception than the rule during the Middle Ages. Marriages among medieval aristocrats

were by and large arranged between families rather than individuals, and love had little or no place in these negotiations among the wealthy. The tenets of courtly love, as set down by Andreas Capellanus, speak of love which need not be associated with marriage. Although Capellanus advocates constancy to one lover, he does not see how love can exist in a marriage. It is perhaps on such authority that in more recent scholarship, *fin amor* is often viewed as essentially adulterous. Twelfth-century courtly romances like Chrétien's, particularly the stories of Cligès and Lancelot, conform to the courtly love convention as so interpreted. It is in keeping with the expectations of *fin amor* that Lancelot chooses love over reason and decides to step into the cart in order to pursue the abductor of his beloved. It is the same convention that the queen follows when she shows displeasure towards Lancelot for having hesitated even for a brief moment before stepping into the cart:

> What? Were you not then ashamed and afraid of the cart? You showed great reluctance to climb in when you hesitated for the space of two steps. That indeed was why I refused either to address or look at you.(4490-93)

Lancelot's two hesitant steps are not just the fuel for Guinevere's displeasure; they have generated a great deal of scholarly discussion as well.[50]Chrétien tells us that the cart poses a problem for Lancelot; he must choose whether to ride in it for the sake of love or step away from it as reason would dictate. Lancelot rejects reason for the sake of love. Here one could replace 'reason' by 'honour', rejecting reason also brings dishonour to

[50] For example see David F. Hult, 'Lancelot's Two Steps: A Problem in Textual Criticism', *Speculum,* 61, 1986, 836-58 and Karl D. Utti and Alfred Foulet, 'On Editing Chrétien De Troyes: Lancelot's Two Steps and their Context', *Speculum,* 63, 1988, 271-92. Also see David F. Hult, 'Steps Forward and Steps Backward: More on Chretien's Lancelot', *Speculum,* 64, 1989, 307-16.

Lancelot. The insults and slights that Lancelot has to endure would be humiliating to any knight, but as a lover he has done the right thing. Indeed, the queen, his lady, is upset not because he rode in the cart, but because he did not do so at once. Even the issue of honour has grown ambiguous in such a context. It is no longer the stereotyped honour of the warrior, guarded by pride and proven by valour; it has acquired the added dimension of a nobility of conduct that violates and contradicts the conventional, decorous view of honour. The knight's virtues are no longer demonstrated through physical feats of valour alone, or the mental and moral virtues directly fostering them; he is now also a lover, to be judged by the gracious actions he performs in the name of love. Lancelot's stepping into the cart triggers off a sequence of events that reveal the equivocal relationship between the tenets of chivalry, courtesy and courtly love: all equally features that, by the twelfth century, form the integral structure of values shaping the masculinity of the warrior.

In the romance, the repercussions of Lancelot's choice appear almost immediately. By following the dictates of love, he meets with deep social disgrace: the people of the town through which the cart passes mock him, and 'old men and children shout abuse at him, filling the streets with their clamour, so that the knight hears a great deal of slander and abuse at his expense'(405-6).The young damsel at whose keep Lancelot and Gawain spend the night gives all her attention to Gawain and not Lancelot, instead telling Lancelot that he cannot seek to try the adventure of the magic bed since 'once a knight has been in a cart, he suffers shame on earth, and it is not right for him to concern himself with the matter.' However, Lancelot does sleep on the magic bed and survives this adventure as well as the adventure of the flaming lance. Further, his embracing of

dishonour for the sake of love does not even satisfy the queen for whose sake Lancelot suffered the ignominy: she has learnt of his hesitation and is furious that Lancelot, even for a brief moment, contemplated not doing whatever it took to come to her.

At no point of the narrative is it specified that Lancelot's love is dishonourable because it is adulterous. If there is any possible reflection on Lancelot's reputation for chivalry, it is because his devotion to his beloved makes him agree to put himself in this intrinsically dishonourable situation. From one perspective, the devotion he thereby shows towards the queen enhances his image of the ideal courtly lover; from another, it makes him a figure of shame and ridicule. The same ambiguity inheres in certain other of Lancelot's actions: for instance, the scene where he does not hear a knight challenge him because he is so deep in the thoughts of the queen; or the one where he presses the queen's hair to his heart, oblivious to all else; or where he fights with his back to his opponent so that he may keep the queen in his view; or even when he fights poorly on her signal. These instances do not build up the figure of an admirable knight. One may be further confused during the episode when the queen and Lancelot consummate their love. How does one respond to Lancelot's actions? Do we expect a heroic figure to make such a transgression, especially when he avers to treat his love as if it were sacred?

> As he left, he bowed before the room, behaving just as though he were before an altar, then went away in deep anguish. (4721-3)

This may be very much in the vein of the troubadour poetry that influences the idea of *fin amor* in the twelfth-century romance; nonetheless, love places Lancelot in a

dilemma. The kind of love-relation that exists between Lancelot and the queen appears unjustifiable and problematic. Even Chrétien's twelfth-century readers would have recognized it as a gross offence against one's sworn lord, since Lancelot is in the service of his liege lord Arthur, Guinevere's husband. Apart from the simple question of sexual betrayal, any taint on Guinevere would be intolerable as she was the potential mother of the next King; her purity was necessary for the well-being and integrity of the kingdom.[51] Adultery with the queen would certainly be morally questionable as well as politically and socially unacceptable in the feudal context of the romance.

There is adulterous love in *Cligès* as well. In this romance too, Chrétien explores the concept of courtly love elaborately in his depiction of the love between Soredamors and Alexander, Cligès' parents:

> Alexander loves and desires the girl who sighs for love of him, but he does not know this and will not know until he has endured much pain and grief. On account of his love, he serves the queen and her maid-in-waiting, but without addressing or speaking to the one he thinks most of. If she dared press the claim she thinks she has on him, he would gladly have told her the truth, but she neither dares nor should do so. The fact that they see each other without having the courage to say or do anything further is a great hardship for them, increasing and kindling their love.[52]

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[51] Peggy McCracker, 'The Body Politic and the Queen's Adulterous Body in French Romance' in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbuy, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, 38-64.

[52] *Cligès*, 575-84, 100-1.

Alexander and Soredamors are ultimately united in matrimony, and it is their son Cligès's illicit love for Fenice that poses questions of loyalty. Both loves are drawn from the tradition of courtly love, like the love between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. The story of Cligès and Fenice is clearly modelled on the legend of Tristan and Isolde, a tale of adulterous love well known to the twelfth-century audience; yet the two are explicitly differentiated. Fenice herself indignantly exclaims:

> I'd rather be torn limb from limb than have people in referring to us recall the love of Iseut and Tristan, about whom such nonsense is talked that I'm ashamed to speak of it. I couldn't reconcile myself to the life Iseut led. With her, love was too debased, her body was made over to two men, whilst her heart belonged entirely to one. (1341-6)

This claim is true to an extent, for Alis never really sleeps with his wife Fenice. He is under the illusion that he does so because of the potion given to him by Fenice. The knight Cligès had come to Arthur's court to earn renown, on his return to his country, Constantinople, he falls in love with his uncle's betrothed. Fenice, is then married to Cligès' uncle Alis, but continues to love Cligès. Alis, however, is not aware of the relationship between his wife and his nephew since Fenice has given him a potion that makes Alis believe that he has consummated his marriage with Fenice, when in fact it is not so. The adultery between Fenice and Cligès is also excusable to a certain degree because Alis has wrongfully taken away the kingdom from his nephew Cligès to become king, and then married princess Fenice. Moreover, Fenice is able to extricate herself from the unconsummated marriage to Alis by first feigning death and then leaving

Constantinople along with Cligès to seek refuge in Arthur's kingdom till the time Alis dies.

It has been suggested that Chrétien left the romance of Lancelot unfinished because he was unable to resolve the moral issue of the adulterous love between the queen and Lancelot, turning his hand instead to a different type of romance, on the Grail legend. *The Knight of the Cart* concludes with the return of Lancelot to Arthur's court and his final defeat of Meleagant, leaving the question of adultery unresolved. The century following Chrétien's work spun out a whole new saga of love between the queen and Lancelot, making Lancelot one of the most celebrated knights of thirteenth-century romance literature. The proliferation of stories about the relationship between the queen and Lancelot, from the thirteenth-century prose *Lancelot* to the final sections of Malory's fifteenth-century *Morte Darthur*, indicate the popularity of *fin amor* as an ingredient of the Arthurian romance.

Chrétien de Troyes may be credited with inventing the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, but the story of Arthur's betrayal by his queen goes back to Geoffrey of Monmouth. In his account of Arthur's reign in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, written in the early twelfth century, Guinevere's lover is the usurper of Arthur's kingdom, Mordred. In Chrétien's *The Knight of the Cart*, probably written less than fifty years later around 1180, we see the first appearance of Lancelot, who sets out to rescue the queen and who is also her lover. In the near-contemporary German romance *Lanzelet*, he has a number of lovers, but the queen is not one of them. So we may conclude that it was Chrétien who popularised the love affair between the queen and the knight Lancelot.

The relationship is then expanded in France in the thirteenth century, in the non-cyclic prose *Lancelot* early in the century followed by the more popular prose romances known as the Vulgate Cycle or the Lancelot-Grail Cycle.[53]In the expanded narrative of these works, we get an account of the first meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere and the mention of their first kiss. This is echoed in Dante's *Inferno* (Canto 5), where the illicit lovers Francesca and Paolo are first led into temptation, and exchange *their* first kiss, while together reading the story of Lancelot and Guinevere.Love spurs Lancelot to heights of chivalric achievement, and leads him to become the best knight in the world. The same love also brings him disgrace when he fails to see the Grail only because of his illicit love for Guinevere: he is outdone in this respect by his son Galahad. The final section of the cycle, the *Mort Artu*, tells us how the lovers are discovered by Mordred and Agravaine. This leads to their elopement and the war that finally dissolves the Arthurian court.

Lancelot is not a popular figure in the romances that come out of England before Malory. He is mentioned only briefly in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (*c*.1400),[54] where he is not depicted as Guinevere's lover either. Malory's rendition of the Arthuriad comes in the mid-fifteenth century, about two centuries after Chrétien's romances. Malory presents us with a knight who is sustainedly inspired by his love for the queen. Malory explicitly mentions their intimacy in his 'Knight of the Cart' episode:

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[53] For these I have referred to *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed C Dover, Cambridge: Brewer, 2003.

[54]*The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. Larry D. Benson, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994.

> He toke hys plesaunce and hys lykynge untyll hit was the dawning of the day; for wyte you well he slept nat, but wacched. (33-5)[55]

In this section of Malory's tale, we get a longer glimpse of the two lovers and, in particular, learn more about the queen. She is mostly unjust to her lover Lancelot, often rebuking him for not showing enough devotion to her. But the two also share an unconditional love, as brought out unmistakably when Mordred and Agravaine discover the lovers in the queen's chambers. Lancelot takes her in his arms and makes a speech expressing his devotion to her, calling her 'my speciall good lady' and convincing her that if he is killed, his brothers will certainly come to rescue her and avenge him. To this Guinevere replies:

> Nay, sir Lancelot, nay! ... Wyte thou well that I woll nat lyve longe aftir thy days. But and ye be slayne I woll take my dethe as mekely as ever ded marter take hys dethe for Jesu Crystes sake. (46-48)

In Malory's text, which uses the French Vulgate cycle as one of its sources, Guinevere is given more importance than in Chrétien's text, not only as Lancelot's lover but also as the 'destroyer of good knyghtes,' an accusation which would certainly be damning in the world of chivalry. In the episode of the poisoned apple, Guinevere is falsely accused of poisoning a knight and put on trial. There is no one to defend her honour, since Lancelot is away from court. Guinevere faces the prospect of being burnt at the stake. Lancelot arrives in time to save her, and the Lady of the Lake reveals the true

[55] All references to Malory's *Morte Darthur* are from the second one-volume edition of the *Works* edited by Eugene Vinaver, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

culprit, thereby absolving the queen. The figure of the queen is now, by the fifteenth century, a complex and largely sympathetic character. This development may be seen as an example of the growing importance of women characters since Enide's somewhat silent entry into the world of romance in the twelfth century.[56]

In the final episode of Malory's *LeMorte Darthur*, we see how Arthur's world disintegrates, and not for a single reason alone. By Malory's time, the episode of the cart, which was so crucial in defining Lancelot as a knight and a lover in Chrétien's day, does not call for much debate. The rapidity with which social sensibilities changed from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries-- through the twelfth century right up to the time of Malory in the fifteenth, brings about a drastic re-formation in the masculinity of the warrior as well. The warriors or knights, as we see them in twelfth-century literature, may have inherited some traits from the patriarchal heroic society of the earlier period, but are otherwise transformed by political, economic and military factors, as well as social and cultural changes that begin to affect Europe from the twelfth century onwards.

Such elements add to the uncertainty in the presentation of the ideal knight. Lancelot is the ideal knight, at least in a particular phase in the development of the Arthurian cycle. He is destined to rescue the prisoners of Gorre and predestined to rest in the most exquisite tomb, his adulterous love for Guinevere notwithstanding. The quasi-religious aspect of their love, and Lancelot's patently excessive devotion to the queen, are so intertwined with his implicit neglect of his knightly and martial obligations, not to

[56] See C. Meale, 'Entrapment or Empowerment? Women and Discourses of Love and Marriage in the Fifteenth Century' *in Writings on Love in the English Middle Ages*, ed. H. Cooney, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 163-78; also K. Cherewatuk, *Marriage, Adultery and Inheritance in Malory's Morte Darthur*, Cambridge: Brewer, 2006.

mention the adulterous nature of their relationship, that it is difficult for the reader to determine whether Lancelot's actions are to be applauded or condemned. Has love ennobled the knight or degraded him? Questions such as these will demand our attention as long as we continue to view his actions by the criteria of heroic masculinity of the earlier warrior heroes. Lancelot exists in a far more complex social sphere than his predecessors. His dilemmas reveal not just the problems connected with love but also the larger issues of identifying and evaluating appropriate knightly behaviour in a society where multiple value systems lay claim on the conduct of the individual. The competing values of these multiple systems compel the individual to make choices and take actions that are likely to be criticised when judged by the conventional code of conduct. Lancelot's expression of masculinity, which appears ambiguous, is the result of these paradoxes in the social system that frames the twelfth-century romance. The figure of Lancelot embodies masculinity in flux, just as the contradictions in his character reflect the contradictory ideals comprising the social structure surrounding him.

The knights of Chretien's romances are indeed very different from the hero-warriors of the earlier period. However, what differentiates them is not just an outward presentation; there is a genuine ambiguity implicit in the new idea of masculinity seen especially in knights like Lancelot. He certainly presents a complex figure composed of many contradictory elements, which will be elaborated upon by the knights of the following centuries. The ambiguities that eventually result in complexity and multi-dimensional figures like Gawain or the knights in Chaucer's romances are already visible in the dilemmas and tensions experienced by some of Chrétien's knights.

The social structure of the world inhabited by the knight was such that he could not easily avoid an overlapping of interests or certain indiscretions of conduct. In fact, the model of the three orders or estates --those who rule, those who pray and those who serve -- is a somewhat simplistic overview of a far more intricate structure. Jacques LeGoff[57] argues against the tripartite model in order to create a more complex picture of 'medieval man'. Other accounts of the period also emphasize the growing importance of the individual, outside all social categories.[58] They speak of a discovery or even 'rediscovery' of the 'self', leading to a questioning of the ideal of knighthood, and recognition of the difficulty of determining one's place and function in a society with such varying and unstable value systems. In the twelfth-century courtly and chivalric milieu, the knightly model of conduct does not only embrace acts of valour and the concomitant sense of honour and loyalty. The knight must also be a polished courtier; most importantly, he must work out a relationship with the women who constitute a new but important presence affecting his world. These are the factors that make the chivalric romances so popular during the following centuries. The romance came to be more representative of twelfth-century culture than epic-like compositions such as *The Song of Roland*, perhaps because the audience could identify with the romance knight's predicament of engaging with the changes that surrounded him. The knights of romance appear to engage in the same human predicaments as the readers themselves in their own social milieu, even if on different terms. The success of Chrétien's romances, featuring this new model of knight-hero, may be measured by the enthusiasm they generated, as

[57]Le Goff, *L'Homme Medieval*, ed. Jacques LeGoff, Paris: Seuil, 1989. Quoted in Jorgen Bruhn, *Lovely Violence: Chrétien de Troyes: Critical Romances*, Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, 8.
[58] Colin Morris, The *Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972; Robert Hanning, *The Individual in the Twelfth Century Romance,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

reflected in the production of large cycles of tales of these Arthurian knights in more than one European vernacular over the next few centuries.

The change of temper and fashion that we find in the twelfth-century romances was a change involving the entire world of the warrior, reflecting the changes taking place in the wider society of the times. The very nature of chivalry itself now grows multidimensional, not governed by a single code.[59] The entry of women characters, with increasingly important roles in stories ostensibly recounting the 'heroic' deeds of male warriors and adventurers, further emphasises the need to reassess our perceptions of heroic masculinity in the age. This chapter has examined how heroism can no longer be perceived as something static; it changes in response to the pressures of its environment. The following chapters will study these dynamics further as I look more closely at the impact of feminine characters on heroic masculinity.

[59] Elizabeth Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory's Le Morte Darthur*, Cambridge: Brewer, 2001; Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literatuer*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Chapter III

Chaucer's Heroes: 'Now blissful Venus help…'

Troilus and Criseyde, *The Knight's Tale* and *The Franklin's Tale,* the three texts I examine in this chapter, are romances which share a close connection with the *roman de antique*. The latter, written in the French vernacular, usually fused military exploits of heroes of Greek and Latin antiquity with the newer theme of love, a concept that was emerging around the time of composition of the vernacular renditions. The first two Chaucerian texts I discuss can be associated with the *Roman d'Eneas*, *Roman de Thebes* and *Roman de Troie*, stories adapted from the classical epics, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Statius' *Thebaid*. The authors of the *Roman deThebes* and the *Roman d'Eneas* are unknown, but the two works are granted to have been written during the 1150sor 1160s. Benoît de Saint Maure's *Roman de Troie,* to which Chaucer's story of Troilus' love for Criseyde ultimately harks back, is accepted to have been written in 1165. Benoît is said to have taken his material from the accounts of the Trojan War provided by Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygus. *De excidio Trojae* or the *History of the Fall of Troy*, by Dares, claims to be a first-hand account of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. Dares' account and *The Ephemeris belli Trojani*, attributed to Dictys, were the main sources of information regarding the Trojan War during the Middle Ages. This list of major sources indicates the nature and extent of classical influence on writers of the Middle Ages, including Chaucer. Chaucer's choice of stories relating to Greek and Roman antiquity is actually in keeping with his time: by the fourteenth century, the fascination for classical

or pagan lore was quite a vogue. By the end of the previous century, Dante had already accepted Virgil as his guide for part of the journey he made in his *Divine Comedy*. This was not solely on account of Virgil's fourth *Eclogue,* in which the reference to a newborn child, whose birth would usher in a Golden Age, was considered to be prophecy of the birth of Christ. Although Virgil's work particularly influenced Christian thought, the writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries generally felt that they, as the 'moderns', had much to learn from the poets and thinkers of antiquity.[1]As indicated above, the commonest sources on which they drew were post-classical, but the Latin authors of the great classical age (though not as yet the Greek) were starting to claim attention or, in one or two cases like Virgil and Ovid, had been known through the Middle Ages and interpreted in distinctively medieval ways. Medieval men of letters imagined themselves as heirs to the heritage of classical antiquity. This sentiment is already present in *Roman d'Eneas* and the work of Benoît de Saint Maure. These early twelfth-century works certainly influenced Chaucer just as much as they did other writers of the period, and commonly did duty for the earlier classical originals: after all, classical models of composition were considered signs of culture and refinement, as the following statement by Chretien suggests:

> Greece had once the leadership in chivalry and learning...[2]

This remark, with which Chrétien de Troyes introduces the story of *Cligès*, leads to two other points: it draws our attention to a different narrative series also belonging to the

[1] A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1982, 1.
[2] Chrétien de Troyes, '*Cligès*' 32, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D.D.R. Owen, London: J.M. Dent, 1991, 93.

romans de antique, the *Roman d'Alexander*.[3] The *Roman d'Alexander* comprised a large collection of stories dealing with the various strands of Alexander's life. The Latin *Res Gestae Alexander* by Julius Valerius was the chief source of the Alexander romances in the Middle Ages, and was first translated into the French vernacular in the early twelfth century by Alexandre de Paris. It is the later additions made to the Alexander cycle by Lambert le Tort that bring us to the second point, regarding the manner in which medieval writers used their original sources. Chrétien's remark draws attention to the matter.

Like their contemporaries and predecessors, Lambert le Tort, Benoît, the *Eneas* poet and even Chaucer 'medievialised' material that originally belonged to the period of classical antiquity. Not only are classical characters presented in medieval works as contemporary courtiers with courtly manners, they are also presented as men in love in medieval courtly fashion. Lambert le Tort added at least three different love-episodes to the stories of Alexander's military exploits. Of these, the most important would be the love between Alexander and Candace,[4] the queen of Meroë. The poet of *Roman d'Eneas* too presents us with the love between Eneas and Lavine. In fact, Eneas is shown to be in love with two different women. In the first part of the poem, he is in love with Dido, in keeping with the original story by Virgil; but in the second part, the twelfth-century poet elaborates on a very minor strand in Virgil's original to present us with a complex love situation between Eneas and Lavine. In the cases of both Eneas and Lavine, the experience of love is expressed in Ovidian terms, as with Alexander and Soredamors as

[3]See David Zuwiyya*, A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, Leiden: Brill, 2011.
[4]See Rosemarie Jones, *The Theme of Love in the Roman D'antiquité*, London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1972.

discussed in my discussion of Cligès in the previous chapter. Certainly, this love is now cast in the courtly love tradition; but more importantly, the women do not play a passive role, as it is they who initiate the love process. Chaucer takes characters set in classical times like Troilus, Arcite and Palamon, but gives them characteristics that are recognizably 'medieval': in fact, these particular characters are to be found briefly or not at all in the actual classical works of antiquity. Their presentation is in more 'knightly' terms, in the sense that their conduct is described according to the tenets of chivalry, courtesy and courtly love. Troilus, Arcite, Palamon, and Arveragus are all knights whose actions are ultimately defined by their experience of love. In the narrative renditions of Chaucer, we find a significant development in the manner in which these knights are presented, owing to the knight's interaction with the women characters who now share the focus of the narratives.

The works that I consider in this chapter, besides being indebted to early medieval works set in classical times, draw directly on the stories of Boccaccio, more specifically *Il Filostrato* (1335) and *Tesieda* (*c.*1339-1341) with respect to Troilus and the Theban knights respectively. Both stories revolve around a love triangle and like other romances of the twelfth century, also deal with the complications and challenges the knights face in course of their experience of love. The action in Chaucer's tales of love also involves a strong feminine presence. The presence of the lady or the feminine was, until the romances of the twelfth century, an experience beyond the realm of heroic masculinity. She is introduced in the narrative of heroic adventure, as seen in the previous chapter in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, as a means of expanding and transforming the heroic

identity. My present chapter further examines how the presence of the feminine influences the knight-hero in the re-shaping of his masculinity.

It has been suggested that the genre of romance presents women 'in terms of male desire, as fundamentally different from men yet ultimately appropriated by them.'[5]One of the points I argue in this chapter is that women are no longer presented as mere objects of male desire or as subject to male control. In their interaction with the knights, women characters such as Dorigen and Criseyde are in fact responsible for reshaping a novel and fundamentally different masculinity in the warrior. My arguments in this chapter revolve around the interaction between the knights and the women they encounter, and I probe the knight's transformation in terms of his relationships with the feminine as the tales unfold. As mentioned earlier, the three works of Chaucer that I examine here are all based continental writers, primarily Boccaccio; and in each of them, Chaucer also incorporates themes, allusions and ideas from Boethius, Dante, Petrarch and others. Moreover, by 1382, when Chaucer is believed to have begun *Troilus and Criseyde*, and1388,[6] when he is said to have begun his *Canterbury Tales* (these are the texts I study in this chapter), Europe, especially Italy, was already experiencing a shift in perspective that ushered in the European Renaissance. The revival of classical scholarship during this period represents an important phase in the transmission, study and interpretation of the classical texts. Chaucer learnt from his Italian forerunners of the wealth of classical material, as well as the power of the vernacular languages to popularize and advance that

[5]Susan Crane, 'Medieval Romance and Feminine Difference in *The Knight's Tale'*, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 12, 1990, 50.
[6] See *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, London: Oxford University Press, 1974, 669 and 811.All citations of Chaucer's works from this edition.

learning. This gives a perceptibly new orientation to his treatment of classical settings, though his approach remains basically 'medieval'.

The twelfth-century romances, such as the ones written by Chrétien de Troyes, turn on a code of conduct to be followed by the knight, but such codes of behaviour are challenged by other, competing values of society. In fourteenth-century works in English, like the ones I examine in this chapter and the next, we find that the idealized presentation of knights is affected by similar contradictions and discordances. Idealized qualities such as largesse, courtesy, prowess, loyalty and service to a lady define the concept of chivalry which by now has come to define the knight's masculinity; yet these qualities are not enough to deal with the challenges faced by the knight and the consequent inadequacies opened up in the chivalric ideal. Chivalry is no longer a concept relating to the battlefield; it has expanded its meaning, and though it is still connected to the martial career of the aristocracy and the upper classes generally, we find that the warrior code alone fails to explain or even grasp the tensions and pressures that the knight experiences as a result of socio-political and cultural transformations. The concept of chivalry had always varied in practice from region to region. Now we find multiple codes of chivalry which coexist and evolve side by side. Susan Crane, in her book *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*, speaks of the various local codes of chivalry in France and England. She points out that once the crown of England passed from the Normans to the Angevin rulers with the ascent of Henry II to the throne in 1154, the Angevins did not integrate England with the Angevin provinces in France. England was therefore politically isolated, and by the end of the twelfth century,

developed a social order whose feudal institutions and laws differed from those of the French provinces.

In contrast to the fragmentation of power and the complicated, often conflicting oaths of fealty that made administration difficult on the continent, William I's power was clear and complete: he claimed all land in England for the crown, and then granted land in tenure only. The strength of the early Norman kings, together with a tenure system that was more clearly stratified than those on the continent, favoured the peaceful development of a securely landed aristocracy.[7]

The ascent of Henry II to the throne of England is considered to be an important transition since the Angevin court became a centre for cultural activity, including literary writing, centred in England and not oriented to continental France. The class structure of English society also underwent a significant change.

Unlike the continental hereditary *noblesse,* this barony was not yet so rigid that it attempted to exclude the *nouveau riche*, the soldier or the administrator by laying down strict qualifications of blood and birth as conditions of entry.[8]

Hence we find that the feudal system in England develops on less rigid lines in comparison with France or any other country on the continent. It follows that these different political structures would have varying codes of behaviour and varying versions of chivalry. Chivalry was not a static phenomenon or concept, but a practice constantly

[7] Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986 4-5.
[8]Ibid. Also see Richard. W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe,* Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1999; and Constance B Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble: Chivalry and society in Medieval France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

redefined by the changes that affect society, thereby also redefining the norms of knighthood which provide the criterion for assessing the masculinity of the warrior. Further pressure was brought to bear on the notion of chivalry during the Hundred Years War(1337-1453) between England and France. A number of mercenary knights were inducted by both the English and the French– Sir John Hawkwood and Bertrand du Gueslin, to name just two. Over the prolonged duration of this war, the notion of chivalry came to be widely questioned, particularly in France after the French army suffered a series of disastrous defeats.[9]Edward III's war against France in 1337 also saw the growing importance of archers, and although there continued to be knights on horseback, their heavy armour proved too cumbersome for new military tactics including skirmishes and guerrilla attacks.[10] The muster rolls of the Hundred Years War after 1369 provide much information about the decline in the military participation of knights. This was probably the result of the demilitarization of the English gentry, the social stratum from which knights were traditionally drawn.[11]

Chaucer himself is said to have participated in the war and was held prisoner during the Rheims campaign of 1359. During this time, the English army, we are told, was made up of 'mixed retinues'[12]with different types of combatants. Although the number of knights participating in the war is noticeably declining, there were still instances of knights who headed the 'mixed retinue'. The practice of chivalry was perhaps less viable, by this time,

[9]Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and The Ideals of Knighthood in France During the Hundred Years War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
[10] See John H Pratt, *Chaucer and War*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2000; and Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood*.
[11] A.R. Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013, 54.
[12] Ibid.

but it is still admired and valued. In fact, the first three pilgrims mentioned by Chaucer, the Knight, the Squire and the Yeoman, illustrate the classes of soldiers that made up this 'mixed retinue'. The Knight has served in the Crusades and also been a mercenary. Regarding the Squire, we are told: 'And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie, / In Flanders, in Artois and Pycardie' (85-6).[13] The Yeoman carries the weapons of an archer. In addition to the changes in the concept and practice of knighthood by the second half of the fourteenth century, we also witness the growth of a new class: the gentry.

The fourteenth century also witnesses the rise of a group of men, to which Chaucer himself belonged, who were in the royal service and in positions that greatly expanded opportunities to enter the upper ranks of the social hierarchy, not on the traditional bases of military service and land tenure, but through the skilled and specialized service they were able to provide.[14]

According to Paul Strohm, it was this group of 'careerists' who challenged the earlier social order. Such change may be associated with the decline of European feudalism, commencing after the twelfth century and generally connected with the rise of the burghers or town dwellers. The emergence of such a group altered the older relations of vassalage which were based on land tenure. The emergence of this new class also changed the nature of loyalties. The vertical lines of dependence began to be replaced by lateral ties.[15]The traditional medieval view of the three estates-- those who pray, those who fight and those who work, comprising the clerics, the knights and the peasants

[13] 'The General Prologue, *The Canterbury Tales'*.
[14] Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994, 1.
[15]See Strohm, *passim*.

respectively[16]--has, by the time of Chaucer, grown much more expansive and fluid than earlier. Society is now viewed as more organic than hierarchical. Although a hierarchy still exists, we find that it is loosening its grip as new economic models bring in new classes of people who cannot be accommodated within any rigid, tradition-bound social structure. Paul Strohm, describing the social structure of Chaucer's time, tells us:

> The knight's - and, in the second half of the fourteenth century, the new class of esquires - enjoyed the same *gentil* status as the great aristocrats, though clearly without enjoying the benefits conferred by the hereditary titles and accompanying revenues of the latter group. Although non-*gentil*, the urban merchants (whose free status and prosperity entitled them to the titles of 'citizens' or 'burgess') often enjoyed wealth considerably greater than that of most knights. And even these distinctions mask variations. Many knights and esquires of the period held no land at all and few or no military obligations, but earned their status through civil and administrative tasks which we might consider essentially 'middle class'.[17]

Records of the period show that some of the influential city merchants were actively involved in London politics and were often far wealthier than the average knight. One such example is the knighted Sir William Walworth, Lord Mayor of London, who is said to have struck down Wat Tyler, leader of the Peasants' Revolt, in June 1381. All through the fourteenth century, the government of England issued decrees called 'distraints of

[16]See Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. A. Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
[17] Paul Strohm, 'The social and literary scene in England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer* ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 2-3.

knighthood' requiring all those of good birth and a certain level of income to be knighted.[18] The offer, we are told, was not taken up by many. The English aristocracy of the late fourteenth century did not display exemplary chivalry either, the court intrigues which resulted in political instability during the reign of Richard II being a case in point. However, all this indicates that knighthood was no longer closely linked to the practice of warfare, and the prestige of the latter occupation, at least according to the old military model, also declined. In fact, the old statute of distraints of knighthood was revived in that age less to ensure an effective military presence than to garner revenue. The decline of the feudal order also altered the idea of chivalry, yet one finds that the contradictory and complex body of chivalric practices continue to exist during this century.

Social practices in the latter half of the fourteenth century became more and more fluid, as the gentry and the urban middle class were fast making dents in the hitherto hierarchical nature of society. Chaucer's own position in society is evidence of the social mobility allowed to an aspiring individual at this time. Chaucer, a member of the merchant class, enters the service of John of Gaunt and later becomes a civil servant as the controller of customs in London. Chaucer's father, John Chaucer, was both a prosperous vintner and deputy chief butler to Edward III. Chaucer himself began his career in 1357 in the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, the wife of Prince Lionel, son of Edward III, and by 1368 we find his name listed among the esquires of the royal household of Edward III. The social mobility of the period is both the cause and the effect of the rapid growth of towns and trade; the economic expansion brought the city

[18] See 'Chivalry', D.S. Brewer in *A Companion to Chaucer,* ed. Peter Brown, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002, 60-62.

and towns into closer relation, thereby increasing the power and wealth of the merchants and gentry. One of the outcomes of this growing contact between varied social groups was the rise of literacy. Janet Coleman recounts how during the period, a large number of men and women knew people who could read and write to some degree, even if they themselves could not do so.[19] In another study conducted by her, Coleman identifies the groups that made up the expanding ranks of the literate in the fourteenth century. According to her, in the latter half of the fourteenth century, England witnessed a vast literary output dealing with social concerns, political grievances and religious homilies, which would not have happened without the rise of a middle class. Coleman argues that it is this section of society that uses literature to question the workings of society. In her study, she speaks of the rapid growth of grammar schools and the expanding of the university curriculum as the agencies of literacy and informed thought among the English middle class.[20] Rise in literacy among the middle classes should imply the growth of the English language as well; however, during this phase of the fourteenth century, one finds more than one language vying for prominence as the medium of literary writing in England. French continued to be an important language as it had been since the Norman Conquest, but seems to be on a decline, compared to its position since the days of the Norman conquest. Although it continued as the language used for court business, and it was also used by a number of English writers, but there were a number of English writers who wrote in English, Latin and in French as well. For instance, John Gower, Chaucer's contemporary and friend, wrote in all three languages, though his best work is written in

[19] Janet Coleman, 'English Culture in the Fourteenth Century', in *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
[20] Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350-1400*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

English, *Confessio Amantis*. It is during this period that works such as Langland's *Piers Plowman* and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knigh*t were also composed, the former in the dialect of the South-West Midland and the latter in the North West Midland dialect. The English language was, at this time, split into various dialects spoken in different regions of the country, and it was the East Midland dialect, the English used by Chaucer, which gradually gained importance by the last few decades of the fourteenth century and eventually overshadowed all other dialects to become the standard English by the fifteenth century.

Closely related to the point about literacy and language is the ever intriguing question about the audience Chaucer was writing for. The rapid changes that English society experiences during this time suggest that Chaucer could not possibly have envisaged a homogenous audience; his audience comprises many social classes, literacy levels and linguistic preferences. The need to cater to this large and diverse audience, rather than an integrated aristocratic one, affected the treatment of chivalry and the presentation of masculinity in the romances. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer seems to be addressing a small closed group, although at the end, Chaucer wishes his story to circulate among a larger public:

> Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So sende might to make in som comedye!
> But litel book, no making thow n'envie,
> But subgit be to alle poesye;
> And kis the steppes, where as thow seest pace

> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.
> And for ther is so gretdiversite
> In Englissh and in writying of oure tonge,
> So prey I God that non miswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge.
> And red wherso thow be, or ells songe,
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche! (V. 1786-98)

It was once thought that Chaucer's audience was chiefly made up of the aristocratic class. More recently, scholars such as Paul Strohm and Seth Lerer[21] have convincingly dispelled the myth about Chaucer as court poet. Chaucer's audience, as is now accepted, consisted of both aristocratic and non-aristocratic groups. However, the idea of Chaucer as a court poet continues to influence scholars in interpreting Chaucer's narrative strategies. Further, the depiction of Chaucer reading from the pulpit in a well-known painting has generated the figure of Chaucer as preacher, or the 'moral Chaucer'. Susan Phillips, in her recent chapter 'Chaucerian Smalltalk', says:

> Although various Chaucers have gone in and out of scholarly fashion, the image of him at the pulpit haunts current criticism in much the same way that earlier scholarship was shaped by the vision of him as the court poet.[22]

There is no conclusive way to determine the audience Chaucer was writing for. What one can infer from the social picture of fourteenth-century England is that while members of the royal family and aristocracy would certainly be drawn to works about chivalry,

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[21] Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer*. Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1993. See also Stephanie Trigg. 'Chaucer's Influence and Reception', in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Seth Lerer, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 297-323.
[22] Susan. E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England.* University Park: Penn State University Press. 2010,67.

Chaucer's audience would also comprise members from the lower ranks of the gentry, persons in social situations close to his own. We may also assume that like the fictionalized audience of his *Canterbury Tales*, who represent a socially mixed group, his audience extended to a still more heterogeneous cross-section of English society. All this leads us back to the picture of a society in which the older hierarchic structures and earlier norms of taste and reception come into competition with new and more diverse influences.

The socio-historical complexity of Chaucer's England may, to a great extent, account for the poet's substantial innovations in the stories he reworks. The tales that I look at in this chapter belong to the Matter of Troy and Matter of Thebes, which were used by the medieval French writer Benoît de Sainte-Maure in his works *Roman de Troie* and *Roman de Thebes*, written during 1155-60. Two centuries later, around 1335-40, Boccaccio uses the same material for his *Il Filostrato* and *Teseida* respectively. Chaucer follows the tradition about fifty years later, but his compositions mark entirely new developments from his predecessors. The changes that Chaucer works on the available material of the Matter of Troy recast the generic identity of the works. Writing in 1957, Charles Muscatine says

> ...*Troilus* can be called neither romance nor realistic novel. Though it has traits of both, it cannot even be called both.....The *tertium quid* created by the interplay of....styles and philosophical positions is best called a genre unto itself, for the result is a qualitative difference from the romance or

> novel that requires a different kind of attention from the readers.[23]

Decades later, Paul Strohm agrees in 1994 that *Troilus and Criseyde*

> embeds the most varied narrative structures-invocations ,*process*, epistle, song, complaint, vision-within a narrative whole that constantly shifts its own coordinates, from tragedy to history to romance and back to tragedy again.[24]

Barbara Nolan shows quite conclusively how Chaucer uses the themes of the *roman antique* in his works. She says:

> Scholars who easily trace the *matiere* of love in the French *romans antiques* to Ovid- the sighs, the insomnia, the lyric lamentations, the tears, the stratagems of lovers- have had much greater difficulty with its *sen* or significance. Yet it was not only the Ovidian *matiere* of love but also a distinctive set of moral and political questions *about* such love that the authors of the early *roman antiques* bequeathed to subsequent poets writing in the same tradition.[25]

She further elaborates, after separating the *amour courtois* of the north of France from the *fin amor* of the southern troubadours,

> ...nor [do]the French *romans antiques* deal with worldly attachment versus spiritual love. Nor do they celebrate an amoral code of 'courtly love,' one that makes adultery a

[23]Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957, 132.
[24] Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer,* 118.
[25]Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 75.

> central, positive element in a 'religion of love.' Instead, they focus on the question of illicit (or foolish) versus chaste married love. The most basic school commentaries on Ovid's love poems, together with the influential Eneas and Roman de Troie, seem to have provided the foundation for an ethical poetics of secular love that helped to shape all later poems in the tradition of the *roman antique*. [26]

The courtly love tradition of the early twelfth century, which harks back to the troubadours of France, is not the only kind of love poetry that finds its way into the works of Chaucer. He is, C.S. Lewis reminds us, 'the great translateur of the *Roman de la Rose*'[27] as well. Moreover, from the numerous echoes of the *stilnovisti* poets found in *Troilus and Criseyde*, one may also presume the strong influence the 'dolce stil novo' had on his expressions of love. The 'dolce stil novo' or sweet new style of love poetry, as the thirteenth-century poet Orbicciani in Dante's *Divine Comedy* describes the poetry of Dante's predecessors and contemporaries, was a development of the courtly love tradition of the troubadours. The poets using this convention usually presented their lovelorn state in philosophical terms, and often presented the inner psychological turbulence that the lovers experienced. Chaucer was certainly aware of these new poetical trends from Italy during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, since we not only find him using one of Petrarch's sonnets in his *Troilus* but also, in Book III of the same work, making a direct allusion to Guido Guinicelli's canzone 'of the gentle heart', in which love is presented as the twin of the gentle– that is, noble or refined –heart. From the Italians, Chaucer would have learned of a love that was sublime, where the beloved could be the

[26] Ibid. 76.
[27] C. S. Lewis, 'What Chaucer really did to *Il Filostrato'*, in *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*. *1837-1933*. Vol 2, ed. D.S. Brewer, London: Routledge. 2003, 470.

means to reach a higher intellectual or spiritual plane. The love experience of the *stilnovisti* poets, above all in Dante's *La Vita Nova*, was a means of transforming carnal desire into a desire for divine love, an experience in which the lady is both the goal and the means to transcend earthly love. At the same time, the battle that love causes within the lover's soul, the problems of the *dolce dolour* or sweet pain that the lover experiences, make up the paradoxes of this convention of love. All of this is experienced by Troilus. Chaucer's debt to the French and Italian traditions is undeniable. It seems most likely that he came into contact with the new veins of courtly love when he visited Italy and France on missions for the English court. He uses these traditions and reworks them in a manner that suits his treatment of the stories. Neither *Troilus and Criseyde* nor *The Knight's Tale* nor *The Franklin's Tale* conforms entirely to these traditions, although each of them is an adaptation of a previous work, as each is modified by the complex emotional and social environment of fourteenth-century England.

Troilus

The story of the love of Troilus for Criseyde was first told about two centuries before Chaucer wrote about it in the fourteenth century. Benoît de Sainte-Maure, in his French *Roman de Troie*, speaks of the love between Troilus and Criseyde alongside the love stories of Medea and Jason, Achilles and Polyxena, Helen and Paris, and Ulysses and Penelope. Among all these love affairs mentioned in Benoît's work, only the love between Troilus and Criseyde has no clear or direct literary precedent. Most scholars

accept that Benoît invented the love affair between Troilus and Criseyde, or Briseida as she is called in the *Roman de Troie,*[28] and the point that Benoît emphasises about their love is their separation followed by Criseyde's betrayal. All the earlier sources that deal with the story of Troy, starting with the *Iliad* and continuing through Dares or Dictys, mention Troilus and his eventual death at the hands of Achilles. Briseis, as Criseyde is then known, is briefly mentioned but not in connection with Troilus. After Benoît mentions her in his twelfth-century romance as the beloved of the Trojan prince, the thirteenth-century Sicilian Guido delle Colonne writes of their love and Criseyde's betrayal in his *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, and we then have the Italian version of the same story written by Boccaccio around 1335-40, entitled *Il Filostrato*. The story of the doomed love affair thus passes from author to author and from the Latin versions of the Trojan war by Dares and Dictys to the French by Benoît, from French to Italian and then finally through Chaucer into English.

My discussion examines how Troilus finds it difficult to negotiate the demands of a warrior's role at the same time as a lover's. I also look at how Chaucer's depiction of Criseyde as an unconventional and somewhat self-sufficient character makes it even more difficult for Troilus to work within the confines of a code of masculinity according to earlier chivalric conventions.

[28] For a discussion of this see R. M. Lumiansky, 'The Story of Troilus and Briseida According to Benoît and Guido', *Speculum* 29 (1954) 727-33.

'Is Troilus effeminate, impotent, or manly?'[29] This is the question, says Peter Beidler, that has dominated the arguments presented by various scholars in the collection of essays that he edits on the subject of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Critics, especially modern critics, have characterised Troilus as effeminate, emasculated or even impotent, debating over his manliness because of what they consider his passivity as a lover. Troilus' swoon seems to have particularly surprised a number of modern critics. The swoon in question occurs when Troilus sees his beloved Criseyde in a state of distress. On finding Criseyde so troubled by his 'jalousie', Troilus too is affected in the following manner:

> The felyng of his sorwe, or of his fere,
> Or of aught ells, fled was out of towne
> And down he fel al sodeynly a-swowne. (III.1090-3)

This happens after Pandarus, in an effort to get Criseyde and Troilus together, invites his niece Criseyde to his house. She is then compelled to stay the night at Pandarus's place because of bad weather, but is unaware of Troilus hiding in a closet of the room in which she sleeps. Earlier, Pandarus had made up a story about Troilus being insecure about her love, and told Criseyde that Troilus was troubled by the thought of rival lovers. Pandarus makes up this story about Troilus' jealousy in order to draw the two lovers closer, but it causes Criseyde much distress. Seeing his beloved in such a state, Troilus cannot control his grief and faints. Troilus' swoon has generated much debate. Barry Windeatt says it is 'a deflation of male stereotypes of sexual conquest and mastery'.[30] David Aers goes further and says that Troilus suffers from a 'fear lest his masculine identity, so heavily

[29] *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter Beidler, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998, 5. Beidler puts forth this question in the introduction.
[30] Barry Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 225-26.

dependent on performance in the sexual domain, might not, as it were, stand up'.[31] Critics have also found Troilus to be self-indulgent, spending too much time, according to some, on his grief; he has hence been considered unduly timid. Diane Steinberg finds his falling in love 'a debilitating and feminizing experience'.[32] Stephanie Dietrich, at the beginning of her article on Troilus, says:

> Recent criticism on Troilus' 'lovesickness' and the resulting passivity suggests that if Troilus is not exactly emasculated he is at least 'feminized' by his erotic experience.[33]

'Troilus is effeminized by courtly love,' observes Jane Chance,[34] and Elaine Hansen blames courtly love for 'softening and unmanning' the knights. She goes on to say:

> The courtly, aristocratic male lover in the very act of falling in love is, by convention and by rhetoric, rendered to some degree passive and submissive; he is.....feminized and interiorized by love, or by the language of love.[35]

This is not completely true. Women in the romances display a similar languor when in love. For instance, in Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*, where Alexander falls in love with Soredamors, they are equally incapable of revealing their love for each other. They both suffer the pangs of love and seem to be paralysed by its ardour. It is only after Queen

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[31] David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing. 1360-1430,* London: Routledge, 1988,129.
[32] Diane Steinberg, ''We do usen here no women for to selle': Embodiment of Social Practices in Troilus and Criseyde' *Chaucer Review* 29.3 (1995) 259-73.
[33]Stephanie Dietrich, ''Slydyng' Masculinity in the Four Portraits of Troilus' in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter Beidler, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998,205.
[34] Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer: the Fabulation of Sexual Politics,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 110.
[35] Elaine Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 17.

Guinevere recognizes the symptoms to be those of love that she arranges for the two to be married. The behaviour of the medieval lover as found in the chivalric romances, which seems incomprehensible to the twentieth-century mind, is in fact the norm set by the courtly love-convention. Not only do Andreas Capellanus' rules on love say that a lover should be jealous, he even recommends jealousy, saying that it would increase the ardour of love. We know that Troilus was not really suspecting Criseyde of anything, but Pandarus' ploy does work: it brings the lovers closer. Troilus' fainting would also have been acceptable by such rulings of love since the same rule-book says that no act or thought is worthy to the lover unless it pleases the beloved. Troilus, being the true courtly lover, is rightly shaken by his beloved's reaction to his 'jalousie,' however false that jealousy may have been.

To Chaucer's audience, familiar with the romance conventions, Troilus's swoon would not raise any questions at all. Men in medieval romances are often found behaving in a sentimental and languorous manner that does not match the usual stereotypes of masculinity, even while carrying out heroic and quintessentially male feats. Yvain loses his mind, but then recovers and goes on to fight giants; Lancelot ridiculously falls into a trance on seeing a strand of Guinevere's golden hair, yet is at the same time the only knight who can rescue her and others from Gorre. As far as swooning goes, it is quite common to find these valiant men lying in a faint for various reasons. Gretchen Mieszkowski uses an instance from the prose *Lancelot* to further illustrate this point. Lancelot, known to be the greatest of knights, is so overcome by love that he cannot even

speak with his beloved, the queen, after she learns that it was he who had been performing brave deeds in her name:

> ...he is so pale he looks ill, he cannot lift his eyes, he trembles so that he can hardly speak, and weeps continuously so that his silk garment is soaked to his knees. To tease Lancelot, Guinevere suggests that he is attracted to one of her ladies-in-waiting, and he is so shocked that he starts to faint. Guinevere must call Galehot to come catch Lancelot, and the rest of her conversation is with Galehot, who answers for Lancelot while Lancelot hangs his head between them. Lancelot himself, then, is one of the fainting heroes of the western Middle Ages, and he faints at the most important moment in his life.[36]

In the context of medieval romances, there is nothing unmanly, effeminate or emasculating about fainting, nor would a romance lover be dubbed self-indulgent for being lost in thoughts of the beloved. In fact, the romance tradition to which Troilus, Lancelot, and Yvain belong upholds an incapacitating yearning for love. The love they experience inspires them to achieve honours, but also destroys them with its intensity. These knights fight dragons and giants, but are cast at the same time in the mould of languishing lovers, all in accordance, as I have discussed in my previous chapter, with the norms laid down by Ovid, Andreas Capellanus and the troubadours. By Chaucer's time, this is supplemented by the influence of the *stilnovisti* poets, whom I have discussed above, and even more strongly by Petrarchan convention, which I will examine shortly.

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[36] Gretchen Mieszkowski, 'Revisiting Troilus's Faint', In *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tiscon Pugh and Marcia S Marzec, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008,50-51.

At the very beginning of his narrative, Chaucer tells us that he is 'that God of Loves servantz,'(I,15) and that he is writing the story of Troilus' love and the loss of that love. It is therefore clear that the Troilus he presents to the readers is to be understood as a courtly lover. Modern critics may well question the 'passivity' of Troilus, but a clearer understanding of his masculinity emerges when we accept him as conforming to the demands of the courtly love convention. This approach to the work is also advised by C.S. Lewis at the beginning of his essay in which he compares Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.[37] Lewis reminds us that at the time when Chaucer was writing *Troilus and Criseyde*, he was not yet the writer of the *Canterbury Tales* but was already 'the great living interpreter in England of *l'amour Courtois*.'[38]

This is a tale of how love changes 'this fierse and proude knyght'(I. 225) to one who cries to Venus, 'Now blissful Venus helpe, er that I sterve'(I. 1014). Troilus, as presented in the first two books of the work, does initially appear as a warrior figure, although we do not see him in direct combat. His scorn of other lovers and his proud claim of not being affected by love's arrow are extremely short-lived. This too is a common convention attesting to the power of love: a young man asserts his male ego by scorning love and the female sex, till love overpowers him and dents his immature masculinity. In accord with this design, we soon see Troilus yearning for the love of Criseyde, who is completely unaware of his feelings. His search for solitude, his lack of appetite, the trembling and hopelessness that he experiences are very much in keeping with the lover's lot. His state of mind is very clearly presented by the song that he sings, which epitomizes the state of

[37] C.S. Lewis. 'What Chaucer really did to Il Filostrato', 470.
[38] Ibid.

confusion that love brings about. Each line of Troilus' song poses a question to which there are no clear answers. Troilus is caught between two sets of emotions: love, he says, is delightful and yet makes him mourn. Troilus had earlier mocked love, but after seeing Criseyde, he experiences the very paradoxes of love which he had earlier criticised. Now he wishes to be a devotee of the God of love. Troilus' song is an adaptation of Petrarch's sonnet 132. Troilus, like the speaker in Petrarch's sonnet, seems to feel the contrary effects of love:

> Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
> That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
> Allas! What is this wonder maladie?
> For hete of cold, for cold of hete, I dye (I. 417-20)

Troilus, as we see here, seems changed by the experience of love, not only because he now wishes to be love's devotee, but more so because of the manner in which he feels the physical symptoms of love. Petrarch's sonnet, which Chaucer uses here, provides Troilus' experience of love with a new rhetorical style that enables Troilus to convey the intensity of the lover's emotional turmoil. Troilus is only expressing what any other lover of the medieval romance tradition would be going through, but by the time of *Troilus and Criseyde*, such utterances had added a new component to the institution of courtly love. Petrarch had provided the medieval lover with a fresh rhetoric of love, associated with the courtly love convention but extending beyond it to a broader field of amorous experience. Such a development is obviously significant because later, in Book II, when Criseyde learns of Troilus' love from her uncle Pandarus, she asks him 'Kan he wel speke of Love?' She wishes to know if Troilus is able to converse like a lover so that 'I

the bet me shal purveye'(II,503-4). This is not the only instance in the romance where Troilus uses this new style. The letters he writes to Criseyde and the aube he sings with her also incorporate elements of Petrarchism and the *stil nuovo* of earlier Tuscan poets, although the expressions themselves were already part of courtly love culture. The same knights who are celebrated for their valour and their feats of arms are also now supposed to be well acquainted with the language of love and even indulging a poetic vein. In the case of knights like Lancelot and Yvain in the Arthurian romances, their martial activities and love-experience often go side by side, although in their case too, their experience of love does raise certain questions as discussed in the previous chapter. Yvain suffers a mental breakdown as a result of rejection by his beloved, but as soon as he recovers, he almost instantly decides that he will win back the love of Laudine with feats of valour. In the case of Lancelot too, we are quite convinced of his physical prowess, even when he seems to behave foolishly by following Guinevere's instructions to fight poorly in the tournament against Melegnant. But in Troilus' case, we are only presented with reports regarding his valour but we do not really see him engaging in any martial activity except after he has completely lost Criseyde to Diomede.

Chaucer presents Troilus as a medieval knight whose military exploits take second place to his role as a lover, which provides the main focus of the story. For the greater part of the romance, Troilus the lover is so immersed in thoughts of his beloved that he pays very little attention to anything else. Book I introduces him as a fierce and proud knight, and Book II heightens this image, though by this time Troilus is already in love:

> So lik a man of armes and a knyght

He was to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowesse;
For bothe he hadde a body and might
To don that thing, as wel as hardynesse;
And ek to seen hym in his gere hym dresse,
So fresh, so yong, so weldy semed he (II.631-36)

This is when Criseyde, who by now knows how Troilus feels about her, sees him returning from a battle against the Greeks. In the next Book, we are told that though he burned with desire for Criseyde, he was so restrained in showing his emotions that no one could guess 'what that he mente, as touching this matere'(III. 432). Even though he was so deeply in love,

By day, he was in Martes heigh servyse,
This is to seyn, in armes as a knyght;
And for the more part, the longe nyght
He lay and thought how that he myghte serve
His lady best, hire thonk for to deserve. (III. 437-41)

Here Troilus seems to strike a balance between his role as the lover and his social function as a knight. This is something most critics do not consider, concentrating instead on the infamous swoon that follows shortly after the lines quoted above. However, as I have explained earlier, Troilus' swoon is not a major factor affecting his masculinity, at least not in the context of the social milieu of the chivalric romance where Chaucer places him. More significant is the fact that Troilus continues to engage in martial activity, dutifully and courageously, but not for valour or renown. He does so only so that Criseyde may be pleased with his actions.

In this tale of 'double sorwe'(I.1) Chaucer first narrates the incidents that move 'fro wo to wele'(I.2). The scene where Troilus hides in the closet and then consummates his love with Criseyde is the culmination of this part of the narrative. Till this point in Book III, we witness how Troilus suffers the pangs of love till he is finally united with his lady, but he remains the ardent warrior as well, though we do not actually see him in battle. It is mostly in the second part of the narrative, where we witness him 'after out of joie,' that one may see how Troilus struggles in his relationship with Criseyde to maintain the balance between martial performance and the endeavours of a courtly lover. Barbara Nolan, who places Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in the tradition of the *roman antique,* says that in the source-text of the Troilus story, Benoît de Saint Maure's *Roman de Troie,* Benoit presents the love of Briseida and Troilus, Helen and Paris or Medea and Jason, as examples of *fole amor* or foolish love. Troilus' love is not likely to be viable in the context of Briseda's treachery and the impending destruction of Troy.

Chaucer's Criseyde is far more complex than any of her previous representations. She may be a 'hevenyssh perfit (I.104) creature' but is also 'slydyng of corage' (V.825), in other words, she seems perfect but has her faults. Criseyde is 'slydyng of corage' meaning she lacks perseverance, as also that she is likely to lose heart, and this is made explicit in the manner she betrays Troilus for the support that she hopes she will get from Diomede. Chaucer's tale depicts her as 'changeable', but she is as much a victim of circumstances as she is calculating, and though we see her 'treachery', she also displays a degree of 'sovereynetee', an attribute quite unknown to women of the period of the

Roman de Troie but evidently one that all 'women desiren to have'[39] by the time Chaucer was writing his *Canterbury Tales.* Chaucer's Criseyde displays a rare individuality when she finds that she has to take decisions which will prove important to her future. For instance, when she is told by Pandarus of Troilus's love for her in Book II, though her first response is to express fear, she later considers the reasons why she should or should not return Troilus's love. Such deliberation on love is common enough in romance literature, but the thoughts expressed by her during her deliberations distinguish her from others:

> I am myn owene woman, wel at ese,
> I thank it God, as after myn estat,
> Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty lees,
> Withouten jalousie or debat:
> Shal noon hausbonde syen to me 'chek mat' (II. 750-54)

It is for this reason that Sanderlin calls Criseyde 'a sister to the Wife of Bath'.[40] Sanderlin argues that Criseyde represents a new culture which was beginning to challenge the older one, adding that Criseyde's process of thought shows a 'scientific emphasis on relative values and individual consciousness'.[41] One may, to a certain degree, agree with Sanderlin's point about Criseyde's manner of reaching a decision. It is certainly more pragmatic, even calculating, and therefore something new to the genre of courtly romance. It is Criseyde's situation that requires her to conduct herself in this way. The other occasion where she assesses her position carefully is in Book IV, when she takes

[39] Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Tale,* 1038.
[40] George Sanderline, 'In Defense of Criseyde: A Modern Scientific Heroine' *Language Quarterly*, 24 (1986) 47
[41] Ibid. 47-48.

the decision to go to the Greek camp instead of either eloping with Troilus or asking King Priam to reconsider his decision to exchange her as a prisoner of war. In Book V, while she deliberates on why she should accept Diomede's love, we can see the practical and dispassionate nature of her decision, guided by her circumstances. Critics have, however, often cited the same examples, her slow arrival at love in particular, as proof of Criseyde's 'ferfulleste' nature.[42] C.S. Lewis, in his very influential work *The Allegory of Love*, had earlier made a similar remark, saying that Criseyde is

> Neither very good nor execrably wicked...But there is a flaw in her, and Chaucer has told us what it is; 'she was the ferfulleste wight that mighte be'. If fate had willed, men would have known this flaw only as pardonable, perhaps an endearing, weakness; but fate threw upon difficulties which convert it into a tragic fault, and Criseyde is ruined.[43]

The phrase 'ferfulleste wight'(II. 450) is significant, not because it is said to be a flaw in character, but because we see how this trait in Criseyde affects her relation with Troilus. To be afraid of an unknown future is certainly not a flaw of character. Criseyde, in her position as a woman and the daughter of a traitor, seeks protection from Hector, as she is afraid of the repercussions her father's betrayal might have on her. She is similarly circumspect in considering the implications of Troilus's affection; after all, he is the king's son. It is this carefully guarded nature of Criseyde that accounts for her 'ferfulleste' nature, making her 'slydyng of corage'. It is the same trait that brings about

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[42]Quoted in A. Minnis and E.J. Johnson, 'Chaucer's Criseyde and Feminine Fear', *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne*l, Belgium: Brepols, 2000, 199-216. This quotation is originally from John Lawlor, *Chaucer*, London: Hutchinson, 1968, 76.
[43]C.S. Lewis. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936, 189-90.

the eventual desperation into which Troilus is cast. That she must go to the Greek camp in exchange for Antenor is a matter beyond her control, but her acceptance of Diomedes as a lover is the outcome of her calculating nature. Criseyde herself gives us the reason why she could not reject Diomedes' wooing:

> Retornying in hire soule ay up and down
> The words of this sodeyn Diomede,
> His grete estat, and perel of the town,
> And that she was alone and hadde nede (V. 1023-26)

She was alone and needed a protector in her time of peril. Troilus' actions, especially in the last part of the romance, have to be viewed in the light of Criseyde's actions. The anxiety and hopelessness that Troilus displays as a lover, brought about by Criseyde's circumspect nature, contributes to the refashioning of Troilus' masculinity as a warrior on the rebound, as it were, once that love has been frustrated.

Admittedly, Chaucer has taken great pains to portray Criseyde as a woman belonging to the class that can fitly experience and express *fin amor*;[44] yet the Criseyde one meets in Chaucer's text eludes the parameters set by the romance convention. It is this extension of the feminine, as presented in the figure of Chaucer's Criseyde, that tests Troilus as a lover. How does Troilus, a conventional lover, fare when paired with this unconventional heroine? This is one of the questions shaping my reading of Troilus' masculinity. Apart from the usual difficulties faced by the courtly lover such as sleeplessness, restlessness, the need to keep his love a secret or even the feelings of jealousy, Troilus faces another problem:

[44] See Karl Young, 'Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as Romance', *PMLA*. Vol 53 (1938) 38-63.

> Though ther be mercy written in youre cheere
> God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde! (III. 1356-57)

It is not Troilus alone who finds it difficult to gauge Criseyde's motives; Pandarus seems to have the same difficulty. In Book IV, after the Trojan parliament has agreed to the exchange of Criseyde, and Pandarus tries to comfort his distraught friend Troilus, he tells Troilus that he will arrange a meeting with Criseyde so that the two lovers may discuss how best to deal with the situation. In the course of this conversation, Pandarus tells Troilus:

> ...And by hire words ek, and by hire cheere,
> Thow shalt ful sone aperceyve and wel here
> Al hire entente, and in this cas the beste. (IV. 655-57)

Pandarus tells Troilus that by meeting Criseyde, he would be able to decide the best course of action once he knows from *her words and her expression* what her intention is, implying the difficulty of completely understanding Criseyde's intent. We see here how Troilus' conduct and thought is being shaped by Criseyde. Troilus does not impose his decisions on Criseyde, like Erec who bids Enide to follow him unquestioningly from the court. He tries to learn from her words and expressions what she herself might intend. Troilus has to look beyond the rules of courtly love convention in order to form his responses to Criseyde. This points to the complexity of Criseyde's character, and the limitations of the courtly love convention; these two factors together make unprecedented demands on the masculinity of the knight-warrior, requiring it to modify and reinvent itself.

A close study of Book IV reveals how the tension created by the events lays bare the fissures in the structure of the courtly love tradition, in terms of which the love of Troilus and Criseyde has been defined. From the moment Hector is overruled by the Trojan Parliament and Priam announces the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor, we begin to notice the inadequacy of the courtly love convention: Troilus cannot save Criseyde since he cannot speak of his love for her to his father, or to anyone else for that matter: that would break the code of secrecy required of the courtly lover, since revealing their love will also jeopardise the reputation of his beloved. In this case, of course, there are also reasons of class difference and political expediency why Troilus cannot reveal his love. Troilus and Criseyde are equally devastated by the news of Criseyde's consignment as a prisoner to the Greek camp, yet neither can do anything to avoid their separation and thereby save their love. Critics like Virginia W. Valentine have gone so far as to suggest that situations such as the exchange of Criseyde as prisoner of war are simply incompatible with the courtly love tradition. Valentine says that the genre of courtly love romance 'cannot operate in the milieu of legal decisions and war time stringencies'.[45] Although I do not agree completely with Valentine, since there is no code for 'situations of love' that the convention dictates, the situation Troilus and Criseyde find themselves in is indeed vastly complicated by the environment of war, making it virtually impossible to conduct themselves according to the tenets of courtly love. Critics like Aers[46] and

[45] Virginia Walker Valentine, 'Aplogia pro Criseyde: 'Of Harmes Two, The Lesse Is For to Chese', *Chaucer's Knight: A Man ther Was,* Axelrod: Tempa Bay, 1994, 25-33.
[46] David Aers, 'Masculine Identity in the Courtly Community: Self Love in *Troilus and Criseyde'* in *Community, Gender and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430*, London: Routledge, 1988, 132.Same query as in previous note.

Campbell[47] are of the opinion that the problems that arise in Book IV and thereafter take place because from this point onwards, the private love of the two protagonists is forced to enter a public arena. The Trojan parliament, says Aers, 'turns Criseyde into a commodity, perceiving women as mere objects in a system of exchange to be operated in what they take to be their own interest'.[48] The feudalism of the Middle Ages was overwhelmingly patriarchal, and it has been observed that such an exchange would not have appeared 'inhumane or unusual to late medieval readers merely because of Criseyde's gender', since by that time, women were very much a part of ransom proceedings during war. As Murray tells us:

> While protected from actual capture during a military campaign, ladies of the elite would often serve as temporary surrogate hostages for their knightly relatives held by the opposing side. In the early fifteenth century, for instance, the poet Jean Regnier was released from captivity by the English only 'by leaving as hostage his wife, Isabel Chrétien, and his son.'[49]

Murray points out that Chaucer presents Criseyde's exchange as 'consistent with the familiar system of medieval bargain'.[50] While one can understand that such a practice was necessitated by an ongoing armed conflict between two warring sides, be it the ancient Greeks and Trojans or the English and French forces during the Hundred Years

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[47] Jennifer Campbell, 'Figuring Criseude's 'Entente': Authority, Narrative, and Chaucer's Use of History' *Chaucer Review* 27 (1993) 343.
[48] Aers, 132.
[49] Molly Murray, 'The Value of 'Eschaunge': Ransom and Substitution in Troilus and Criseyde', *ELH* Vol 69 No 2 (Summer 2002)341.
[50] Ibid.

War in Chaucer's own days, it is harder to accept in human terms that the lovers cannot protest against it because they need to abide by the code of secrecy.

Troilus and Criseyde do, however, meet in order to deal with the crisis. The meeting begins with both of them in tears:

> Tho woful teeris that they leten falle
> As bitter weren, out of teris kynde,
> For peyne, as is ligne aloes or galle.
> So bitter teeris weep nought, as I fynde. (IV. 1135-38)

The stress of parting from her lover is so great that Criseyde faints, following which Troilus too prepares to take his life, thinking Criseyde to be dead. However, Criseyde recovers just in time to prevent Troilus from killing himself, and then hastily comes up with a plan to return in ten days:

> And thenk right thus, 'Criseyde is now agon.
> But what! She shal come hastiliche ayeyn!'
> And whanne, allas? By God. Lo, right anon,
> Er days ten, this dar I saufly seyn. (IV. 1317-20)

Criseyde is not just falsely consoling Troilus. Murray tells us that Chaucer knew that 'captives held in a ransom bargain, particularly in times of war could easily find some opportunity to leave their place of imprisonment.'[51] The two lovers, it would seem, have finally found a way of preventing their love from becoming public knowledge, yet avoiding a long-term separation. The high drama, accompanied by hyper-anxiety and surging emotions, has revealed that the convention of love followed by the two lovers is

[51] Murray 343.

not satisfactorily capable of handling the strain of their situation. This is perhaps why Book V opens and ends with something completely contradictory to what the lovers had imagined. Criseyde finds it difficult to return to Troy as she had promised Troilus; Diomede woos Criseyde and warns her of Troy's impending fall; Troilus sees Diomede with the brooch he had given Criseyde and realizes that she will no longer return. Following Criseyde's 'betrayal', Troilus, who is said to be second only to Hector in courage and prowess, goes on a killing spree against the Greeks, looking for Diomede to take revenge until he himself finally dies in battle.

It may seem that Chaucer's narrative does not give enough clear depictions of Troilus' manliness as a warrior. We do hear of his returning victorious after battles with the Greeks in Book II, when Criseyde sees him from her window. But it is only in the last book, after Troilus' disappointment in love, that Chaucer speaks of the fury with which Troilus slays numerous Greeks. This limited glimpse of Troilus' prowess does not conclusively prove his lack of manliness. What seems missing is the ennobling power of love. Love should have elevated the lover, inspiring him to greater feats of valour, strengthening his endurance and elevating his thoughts. Such is the positive power of love usually found in the courtly love tradition. Here we see, perhaps for the first time, the narrow boundaries of the convention of courtly love. In this tale of frustrated love, once Troilus is absolutely sure that Criseyde will no longer return to him, he does the only honourable thing left for him to do: he goes out to battle and fights valiantly, eventually dying a warrior's death at the hands of none other than the great Achilles. He does seem to redeem himself. Troilus satisfies the demands of both courtly love and

martial heroism quite competently whenever he can handle each separately. It is when these two factors of his chivalric masculinity get intertwined, as during the issue of Criseyde's exchange, that he is unable to extricate himself unscathed. Chrétien's knights too, as discussed in the previous chapter, find it difficult to satisfy the traditional role of a warrior and the new conventions governing the lover simultaneously. Each is seen striving for a balance between the demands that the separate traditions make on them. The manner in which each knight works out a particular balance to suit his unique situation articulates their individual masculinity.

The tendency to observe and evaluate Troilus' actions according to the heroic ideals of an earlier period hampers our understanding of this fourteenth-century knight. Chaucer's Troilus is a chivalric knight in the unconventional situation of a betrayed lover. His beloved is also a woman unlike any other courtly-love heroine. The demands made on Troilus by the expectations of the courtly love tradition, the martial role equally binding on him, and the unusual circumstance of betrayal in love, compel this knight to behave in a singular manner. Troilus' predicament shows us the inadequacy of the boundaries or established norms that might have determined his masculinity. The tale of Troilus' lost love, like the tale of Arveragus' dilemma in *The Franklin's Tale*, demonstrates the need to broaden the parameters of chivalric masculinity, since the conflicts experienced by these knights lie beyond the conventional domain of chivalry and courtly love.

Areveragus

In the tale told by the Franklin, we are presented with another 'sister to the wife of Bath',[52] Dorigen. Unlike critics who compare Dorigen to the Wife of Bath because of the rambling and incoherent speech[53] of her lament in the *Franklin's Tale* (1355-1456), it is the 'sovereignty' that Dorigen enjoys in her marriage that recalls the *Wife of Bath's Tale* (and indeed the *Wife of Bath's* Prologue), although Dorigen's 'sovereignty', unlike in that tale, is not absolute in nature. *The Franklin's Tale* recounts how, when Arveragus married Dorigen,

> Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knight
> That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
> Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
> Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hir jalousie.
> But hire obeye and folwe hir wyl in al
> As any lovere to his lady shal:
> Save that the name of soveraynetee
> That wolde he have, for shame of his degree. (V.745-52)

Dorigen in turn promises to be his 'humble trewe wyf'(58). Their marriage starts out as very much of the ideal kind extolled in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. However, this idyllic marital harmony is disturbed when Aurelius appears on the scene. The complications that result from the interaction between Aurelius and Dorigen reveal to us the flawed expectations that the code of chivalry imposes on its adherents. It also exposes the

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[52] George Sanderline, 47.
[53] Germaine Dampster, 'Chaucer at Work on the Complaint in the Franklin's Tale', *Modern Language Notes* 52 (1937) 16-23. Quoted in Warren S. Smith, 'Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the Franklin's Tale', *The Chaucer Review,* Vol 36 No 4 (2002) 374-390.

ambiguous and inadequate nature of the laws governing the convention of courtly love. It may also be correct to say that the crisis faced by Dorigen and Arveragus is the result of Dorigen's sovereignty. Whichever way one chooses to see the situation, what emerges from the crisis is the incompatibility of these vying social codes.

G.L. Kittredge, in his 1912 article 'Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage', set *The Franklin's Tale* within the 'Marriage Group', regarding the tale as the culmination of this group. Kittredge's position has been endorsed by scholars through the years who feel that the tale

> satisfies the Wife [of Bath] on the score of sovereignty and incorporates the Clerk's counsel of patience and humility; it responds to the Squire's romantic or courtly view of love and takes issue with a Merchant's denial of happiness in marriage. The Franklin presents his ideas with a buoyancy which makes them sound like a breakthrough...[54]

More recent discussions on *The Franklin's Tale*, on the other hand, tend to centre around debates concerning 'power relations', 'social privilege' or the axis of sexual difference,[55] arguing that the husband Arveragus does not live up to his promise. Instead, faced with the crisis of whether Dorigen should keep her 'trouthe' with her husband or her word given to Aurelius, Arveragus counsels his wife to engage in sexual infidelity, setting her on a course that might be regarded as morally questionable in conventional terms.

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[54] Donald. R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, Berkeley: University of California, 1976,268.
[55] See Mary. R .Bowman, "Half as She Were Mad': Dorigen in the Male World of *The Franklin's Tale', Chaucer Review* 27.3, (1993) 239-251. Sandra J McEntire. 'Illusions and Interpretation in The Franklin's Tale', *Chaucer Review* 31.2 (1996) 143-163.

Arguments like these draw our attention to the 'imposition of masculine decision'[56] on Dorigen when her husband commands her 'up peyne of deeth'(V1481) never to reveal the prospective 'aventure'. On the one hand, the Franklin's story does indeed afford the picture of a perfect marriage; on the other, it presents us with a husband who 'displays the unreflexive masculine egotism habitual in the traditional culture'.[57] My argument, however, is that the 'habitual' masculinity of the two male characters is under pressure from the strong feminine presence of Dorigen.

To understand my point, it is important not to read Dorigen's actions or Arveragus's dilemma in our own modern terms but in accordance with the social norms of medieval England. Fourteenth-century England was politically and socially still very feudal, even though its hierarchy was being challenged by new forces. The institution of chivalry was still extremely important and highly regarded, even though it was contested or rejected by a section of society, and new social forces had begun to diminish its validity, as recounted earlier in this chapter. Notions of chivalry and the custom of knighthood had gradually moved away from being predominantly a matter of martial prowess, with the associated virtues of character and conduct, to a much more complex and inclusive model of personal worth or honour. One has therefore to keep in mind the extremely fluid and complex social circumstances that both Dorigen and Arveragus must consider before they can arrive at a clean and clear resolution.

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[56] Helen Phillips, An *Introduction to the Canterbury Tales,* New York: St. Martin's, 2000, 140.
[57] David Aers, *Chaucer Langland, and the Creative Imagination,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, 166.

Chaucer's own regard for the chivalric class may be seen from the fact that he not only places the knight at the top of his social hierarchy while presenting the pilgrims in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, but also depicts him as devoting his life to establishing the ideals of chivalry. Modern scholars have criticised the institution of chivalry as overtly encouraging violence and chaos, and spoken of a decline of chivalry in the fourteenth century;[58] but we also get a different picture of what chivalry meant to the fourteenth century from works such as the prose *Lancelot*, where the Lady of the Lake explains to Lancelot the reason behind the institution of knighthood:

> Originally, when the order of knighthood began, a man who wished to be a knight, and who was accorded that privilege by right of election, was told he should be courteous without baseness, gracious without cruelty, compassionate towards the poor, generous and prepared to help those in need, and ready and prepared to confound robbers and killers; he should be a fair judge, without love or hate, without love to help wrong against right, without hate to hinder right in order to further wrong...[59]

Arveragus, as a true knight, must live up to these ideals, especially at a time when knighthood was viewed more as a personal ideal which reflected the inner worth and virtue of the person confirming his sense of honour.[60]

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[58] See Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of The Middle Ages*, trans. F. Hopman, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965.
[59]Quoted from Elspeth Kennedy, 'Theory and Practice: The Portrayal of Chivalry in the Prose Lancelot, Geoffroy de Charny and Froissart', In *Froissart Across the Genres.* ed. Sara Sturum- Maddox and Donald Maddox, Gainsville: University Press Florida, 1998,179.
[60] See D. Brewer, 'Chivalry' in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, 58-74.

Arveragus is ready to reverse the rules of traditional marriage by promising his wife that he would obey her in everything, thereby upholding the conventions of courtly love even after marriage; but at the same time, he does not forget his duties as a knight either. He leaves his new wife for a period of two years in order to win honour and renown in chivalrous feats across England. Dorigen moans the absence of her husband and is particularly anxious about his safe return, considering the rocks off the coast of Brittany:

> 'Is ther no ship, of so manye as I se,
> Wol bryngen hom my lord? Thane were myn herte
> Al warisshed of his bitter peynes smerte.'
> Another tyme ther wolde she sitte and thynke,
> And caste hie eyen dounward fro the brynke.
> But whan she saugh the grisly rokkes blake,
> For verray feere so wolde hir herte quake
> That on hire feet she myghte hire noght sustene. (V. 854-61)

It is during this time of Dorigen's emotional vulnerability that Aurelius sees her, falls in love and begins to woo her. Dorigen consistently rejects his love and advises Aurelius:

> Let swiche folies out of youre herte slyde.
> What deynetee sholde a man han in his lyf
> For to go love another mannes wyf,
> That hath hir body whan so that hym liketh? (V 1002-5)

Dorigen tells Aurelius that she would never be unfaithful to her husband, and declares quite emphatically that this was her final stand:

> Ne shal I nevere been untrewe wyf
> In word ne werk, as far as I have wit;

I wold been his to whom that I am knyt.
Taak this for final answere as of me. (V. 983-87)

She follows up her 'final answere'(V.987) to her would-be lover by telling him that she would grant him her love only if he were able to remove all the rocks from the shores of Brittany. The Franklin tells us that she said this 'in pley' (V.988) and that Aurelius was disappointed to hear it, as it seemed an impossible assignment:

And with a sorweful herte he thus answered:
'Madame' quod he, 'this were an inpossible!
Thane moot I dye of sodeyn deth horrible.' (V. 1008-9)

However, Aurelius is seemingly able to remove the rocks from the coast. He then demands that Dorigen keep her part of the bargain by reciprocating his love. Dorigen is now torn between her promise to Aurelius and her vows to Arveragus. She tells her husband about this unanticipated turn of events, and he tells her 'ye sholde youre trouthe kepe'(V.1478). Eventually, however, Aurelius relieves Dorigen of her promise and the tale concludes happily for the couple.

The point that makes most readers uncomfortable about the tale is the fact that Arveragus tells Dorigen to give herself to Aurelius against her will only because of the promise she made to the latter. She had made the promise almost in jest, for she could not have imagined that Aurelius could actually remove all the rocks from the coast. Moreover, her underlying motive was the concern for Arveragus' safety. Arveragus himself is not at ease with his advice, and we must understand why he tells Dorigen 'ye sholde youre trouthe kepe'. He explains to Dorigen that though he would rather be wounded and dead,

he cannot advise her not keep her promise to Aurelius (V.1475-78); he then breaks down in tears. It is certainly not an easy decision for him either, but he feels this is the only decision that he, as a true knight, could possibly take. His integrity as a knight cannot allow him to advise his wife in any other way because for him 'Trouthe is the hyeste thing that man may kepe.' At the same time, he is compelled to save his honour as a knight and a husband, which is why he instructs his wife

> ...up peyne of deeth,
> That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,
> To no wight telle thou of this aventure, (V. 1481-3)

We have to understand the injunction as a plea to his wife, for public knowledge of the 'aventure' would certainly bring him shame, and 'shame was the feeling or condition most to be feared by an honourable knight'.[61] It was after all for the same reason that Arveragus had asked for the nominal sovereignty of a husband 'for shame of his degree'.

Aurelius as the courtly lover, on the other hand, is following the rules laid down for the game of courtly love when he refuses to accept the finality of Dorigen's 'Taak this for final answere as of me'(V.987). He holds Dorigen to the rash promise she made and presses her to love him because, according to the conventions followed of courtly love, the lover was not to accept rejection as final. Dorigen therefore finds 'a dislocation between her intention and the language in which she can express it'.[62] The ideals that Arveragus seeks to protect and the laws that Aurelius follows both seem inflexible.

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[61] Richard. W. Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy. *The Book of Geoffroi de Charny: Text, Context, and Translation*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1996, 12.
[62] Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 65.

Neither of them appears to be concerned with what the third party, Dorigen, may actually feel or intend. The tenets of both chivalry and courtly love fall short of the reality that confronts them. Aurelius' insistence seems callous and naïve; he is, after all, compelling Dorigen to reciprocate his love when he, as a practitioner of courtly love, should know that love cannot be forced. Arveragus too, as a husband more concerned for his own honour, seems to display a misplaced sense of knightly values. One may understand his dilemma, because he is concerned for his reputation and honour; but in fact, he agrees to compromise his own honour by safeguarding what he thinks is his wife's honour in keeping her word, though actually it is a reflection of his masculine knightly concern for his own integrity. Further, he wants to keep Dorigen's surrender secret as in another perspective, that too would compromise his honour. As explained above, he cannot act otherwise than in this contradictory way; but the contradiction exposes the limitations of the conventional ideal of nobility and courtliness. We are led to question what is the 'trouth' and how viable is it to uphold it at all costs. Do we consider Arveragus' integrity and ethical judgement as faltering when he is faced with his wife's concern for upholding her own 'trouthe'? Arveragus' 'trouthe' is to preserve the basis of conjugal love, as he had promised Dorigen when they entered into marriage.[63] Dorigen, as brought out in her lament, seems to be 'struggling towards a resolution of her dilemma which will keep her from suicide and preserve both her 'trouthe' and her fidelity to her husband'.[64] The crisis is actually brought about by the conflict between Dorigen's wish to honour her word given to Aurelius, something she did not expect would cost her anything, and her desire

[63] See M Golding. 'The Importance of Keeping 'Trouthe' in *The Franklin's Tale', Medium Aevum*, 39 (1970) 306-12.
[64] Warren. S. Smith, 'Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the Franklin's Tale', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol 36 No4 (2002)389. Also see Alison Ganze. 'My Trouthe For To Holde- Allas, Allas!': Dorigen and Honor in *The Franklin's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol 42, No3 (2008) 312-29.

to preserve her reputation, as she fears that if she does not keep her promise she would ‘lese my name’. This conflict, again, exposes the limitations of the codes of behaviour championed by knights like Arveragus.

We do not see Arveragus in action as a knight. We are only told that he has left his newly-wed wife and gone to England, and is participating in tournaments and other chivalrous activities in order to win renown and honour. Such martial feats of valour are essential to the image of knighthood, yet they are totally left out of the narrative. In the case of Troilus, martial feats were not given a prominent place in the narrative, but his military actions were at least reported. In *The Franklin’s Tale*, the martial aspect of Arveragus’ chivalry is barely mentioned. This implies that the knight must now practise his chivalry in a different arena, social and ethical rather than martial. If one accepts that, then in this tale we are witnessing a very new situation where the conflict is internal rather than external. The honour that Arveragus seeks to safeguard is a personal objective rather than a value that the community may endorse as exemplary. Even so, we find that Arvregus is not able to resolve his domestic crisis.

In fact, it is Dorigen’s actions that eventually cause Aurelius to release her from the promise she made to him, realizing that he might appear ‘cherlyssh’ (V.1523) if he continued to demand that she surrender herself to him. Aurelius reaches this realization because of the manner in which Dorigen comes to him, not in the garden as her husband had advised, but ‘Amydde the toun, right in the quykkest street’ (V.1502). Aurelius realizes both her anguish and the magnanimity of her husband when she tells him that she has come to him not by her free will but ‘as myn housbonde bad’ (V.1512).

The Franklin's Tale leaves unresolved the issue of how honour is perceived, in public as well as in private. It raises questions about factors outside the individual's control, and illustrates how conflicts between abstract concepts such as honour, truth and love may not be resolved to the satisfaction of all. The tensions here are the result of the opposing values that each character feels it necessary to uphold. Juxtaposing these values against each other reveals a knighthood that is not just a socially constructed ideal, but also a personal acceptance and interpretation of values such as chivalry, honour and virtue. The unease felt at the end of the tale, even though the crisis has been averted, is perhaps because one glimpses the shortcomings of the knight and the lovelorn squire, both of whom are restricted by the code of conduct that they are 'accustomed' to follow. Their respective 'guidelines' do not equip them to negotiate with a woman who intends to adhere to her 'trouthe'. In fact, I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that it is Dorigen who displays an uncommon heroism. Surely, the manner in which she faces her dilemma and goes ahead to protect her husband's sense of honour, in spite of her revulsion in doing so, demands courage and a power of will. Courage here is differently expressed from the courage of the knight warrior whose feats of physical violence confer upon him his masculinity, but scenes depicting such physical feats are absent in this story. Instead, we have Dorigen's unconventional action. Although she does not eventually have to go all the way with her promise to Aurelius, it reminds one of the Lady at the Green Knight's castle who dallies with Sir Gawain in order, as we learn only later, to test his 'trouthe.' Both these women are traversing dangerous terrain, very similar to the paths that take the knights to their 'aventure'.

Arcite and Palamon

We are presented with another triangle of love in the story narrated by the Knight to the pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. *The Knight's Tale* recounts the rivalry between Arcite and Palamon for the love of Emilye. It narrates how the two Theban warriors glimpse Emilye from their prison window as they are held captive by Theseus the Duke of Athens, how they pine for her love, and how finally one dies in trying to gain her love and the other marries her. This appears like the outline of a typical chivalric romance, but the romance that unfolds in four neatly structured parts defies any easy understanding of either courtly love or chivalry.

The story of the two knights is taken from one of the popular romances of antiquity, the old French *Roman de Thebes*. Romances such as the story of Thebes or Troy were indeed popular during the early twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Boccaccio drew upon them in his *Teseida* (*c.*1339-41). The *Teseida* in turn is indebted to Statius' epic of the Theban conflict, the *Thebaid*. Chaucer would have known of both the Latin and the vernacular works:[65]in fact, *The Knight's Tale* begins with an epigram taken from Statius. Chaucer's rendition of the tale is, however, quite different from his predecessors, primarily in the presentation of his characters.

The tale told by the knight to the company of pilgrims is not an account of conventional love. More than the love the two knights feel for the lady, what strikes us is the extreme hatred they feel for each other. This intense mutual hatred has led many critics to

[65] Robert. M. Correal and Mary Hamel, *Sources and Analogues of The Canterbury Tales*, Vol2, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002.

question the chivalric values defining the warriors' conduct. Arcite and Palamon are completely and unreasonably in love with Emilye even though there is no hope of their love ever being known to her, since the two are in prison for life. Yet from the moment they see Emilye, they become not only lovers but rivals in love. So intense is their love for Emilye that each is ready to kill the other for her love. Such ardour in love, and the consequent rivalry, may be understood in the context of the courtly love tradition, but the inherent violence is scarcely compatible with it, still more that such hatred should arise between two sworn brothers.

We first see the two knights as victims of Theseus' war against Thebes. They are found among a pile of dead bodies after the Greeks have defeated the Thebans; even then, they are paired together by their coats of arms. They are sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in the Athenian prison, without ransom or hope of freedom. Neither knight sees any possible way of winning Emilye, even as they quarrel over who deserves her more.

> Love, if thee list, for I love and shall,
> And smoothly, leeve brother, this is al.
> Heere in this prisoun moote we endure,
> And everich of us take his aventure (1183-86)

These words spoken by Arcite to Palamon aptly sum up their hopeless situation. The two Thebans are so evenly presented that it is almost impossible to differentiate between them: they are equally valiant, equally loyal to Emilye, and pine for her with equal ardour. The only difference lies in the god they chose to pray to before the tournament and the prayers they make. Arcite prays to Mars, asking for victory; Palamon to Venus

asking that he may win Emilye. This difference is significant not only because it may imply the different temperaments of the two knights, but chiefly because it reflects the two conflicting elements comprising the chivalric code of conduct. A chivalric warrior is one who fights and loves with the same intensity. Chivalric romances normally present us with warriors whose ardour in love is as important as their military prowess. These warriors fight for the sake of their love. Love for their lady strengthens their resolve to fight adversaries. Thus Venus, the goddess of love, is as important to these knights as Mars, the god of war. Both Mars and Venus are significant patrons of their total ethos. The gifts of the two combine to form the basis of their masculinity. The separate choices made by the two knights, however, also reveals the contradiction between the two concerns that comprise the identity of a knight. Love and war are intrinsically incompatible, since war destroys all that love seeks to protect. It would therefore seem that a notion of masculinity composed of these opposite elements must be fragile and untenable.

The two knights are cast in the role of typical medieval lovers. Following the convention of courtly love, Palamon, on seeing Emilye for the first time, declares that he has been stung in his heart:

> He cast his eyes upon Emeley,
> And therwithal he bleynte and cride, A!
> As though he stongen were unto the herte. (1077-79)

Palamon tells Arcite how the love of Emilye has caused him pain. He then begins to pray to Venus, saying that she herself had descended into the garden where he saw her. Arcite

then goes to the window to see for himself what Palamon was talking about. On seeing Emilye, Arcite is at once smitten. Arcite's feelings on seeing the lady he falls in love with are cast in the appropriate rhetoric of love. We are told that, 'Sighte hir beautee hurte hym so.'(1114) Even in their state of misery as they spend their days in the Athenian prison, without any hope of being released, they suffer the pangs of love. Two different individuals display a virtually identical passion and yearning for Emilye. They also suffer similar hardships in order to attain her love. It is indeed difficult to see either of them as the more deserving, so closely are they matched. Chaucer balances almost every description or speech of Palamon with a comparable one by Arcite, adding to our sense that neither surpasses the other.[66] As Peter H. Elbow observes, Chaucer questions the very viability of courtly love by presenting two equally worthy knights trying to win the hand of the same lady:

> It is unsatisfactory to say, merely, that it is a poem about how two men loved and deserved a woman equally. It is more accurate to say: it is a poem which exhaustively develops the conflict between two worthy men for a woman and thereby reveals profound irrelevancies in the conventional ways of conceiving and judging the worthiness of knights.[67]

It is difficult to agree with this view that the 'conventional ways' are totally irrelevant, since throughout twelfth-century romance writing, the tradition of courtly love added a new dimension of 'gentleness' or nobility to the figure of the warrior. Love for the beloved inspired great feats of valour even while it enriched the knight's personality by

[66] Peter. H. Elbow, 'How Chaucer Transcends Opposition in The Knight's Tale', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol 7 No2, (1972)100.
[67] Ibid. 111

widening his range of experience. On reading *The Knight's Tale*, we find love transforming both the knights in the sense that their lives in prison were passing 'in anguish and in wo' until they see Emilye in the garden and fall in love with her. Even though they know their love to be hopeless, they now seem to enlarge their outlook, beginning to speak philosophically on the human condition. Love transforms their world as it does not do for Troilus, who does not actually seem to grow as a person, nor is he ennobled by the experience.

Their rivalry for Emilye's love also inspires Palamon and Arcite to accomplish feats of valour, albeit only against each other. It is possible to take the constantly quarrelling cousins as merelyun-knightly, just as the animal imagery used to describe their actions may also distract us. The bitter rivalry of the two lovers, who were first introduced to us as blood brothers, does take us by surprise. But from another perspective, the martial prowess of the two young knights is enhanced by the ardour of their love for Emilye. By using such imagery, Chaucer can be seen as imitating the epic style. Boitani tells us:

> The martial Muse, whether in romance, epic, or drama, is of course fond of lions, tigers, bears and boars, and in his attempt at recreating the classical epos in the *Teseida* Boccaccio uses similes that go back, through Statius' *Thebaid*, to Virgil's *Aeneid* and ultimately to Homer's Iliad.[68]

So too, when Chaucer compares Arcite and Palamon, fighting in the grove, to hunters waiting for the lion and then to a 'wood leon' and 'crueel tigre', the two knights are

[68] Piero Boitani, 'The Genius to Improve an Invention: Transformation of the Knight's tale' in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. Ruth Morse, B. Windeatt, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 186.

associated with warriors well known to the medieval audience. In the course of this very poem, during the tournament, Emetreus and Lygurge, the two kings who sponsor Arcite and Palamon and lead the hundred knights on each side, are followed by wolfhounds, lions, leopards and bulls. All this not only adds to the pageantry of the final tournament between the rival lovers, but also underlines the ferocity of Arcite and Palamon. There is no confusion, at least not in the terms I have noted so far, in the presentation of the two knights: they conform to the tenets of courtly love, and also prove their chivalric valour against each other.

The imagery used to describe their combative spirit reminds one of epic heroes. The 'elemental, instinctual fury',[69] which Boitani says is absent in Chaucer's sources, is certainly an unconventional attribute of knights in love. Going by the description of their fight (lines 1655- 60, 2626-31), the two knights seem to be quite out of their minds because of their love for the same woman. Now, according to the rules of love laid down by Capellanus, any person with excessive passion is not deemed fit for love.[70] Their excessive hatred for each other undermines their roles as lovers, according to the full-fledged conventions of courtly love. In fact their enmity towards each other strikes one as futile, not simply because one of them is exiled and the other imprisoned for life, but because Emilye, the lady over whom the two fight and are ready to end their relationship as blood brothers, is unaware of their love for her. In her choice of the virgin goddess Diana as the deity to worship, Emilye makes it very clear that she does not wish to marry either of them. Theseus, the duke of Athens who had imprisoned the two Theban knights,

[69] Ibid.
[70] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. Paul Halsall, sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/capellanus.asp. accessed 20 September 2016.

rightly points out that the two knights risked everything for the love of Emilye who, until the lovers are discovered fighting for her in the woods, did not even know of their existence, let alone the fact that they had put their lives in danger for her love and fought each other almost to death.

> Who may been a fool, but if he love?
> Bihoold, for Goddes sake that sit above,
> Se how they blede! Be they noght wel arrayed?
> Thus hath hir lord, the god of love, ypayed.
> Hir wages and hir fees for hir servyse!
> And yet they wenen for to been fulwyse
> That serven love, for aught that may bifalle.
> But this is yet the best game of alle,
> That she for whom they han this jolitee
> Kan hem therof as muche thank as me (1799-1808)

In spite of all the ardour Arcite and Palamon feel for Emilye, they had so far both failed to catch her attention. We may find it strange that although Arcite had served in her household for three years, he could not confess his love to her or even attract her attention in some way. Each of them had served Emilye as best as he could, which too is a condition that the courtly lover has to meet, but the fact that she had not really learnt of their love, nor had a chance to reciprocate either's affection, does appear to be a problem.

The depiction of Emily also leads one to question the traditional models of both love and chivalry. Emilye is unlike any other heroine discussed so far: we have no idea about her. The only thing we know for sure is that she wishes to remain a virgin nearly all the way through, and yet agrees to marry Palamon at the end when Theseus asks her to do so. Our

attempts at understanding Emilye's motives are also thwarted by the limited scope provided to us by the text:

> Chaucer does not enrich the romantic component in any way; he does not add scenes in which the two heroes interact with Emilye, scenes that would at least render the love interest more plausible. If anything he impoverishes the love interest even further by making Emilye a less compelling figure than Emilye; we have less access to her private thoughts and feelings than in Boccaccio.[71]

There is, however, a cryptic comment by the poet at the end of the tournament between Arcite and Palamon in Part IV which might provide a clue. It concerns the 'freendlich ye' (2680) that Emilye casts on Arcite just after he has won the tournament and therefore won her:

> For women as to speken in comune,
> Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune. (2681-82)

Emilye is here said to follow the vagaries of the changeable and inscrutable goddess Fortune: she is not identified with the goddess. But Susan Crane proposes such an identification, saying that in a way, this explains 'her reversals as inexplicable' and that also 'integrates her inexplicability into the tale's broader concern with the place of accidents in the providential scheme'.[72] Crane's view that Emilye is as 'attractive and resistant, elusive and threatening' to her two lovers 'as befits the terrain of adventure in

[71] Dominique Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in Roman de Thebes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Lydgate*, Routledge: London, 2004, 91.
[72] Susan Crane, 'Medieval Romance and Feminine Difference in The Knight's Tale', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 12, 1990, 53.

romance',[73]links the kind of adventures that knights usually undertook into unknown territories with the personality of Emilye, which is not really known either to the reader or to the knights who love her. In all the earlier romances, the knight-warrior is seen to re-formulate his masculinity as he interacts with the lady whom he falls in love with. In this romance, the love the two knights feel for Emilye does have a certain bearing upon their temperaments, as discussed earlier; but the manner of their interaction and the quality of the change they experience is somewhat questionable. Arcite and Palamon do not test their valour by engaging in any martial exploits, nor are they seen to engage with the feminine in any meaningful way, yet it cannot be denied that their actions as knights in love induce us to re-evaluate their masculinity.

Chaucer changed much of the material he found in his sources. It has often been argued that while writing *The Knight's Tale,* Chaucer was not following Boccaccio so much as Statius; he opens the tale with an excerpt from the XIIth book of the *Thebaid*.[74] In *The Knight's Tale*, Arcite and Palamon fight for the love of Emilye just as Polynices and Eteocles fight for the Theban throne. Anderson, who documents Chaucer's use of the *Thebaid* as well as his borrowing from the *Teseida*, says that Chaucer's combination of the two earlier works makes 'love take the place of the usual political centre of the epic'.[75] Chaucer retained the characters, the love triangle and the pagan gods from Boccaccio while keeping the theme closer to Statius' world where triumph and loss, victory and defeat are juxtaposed. Boccaccio's *Teseida* sought to connect the story of

[73] Ibid. 54.
[74] See David Anderson, 'Imitation of the *Thebaid* in Chaucer's Knight's Tale', In *Before the Knight's Tale*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, 192-224.
[75]David Anderson, 'The Knight's Tale and the Epic Tradition', *Chaucer Review* Vol 1(1966) 67-84.

Troy and the story of Thebes; his narrative begins with Theseus' attack on Thebes at the end of the Theban war:

> Boccaccio created his *Teseida* as a fusion of elements from the Theban and Trojan wars: he borrows characters, episodes and narrative circumstances from the Theban conflict, as recorded by Statius, as well as from the Trojan conflict, as preserved in a variety of classical and medieval sources; he designs the main action of the poem (a conflict between two kinsmen over possession of a woman) in such a way that it combines the mode of conflict at Thebes (civil strife) with the source of conflict at Troy (a woman), so that it becomes both a repeat of the Theban conflict and a rehearsal for the Trojan conflict.[76]

Chaucer incorporates the love triangle from his Italian predecessor Boccaccio, and places it alongside the coexistence of chaos and order that he derives from his Latin source. Arcite dies after praying to Mars, whereas Palamon, who also loves Emilye, had sought the help of Venus. Chaucer is presenting the effects of such a complicated situation on heroic masculinity. Like Troilus and Arveragus, the two other knights we have discussed, Arcite and Palamon too are not readily able to straddle the two domains that comprise their chivalric world. It is not suggested that the two spheres are necessarily opposed, for we have the figure of Theseus who seems to strike a balance between the two. Chaucer's Theseus is presented as an ideal warrior: he shows mercy; he is wise; he is victorious. More importantly Theseus is also in love with his wife Hippolyta, and although we do not witness much of this side of Theseus in The Knight's Tale, we do see him as sympathetic towards the two knights who are in love: Arcite and Palamon. We first meet him after he

[76] Dominique Battles, *The Medieval tradition of Thebes*, 75.

has subdued the tyrant Creon. Later, we see him justly handle the two prisoners, Arcite and Palamon, who have both, in different ways, defied his rule. He organizes a tournament in order to put an end to the conflict over Emilye's love, and finally it is he who brings the tale to a 'happy ending' by persuading Emilye and Palamon to stop mourning the death of Arcite and get married. Chaucer's Theseus is a mature warrior and the epitome of good governance right from the beginning of the tale, though Chaucer says nothing of his heroic feats in legend and supernatural tales. We meet him after his victory in Scythia, when he already has Hippolyta as his wife. He then proceeds on the Theban War, in course of which Arcite and Palamon are taken captive. He is the ordering principle: he punishes Creon's tyranny; he arranges the tournament. It does seem that the world of Arcite, Palamon and Emilye is governed justly by Theseus. The final resolution is also brought about by him, when he asks Emelye to marry Palamon after the death of Arcite.

To sum up, in *The Knight's Tale*, we find that the actions of Arcite and Palamon, both as lovers and as knights, cast serious doubts on the notion of chivalry as well as of love. Their excessive hatred for each other and their equally unreasonable love for Emelye appear contradictory, even if one is the cause of the other. The courtly qualities of courtesy and the refined emotions of love should have tempered down the unbridled urge for violence, which seems more appropriate to the older model of chivalry. Instead, what we see here is a different side of love, a love that shows submission but also allows brutality. Their propensity for violence is reinforced by the imagery used to describe the two knights. In this romance, violence and love do not seem to be at odds with one

another, as was the case with Erec and also Yvain. With Arcite and Palamon, the traditional opposites of love and violence may coexist: Palamon the knight can pray to Venus just as well as Arcite the lover can make offerings to Mars. Their masculinity is expansive enough to subsume such opposite forces, but that does not take away the conflict between them and the unviable nature of the compound.

Chaucer's knights, as we have seen, operate in circumstances very different from those of the earlier heroes they are said to emulate– heroes placed in classical settings but derived more from medieval narrative tradition. They are not required to fight against insurmountable forces; instead, they must engage with their own identities, challenged as they are by the nature of their relationship with the female characters, who by this time have entered the arena of romance as an independent force that the knights must reckon with. This is clearly true in the case of Criseyde and Dorigen. Emilye remains an enigma, but is a force to contend with for that very reason: she is anything the knights have encountered before, outside the traditional experience of knighthood. The knight has therefore to test his courage in his encounter with the feminine, an intractable 'aventure' in itself, and his personality is tempered by this contact. We also see that the basic narrative of the romances discussed here is oriented towards the woman. This is a new trend, and new ambiguities arise because the standards of masculinity need to be readjusted accordingly. By the fourteenth century, the knight or warrior has to negotiate his masculinity on multiple fronts, resulting in a more flexible understanding of masculinity. It can no longer be easily defined, since the knight is no longer tested solely

for his prowess on the battlefield. In the next stage, as we shall see in the following chapter, there is no battlefield at all, but the test is more challenging than ever.

Chapter IV

‘Þisluf-lace schalleþe my hert’

In many ways, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* marks the convergence of various strands of the Arthurian legend, and in some ways it is also the culmination of the evolution, in a general sense, of the warrior hero of the Middle Ages. The Arthurian material that circulated in the form of chronicles, romance, and folklore finds its way into this fourteenth-century alliterative poem written in the dialect of the Northern Midlands. The Celtic tales that lend their influence, the historical records that try to authenticate the Arthuriad, and the romance tradition that popularized the adventure of the knights, each contributes to the poem written by the anonymous writer. The tales of other Arthurian knights, whether from the metrical or the prose traditions, also find resonance in Gawain’s dilemma.

Gawain, as a knight representing the Arthurian court, is first introduced to us by Geoffrey of Monmouth. In his book *Historia Regum Britanniae*, written sometime between 1136 and 1138, Monmouth presents Gawain as one of the most valorous knights in Arthur’s court. It is in this work that Gawain is first introduced as Arthur’s nephew, an association which since then is found in every tale recounting the story of Arthur and Gawain in almost every European vernacular. An earlier association of Gawain with Arthur may be seen, although no kinship can be deduced there, in the carving of the Modena archivolt1120-1140. This archivolt on the north portal of the Porta della Pescheria is said

to date back to.[1] Here Gawain appears under his Briton name Galvagin, fighting a battle along with Arthur and a few other knights while Queen Guinevere seems to be held hostage by Mordoc, whom later tales present as Mordred. The narrative presents Gawain as one of the knights rescuing the queen from a giant named Carrador. This story of the queen's abduction and rescue gives evidence of the presence of the figure of Gawain much earlier than the archivolt at Modena or the mention made by Monmouth. The story is mentioned by Roger Sherman Loomis in his book on the connection between Celtic myths and Arthurian romance first published in 1926.[2] The earliest texts where Gawain appears are the 'Welsh Triads', the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, in which Gawain is mentioned by his Welsh name Gwalchamai[3].Although the Celtic links of the Arthurian tradition and the connection between Gawain and Gwalchamai are still not very clear, scholars like Glenys Goetnick argue that the popularity of Gawain in the northern regions of England may demonstrate a close contact between the Welsh and English figures.[4]Others such as Keith Busby and John Matthews[5] have also suggested Gawain's northern or even Scottish links. Gawain's connection with several parts of Britain is also mentioned in *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, an account written by William of Malmesbury in about 1125, earlier than Monmouth's work, where Malmesbury writes of Gawain reigning over 'Walweitha'[6] or Galloway, a region in the southwestern part of Scotland.[7]*The*

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[1] See Norris J. Lacy 'The Arthurian Legend Before Chrétien' in *A Cambridge Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris. J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, Cambridge: D S Brewer, 2005. 43-51.
[2]R. S. Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2005.(First published 1926).
[3]John Matthews, *Sir Gawain, Knight of the Goddess*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2003, 27.
[4]Glenys Goetnick, *Peredur: A Study of Welsh Tradition in the Grail Legends,* Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975, 28-30.
[5] See Keith Busby in 'Gawain', in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*. ed. Norris J. Lacy, New York: Garland, 1991, 178. See also John Matthews, *Sir Gawain, Knight of the Goddess*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2003.
[6]. William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, trans, Rev. John Sharpe, ed. J.A. Giles, London: George Bell and Sons, 1904.

Mabinogion, a collection of tales drawn from Celtic mythology, also mentions Gwalchamai in connection with King Arthur. These tales, which are said to have been written from stories collected from an older oral tradition, imply a very early link between the figure of Gwalchamai and the later Gawain, since here too Gwalchamai is presented as Arthur's valiant nephew. The story of Culhwch and Olwen[8] in *The Mabinogion* recounts how Arthur, assisted by his various warriors or retainers, is able to fulfill all the conditions laid down by the giant Ysbaddaden in order to bring about the union of Culhwch and Olwen. Culwch was King Arthur's cousin and sought Arthur's help in order to win Olwen, whom he loved, as his bride. It is perhaps in this tale for the first time that Arthur is shown to be a powerful lord surrounded by extremely talented warriors similar to the manner in which he is later depicted in numerous twelfth-century romances.

The figure of Gawain is also closely linked to the warrior heroes of Irish myths such as Cu Chulainn mentioned in the Ulster Cycle of the northern regions, and Cu Roi who belongs to the southern Munster Cycle. Stories connected to the cycle in which Cu Roi appears are now mostly lost, but the two Irish mythic heroes shared certain features which could relate them to Gawain. Cu Chulainn is said to be the son of the god Lugh or Llwch, whereas the name of Gawain's father in medieval romance is Loth or Lot.[9] Both Gawain and Cu Chulainn are involved in a number of tales relating to abductions and

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'url' sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/malmsbury-chronile1.asp accessed 14. September,2016.
[7] Matthews, *Knight of the Goddess,* 37.
[8] 'Culwch and Olwan', *The Mabinogion*, ed. and trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, London: J.M. Dent, 1992, 108.
[9] *Erec and Enid,* 1737.

rescue of maidens, and the two heroes have also often been associated with the solar deity, of which we only get a hint in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:*

> Sone as he on hent, and happed þerinne,
> Þat sete on hymsemly with saylandeskyrtez,
> Þe ver by his uisageverayly hit semed
> Welneȝ to vchehaeþl, alle on hwes (865-70)[10]

A connection between Gawain and Cu Chulainn more relevant to my present discussion is the beheading match each is involved in. A beheading match, like the one that proves to be a crucial part of Gawain's career in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is a feature of a number of other romances involving Gawain, and will be discussed subsequently. Here, it is important to point out the earliest recorded mention of such a beheading match in European literature: the story *Bricriu's Feast*, which belongs to an earlier period but was probably written down in the early eleventh century. This tale also features a beheading match, similar to the one Gawain commits to in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, between Cu Chulainn and Uath. The Irish tale, preserved in an eleventh-century manuscript, speaks of the competition between the three mythic heroes Cu Chulainn, Lodgair and Conall. Each of them wishes to claim the chief place at the hall and receive the 'portion of the hero' at a feast given by their king, Conchobar. (The 'portion of the hero' or the 'champion's portion' was the best cut of meat given to the most outstanding hero.) Conchobar himself refuses to decide who is the best among them, and the three are forced to seek others to be their judge. They finally come to Uath, a giant who lives near

[10] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Tolkien and Gordon, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967. This has been used for all references to the poem, For a modern English translation I have used *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght*, W. S. Merwin (parallel text and translation edition), Trowbridge: Cromwell Press, 2003.

a lake. Uath agrees to declare the winner among the three heroes only after each of them meets him in a beheading match. Lodgair and Conall either do not submit to Uath's conditions or do not return to accept the blow from Uath the next day. Eventually, Cu Chulainn, who strikes off Uath's head and also accepts the giant's return blow, is declared the champion. A version of this story, differing only slightly, also appears in another collection of Irish folklore, the book of the *Dun Cow*. What is evident from these similarities is the connection Gawain shares with the Irish Cu Chulainn and the development of the motif of the beheading match.

Gawain's connection with stories found in the Celtic myths, and the association he shares with archetypal heroes such as Gwalchmai and Cu Chulainn, encouraged scholars like Jessie Weston[11] to consider Gawain as an archetypal figure associated with death and rebirth, introducing him as the original Grail hero. Similar studies exploring Gawain's connection with the mythic past, conducted by a host of important scholars like R. S. Loomis,[12] John Rhys[13] and Heinrich Zimmer[14] have also sufficiently illustrated Gawain's anthropological significance. Although I agree with C.S. Lewis that an anthropological approach to the work in question 'may be true and it may have an interest of its own'[15] but cannot add to the understanding of the dilemma that Gawain faces in the bedroom, I must also admit that studies conducted on similar lines as Loomis have offered recent scholarship a better understanding of the figure of Gawain in the medieval romance

[11] Jessie Weston, *The Legend of Sir Gawain, Studies Upon its Original Scope and Significance*, London: David Nutt, 1897.
[12] Loomis, *Celtic Myth.*
[13] John Rhys, *Studies in Arthurian Legend*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891.
[14] Heinrich Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
[15] C. S. Lewis, 'The Anthropological Approach' in *Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. D. R Howard and C Zacher, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, 59.

generally, but Loomis' research is of particular interest for the poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. John Matthews, in his recent study on Gawain, uses the anthropological approach to provide us with an interesting and important understanding. In his discussion on Gawain's Celtic connections, Matthews cites one of the most reliable Celtic sources to illustrate Gawain's Celtic roots. He refers to the sagas of Celtic heroes that were collected only after the twelfth century: *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, otherwise known as the *Triads of Britain.* The *Triads* mention Gawain's Welsh name "Gwalchamai" about eight times:

> In Triad 4 'Gwalchamai son of Gwyar' is described as "one of the three well-endowed men of the Island of Britain." Triad 75 names him one of the "three men of the Island of Britain who were most courteous to guests and strangers" and Triad 91 as first among the "three Fearless Men of the Island of Britain". Triads 42 and 46a further mention his horse Meingalet (translated as "slender-Hard" by Rachel Bromwich) or Keincaled (translated as "White and Hardy" by R.S. Loomis).[16]

One may see how certain qualities and attributes that we associate with the Gawain of the medieval romance, such as his courtesy, his valour and his horse, Gringolet, (since Gringolet is an important aspect of the Celtic sun deity, with whom Gawain appears to be connected), are in fact features that belong to older Celtic versions of the Gawain figure. We may thus perhaps see how the scene depicted on the archivolt at Modena, which shows Gawain as one the rescuers of the queen, can be traced back to an older line of

[16] John Matthews, *Sir Gawain, Knight of the Goddess*, 27-28.

narratives which present Gawain as a more important figure in stories relating to Arthur. However, it is generally Lancelot that, from the twelfth century onwards, is presented as the queen's champion and rescuer in almost all the tales that deal with her abduction. It is most likely that stories from the Celtic areas were brought across the English Channel by wandering bards who must have come to Brittany after the Saxon invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries. The sculptural evidence at Modena of the popularity of the Arthurian legend implies that the Welsh stories were carried further into Europe before they were brought back to Britain by the invading Normans (1066). The distance covered by the narrative out from and back into the island of Britain is perhaps what resulted in the transformation of both the narratives and the characters. It is most likely that Gawain's character and the tales relating to him underwent such a change over time, resulting in a number of changes. Sometimes the story was applied to other characters, or some episodes were added or removed from tales dealing with him. It is perhaps for this reason that we find a single episode recurring in a number of forms in different stories. It is noteworthy that such transformations in the plot of the stories Gawain appears in, as well as the presentation of his character, continue to occur throughout the career of Gawain even as a medieval knight.

The example cited in connection with *Bricriu's Feast* illustrates the journey made by the motif of the 'beheading match' from pre-Arthurian times to the late fourteenth century rendition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The other important episode that comprises the testing of Gawain, the temptation in the bedchamber, is not so easily traceable although one may find its genesis in another Celtic folk tale, *Pwyll of Drent*. In

this story, Pwyll, the prince of Dyfed, meets Arwan king of Annwan while hunting. Arwan then tells Pwyll of the beheading match he has with Hafgen. Arwan requests Pwyll to take his place for the match. Once Pwyll agrees to replace Arwan for the match that is to take place in a year's time, Pwyll must live in disguise with Arwan's family. Pwyll then goes to live at Annwan, spending every night with his back turned to Arwan's wife:

> The moment they (Pwyll and Arwan's wife) got into bed, he turned his face to the bedside and his back towards her… whatever affection was between them during the day, not a single night to the year's end was different from what that first night was.[17]

Traces of both, the beheading match and the temptation in the bedchamber, may be found separately in a number of medieval romances, unlike in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which is the only available text where the two motifs are interconnected. Two French romances which feature the beheading match and the temptation in the bedchamber separately in connection with Gawain are *La Mule sans frein* and *Le Chevalier à l' épée*, both written either during the late twelfth century or early thirteenth century. In *La Mule*, a lady comes riding on a mule with no bridle to Arthur's court and requests the knights of the court to retrieve her bridle. Kay volunteers to perform the task but returns unsuccessful, for though he is able to overcome the beasts in the forest as they all kneel before the mule that the lady had given to him for the task, he is not able to cross the turbulent river with a narrow iron bridge. Gawain then replaces Kay and is able

[17] *Mabinogion*, 6.

to use the bridge to cross the river. He then comes to a revolving castle where he meets a hairy churl who challenges Gawain to a beheading match. The next morning, when Gawain presents himself for the return blow, the churl spares him since he has kept his word. Gawain then has to fight lions and dragons. Finally, his success leads the lady of the castle, who is the sister of the lady whose bridle had been stolen, to offer herself in marriage to Gawain. Gawain refuses to marry her but retrieves the bridle.

In the second story, *Le Chevalier à l' épée*, Gawain is lost in a forest where he meets a man who takes him to his castle. Here, Gawain is made to sleep on the same bed as the host's beautiful daughter. Above the bed is placed a sword that will strike anyone attempting to touch the daughter. Gawain only suffers a slight cut, which proves that he is better than the other knights. Gawain then marries the host's daughter. The marriage does not, however, last long, for in the next part of the story the bride is abducted by another knight and though Gawain manages to defeat the other knight, the lady first wishes to remain with her abductor, and later, when she shows willingness to return to Gawain, he is not interested in her.[18] It may then be said with some amount of certainty that stories connected with the testing of Gawain, similar to the tests he has to face in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, were already in circulation before the Gawain poet connected the two motifs; but when presented together in the manner of that poem, they pose a far more serious problem to the knight than ever before.

[18] Arthur C.L. Brown and L. Kitteredge*, Iwain: A Study in the Origins of Arthurian Romance*, Ardent Media, 1903, 80. Also see Alan Lupak, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007, 292-3.

Gawain is one of the few knights in the Arthurian corpus to be portrayed so diversely and whose evolution may be linked with the development of the romance tradition itself. The different roles in which Gawain has been cast since his introduction into the Arthurian circle by Monmouth show a varied display of characteristics. The range of his portrayals span from Arthur's most respected knight and nephew, as in the early twelfth-century chronicle by Monmouth, to a less than perfect knight as in some of the thirteenth-century French romances. For instance, in the thirteenth-century verse romance *Hunbaut,* where Arthur has to collect tribute from a particular king, he is compelled to send Gawain since no other knight is present at court at that time. Arthur is advised not to send Gawain on such a mission since he is not too good with his words. This comes as a surprise, since Gawain is known for his courteous speech both in English romances and Celtic tales, where he is often presented as a conciliator. For example, in the tale of *Geraint and Enid* in the *Mabinogion*, it is Gwalchamai who acts as an intermediary between Arthur and Geraint, who is better known as Erec after the name given to him in Chrétien's romances. In the French romances of the late twelfth century, however, Gawain is often depicted as an imprudent knight.

Gawain's centrality to the tales surrounding Arthur may also be seen in the development of the Grail romance, which is a development from the chivalric romance made popular after the style of Chrétien de Troyes, but now focusing more on religious devotion than on devotion to the beloved. *The Conte du Graal* or the Legend of the Holy Grail, which Chrétien de Troyes began writing sometime between 1180 and 1230 but left incomplete, also has Gawain as one of the main characters. Broadly speaking, this new kind of

romance explored the ideals of chivalry in relation to the ideals of spirituality instead of love, as would be expected in the standard chivalric romance of the period. It is not really possible to separate the two kinds of writings as secular and spiritual since the Grail story has 'little basis in the received history and teachings of the Church'.[19]Chrétien 'stale is left incomplete in the middle of one of Gawain's adventures. The first continuation of the originally unfinished story, that was probably composed around 1190, resumes with Gawain combating Guiromelant, from whom he learns about the Haughty Maid of Lorges and the fact that both his mother and Arthur's mother were present in the castle of Marvals.[20] Guiromelant, whom Gawain's sister Clarissant loves, is sworn to fight Gawain since Gawain's father king Lot had slain Guiromelant's father. The fight between Guiromelant and Gawain continues till the end of the day, Gawain then suggests that the two could end their fight if Guiromelant gave up is claim to avenge his father. The next day, however, Gawain is angered to learn that his sister had married Guiromelant, this causes Gawain to hastily leave them, it is then that he arrives at the Grail Castle. The Grail legend, of which Gawain becomes a part after the twelfth century, continues by and large to portray him as an outstanding example of chivalry, although he does rank below Percival, Lancelot and Galahad and thus finally cannot achieve the Grail. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, coming as it does in the late fourteenth century, presents this imperfect Gawain; but that very imperfection, one may say, is made the basis of a new analysis of the chivalric ethos by the poet, and within the poem, possibly a new ethical realization by Gawain himself. In this poem, we then move to a new ethical importance for Gawain on a

[19] Richard Barber, 'Chivalry Cistercianism and the Grail' in *Companion to The Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Carol Dover, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003, 4.
[20] *The Legend of the Grail*, trans., Nigel Bryant, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004, 155-58.

more secular plane than in the Grail legend, making him the exemplar of a more critical and human ideal than the perfect virtue attributed to Galahad in later Arthurian legend, making the latter the only knight who can achieve the Grail. It must also be noted that none of the Arthurian knights who goes on the quest for the Holy Grail returns successfully to Camelot, because this sub-genre of romance writing places special stress on the spiritual aspects of chivalry rather than considerations such as love and loyalty to the king. In fact, in the versions of the Grail cycle that circulated towards the end of the thirteenth century in France, Arthurian knights like Lancelot and Gawain fail to achieve the Grail because of the very ideals that make them invincible. In most of the other romances both Gawain and Lancelot occupy a prominent position primarily for their chivalric feats in the secular sense: Lancelot's undying devotion to his beloved queen Guinevere and Gawain's appetite for physical action.[21] In the case of the Grail Romances, the same attributes that mark them as outstanding knights are declared to be insufficient and disqualify them from achieving the Grail.

Gawain's proclivity for physical feats has always been one of his more prominent characteristics. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which was completed sometime between 1136 to 1138, reintroduced Gawain to the Norman court and probably influenced Chrétien de Troyes's Arthurian romances, speaks of Gawain as a man of action who leads Arthur's troops to Rome and defeats the Roman Emperor Lucius. Monmouth certainly marks an important stage in the development of the Arthurian legend, but it is most likely that it was the Norman-French reworking of his Latin work around 1155 that further popularized the stories of Arthur and his knights.

[21] *The Legend of the Grail*, Nigel Bryant.

The work in question, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, was not a simple translation of Monmouth's ambitious chronicle. Wace translated the Latin history in a manner which would appeal to the taste of his audience at the Norman court. Hence we are presented with a Gawain who fits into the cultural setting of the court with his leanings towards chivalry and love.[22] However, by the early thirteenth century, sometime before 1207, the story of Gawain once again assumes a more heroic mode. Rather than follow in the courtly style of Wace, Layamon's *Brut*, written in English, is in the alliterative rhythm reminiscent of Old English verse, though with some use of rhyme. The mood of Layamon's *Brut* is also quite different from the original narrative he based his own work on. Wace's rendition of Monmouth's history of the Arthurian stories is for an audience of Norman courtiers, while Layamon, on the other hand, was most likely a priest and he writes for the people who are subjects of the Norman court, in the English language whereas the court spoke French. What is important to my inquiry in all this is the figure of Gawain. Since Layamon's *Brut* is more concerned with war, his Gawain reminds one of the earlier heroes fighting for honour and loyalty. Works such as the *Stanzaic Morte Arthure* and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, which are said to have been written around the same time as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and show signs of their French sources, both depict Gawain with a strong sense of loyalty towards King Arthur. The portrayal of Gawain in the fourteenth-century English romances excluding *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is chivalric in the older sense of the word, before the virtues of military strength and loyalty to one's kin became refined by the more sophisticated demands of courtly conduct and courtly love. The Gawain that we meet in *Sir Gawain*

[22] Elisabeth Brewer, 'Sources 1: The Source of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997, 144.

and the Green Knight is a figure who combines all the characteristics of this later model, indeed specially exemplifies these qualities:

> Now schal we semlych se sleȝtez ofþewez
> And þe tecchelestermes of talking noble,
> Wichspede is in spehevnspurd may we lerne,
> Syn we haffonged þat fine fader of nurture (916-19)
> Everyone at castle Hautdesert claims to have heard of him and
> his courtesy.

This fourteenth-century poem about Gawain's strange adventure at the Green Chapel is preserved in the Cotton Nero manuscript in the British Library. The manuscript contains three other poems: *Purity, Pearl* and *Patience*. There is no mention of an author; in fact, we do not even know if the same person wrote all the poems. But we may deduce from the style of this alliterative romance in the North Midlands dialect that the writer had a good knowledge of the Arthurian stories that were in circulation both in England and in France. The manner in which he presents the theme of the poem suggests a close familiarity with the romance tradition. The poet indicates his familiarity with the conventions of courtesy and courtly love, and also displays an admiration for qualities such as valour and loyalty, qualities that the feudal society considered essential to knighthood and chivalry. Yet the poem also questions these very features that it borrows from the romance tradition that it exemplifies.

Derek Pearsall is partially correct when he says that 'Romance purges life of impurities and presents chivalry in heightened and idealized form.'[23] The medieval romance

[23]Derek Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, 21.

certainly does present chivalry in an idealized manner, as Pearsall claims, but at the same time, it exposes the fissures such idealized expectations open up within the individual. The Arthurian stories were used as much to debate contemporary issues about love, chivalry, violence and religious devotion no less than to present an idealized world. The new chivalry lays more stress on the knight's moral values and private conduct, especially as brought out in relation to his mistress, sometimes almost more than through his loyalty to his feudal lord. This is a point I have argued in my previous analyses dealing with the various romances of Chrétien and Chaucer. The Gawain poet is able to combine all these concerns and questions into his poem, which, though closely connected with the Arthurian chivalric tradition, is also a work that, in its stylistic execution, is completely different from the earlier romances. Similarly, he gives us a protagonist who is an integral part of every form of the Arthurian story, whether in chronicles, courtly romances or the Grail romances; yet in spite of the inter-textual space that the Gawain of this poem shares with the rest of the Arthurian tradition, he stands out because of his unique experience.

Gawain

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight occupies a special position among all Arthurian romances. It is also occupies a special position among all Arthurian romances I have discussed in my earlier chapters, the narrative here is not concerned with a love interest.

In spite of this, it is Gawain's interaction with the female agencies of the poem that tests the limits of his chivalric masculinity.

As affirmed by a large number of critics, the interconnected episodes of the beheading match, the bedroom scene and the exchange of winnings definitely set *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* apart from any other Arthurian romance. My argument is that it is the nature of the tests that Gawain faces once he is at Hautdesert, the castle of the Green Knight, that prepare him for the perception that he finally arrives at. His distinctive experience at the end of the poem makes him an outstanding knight because the experience transforms his understanding of his masculinity: a realization made possible by the kind of interaction, or rather confrontation, that he has with the female agencies of the text. In fact, the ambiguity at the close of the poem is due precisely to the fact that no romance protagonist has questioned the ideals of heroism as Gawain is in a way forced to. Perhaps this is why the poem ends without a clear explanation of the outcome of Gawain's action, as Gawain himself is not able to articulate it as yet, although his disappointment after he learns the truth at the Green Chapel, and his refusal to join in the laughter of the other Arthurian knights, testify to the crisis he undergoes. Gawain's own refusal to join in the camaraderie of the Round Table, which dismisses his "faut" as easily as the Green Knight had done earlier, indicate his own dissatisfaction and desire for change.

The poet begins by relating the Arthurian court to the times when Britain was ruled by the descendants of Aeneas. He tells us that since then, the land has witnessed several wonders such as the one which is the subject of the poem:

Mo ferlyes onþisfoldehan fallen here oft
þen in any oþerþat I wot, synþat ilk tyme...
forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe, (23-27)

We are offered a glimpse of Arthur's court and informed about its fame and Arthur's renown at the beginning of the poem, before the arrival of the Green Knight who taunts the Arthurian knights by calling them 'berdlezchylder' (280). But he too is familiar with the court's reputation. He confirms this himself when he says that it was the fame of the court that drew him there. This is the reason he gives for his wish to test their reputation by proposing a beheading match. Gawain accepts the challenge on behalf of his lord Arthur, reminding the court at large that he being 'þewakkest' (354) should be allowed to take on this challenge since 'Þis is so nysþatnoȝt hit yow falls' (338).But we may assume that Gawain was only being modest and with his famed courtesy when he speaks of himself these terms, whereas in fact he was quite confident about his prowess. Arthur, his court and Gawain himself are certain that they can rely on Gawain's prowess and virtue. Arthur allows him to take up the challenge of defending the honour of Camelot not because Gawain is 'þewakkest' but because, as we learn in the following Fitt, Gawain was the knight who 'watzfundenfautlez in his fyuewytez' (640). The Green Knight had, after all, come to test the self-confidence of the Knights of the Round Table. The confidence that the court places in Gawain's abilities, and the confidence that Gawain himself has in his virtues is subsequently put to test. Later, when Gawain's five virtues falter during his stay at the castle, we find this judgment revised in the poem.

Gawain must present himself at the Green Chapel for the return blow in a year's time. The scene in the second Fitt in which Gawain is shown arming himself in preparation for

the journey elaborates on the ‘fautelez’ virtues that Gawain is reputed to possess. Gawain’s attire and armour seem rather ostentatious: his doublet of rich silk, the leather tunic lined with white fur, the broad steel shoes and the knee pieces which are buckled with gold knots. Even his horse Gryngolet has a visor adorned with expensive gems. The ensuing list of Gawain’s virtues appears somewhat discordant. The five virtues that Gawain is said to practice and epitomize, inner qualities that indicate modesty and humility, here stand juxtaposed with an outward appearance that suggests arrogance and vanity. Gawain’s chivalric masculinity is here reflected both materially, in the details of his dressing and armour, and through the abstract ideals of generosity, fellowship, purity, courtesy and pity; but the two do not comprise an easy relationship. One may also note that none of the virtues mentioned --‘fraunchyse’, ‘felaȝschyp’, ‘clannes’, ‘cortaysye’ and ‘pité’(652-3)– can be considered as exclusively masculine qualities, and pity and purity (clannes)at least are conventionally associated with women. This, along with the discrepancy presented between Gawain’s outward appearance and his inner qualities, complicates our response to Gawain and to the code of chivalry that he exemplifies.

‘As tulk of tale most trwe’[24], says the poet about Gawain. This is said in reference to the symbol of the pentangle which is embedded in Gawain’s shield and armour. The poet links the pentangle to Gawain’s nobility and truthfulness when he speaks of the knight’s interconnected virtues. The five virtues are to be identified with the five angles of the pentangle found on Gawain’s shield. The shield itself, as well as the sign of the pentangle, certainly have religious significance, as the image of the Virgin Mary adorns the other side of the shield; but the ‘trawÞe’ symbolized by the pentangle also implies

[24] Ibid. 638.

loyalty, allegiance and fidelity to one's kin.[25]It must further be understood in the context of the feudal norms to which Gawain, as a knight, has to adhere. The ties of blood which predate the feudal society were replaced by ties of dependence. In order to be effective, such a system of mutual dependence between the orders of society must stress the virtue of fidelity or loyalty.[26]Gawain's idealized masculinity, which is representative of the chivalric attitudes dictated by the norms of a feudal society, must be viewed in this context. The poem emphasizes the importance of the chivalric virtues which highlight his 'trawÞe' because the following Fitts of the poem examine Gawain's fidelity to his knighthood, his pledged word to his host and his integrity to himself. All of these come under pressure once Gawain agrees to the exchange of wagers.

> Quat-so euer I wynne in þe wod hit worþez to yourez,
> And quatchek so ȝeacheue chaunge me þerforne.
> Swete, swap we so, sware with trawþe (1106-8)

According to the wager between Gawain and his host, Bertilak of Hautdesert, Gawain is instructed by his host to spend the next three days indoors while he himself goes out hunting. Gawain is also told that during the absence of the host, the lady of the castle would entertain him. It is in the bedchamber, confronted by the beautiful hostess, that Gawain finds himself most threatened. This requires close attention since it is here, for the first time in this romance, that Gawain, a knight, interacts directly with the female agency of the poem. It needs stressing that this female agency comprises both Morgan le Fay, who has actually designed the entire plan, and Lady Hautdesert, who appears as

[25] Robert. E. Lewis, Middle English Dictionary, Part 9,London: Garland, 1985
[26] Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, Vol 2, trans. L.A. Manyon, London: Routledge, 1978, 213.

Morgan's accomplice (although neither Gawain nor the reader knows that at this point). On the three successive days that the lord hunts for deer, boar and fox, the lady spends each morning trying to seduce Gawain. The juxtaposition of the hunting and seduction scenes has encouraged a variety of interpretations and analysis; the animals hunted-- the deer, the boar and the fox-- may allegorically stand for the flesh, the devil and the world respectively, as represented in popular medieval iconography.[27] According to some, the animals hunted on different days may be compared to Gawain in his growing predicament with the lady in the bedroom; according to others, the host's varied manner of hunting can be compared to the lady's stratagems to lure Gawain. Of the various readings of the hunting scenes presented by critics, I tend to agree with the interpretation offered by Zimmer[28] that the host, in offering the three animals on the three days, is in effect bestowing upon Gawain certain qualities of their nature. I agree with Zimmer's argument because, in a way, Gawain's encounter at the castle confers on him an instinctive sense of survival. This castle that almost appears suddenly from nowhere is also the place from where he must emerge as something more than a conventional knight. However, it is important to note that hunting was an aristocratic pastime, and the game of seduction too may be categorized as an aristocratic activity, especially after courtly love became a formal aspect of the feudal aristocratic culture. The fourteenth-century reader or listener, who would also be primarily from the upper echelons of society, would certainly be familiar with the conventions of love from the popular works of literature that exemplified the rules of the game documented in Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love*. On the first day, the lady tells Gawain:

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[27]See Émile Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, trans. D. Nussey, London: Collins, 1972.
[28] Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse*, 67-95.

> Bot hit arladyesinnoȝeþat leure wer nowþe
> Haf þe, hende, in horholde, as I þe habbe here,
> To daly with derely your dayntewordez (1251-3)

It is with 'dayntewordez' that she dallies with the knight, reversing the roles assigned by Capellanus in his book about courtly love. We find Gawain on the defensive, just as the women were supposed to be in Capellanus' dialogues. When the two of them are alone, the lady informs Gawain that she has locked the door and that the servants are asleep. Her playful speech is full of ambiguity:

> ȝear welcum to my cors,
> Yowreawen won to wale,
> Me behouez of fine force
> Your seruant be, and schale. (1236-40)

The lady teases Gawain by saying that he is surely not the man 'þat al lykez'; for had he been the paragon of chivalry that he was famed to be, he would definitely have at least kissed her by now. 'Bot þat ȝe be Gawan, hit gotz in mynde' (1293). The lady is able to manipulate the situation and cleverly baits him by casting doubts on his courtesy. Courtesy as a concept of refined behaviour had, since the later twelfth century, been an essential component of knighthood. The practice of courteous behaviour incorporated multiple ideas aptly described by A.C. Spearing as

> a single, immensely rich complex of ideas and feelings, which is capable of specialization in any of a number of directions- towards heavenly grace, towards a politeness which shows

> itself in courteous speech and deference to ladies, towards elegant seduction and love-making. [29]

The lady obviously uses 'cortaysye' in the sense of 'elegant seduction and love-making', whereas Gawain's behaviour displays a different aspect of courtesy; he is splendidly skilful in 'courteous speech and deference to ladies'[30]. By using such a courteous stance Gawain is able to carefully counter the lady's flirtatious motives. He accepts what the lady has to say but at the same time coyly dismisses any claim to such a reputation. The scene offers some amount of humor as one sees Gawain behaving more and more like a damsel trying to fend off a suitor's unwanted attention, but he is finally able to get away only after she has extracted a kiss from him. The tension and ambiguity between the different interpretations of the ideal of courtesy that Gawain and the lady seem to have in mind opens up a contradiction at the very heart of the chivalric tradition itself.

On the second morning, the lady again teases Gawain, saying, 'Sir, ȝifȝe be Wawen, wonder me þynkez' (1481), implying that Gawain does not meet the expectations of 'cortaysye', and questions 'Why! Arȝelewed, þat alle þe los weldez?' (1528) She says she had expected to learn of 'sum tokenez of trwelufcraftes' from him. Gawain, who is not ignorant of this aspect of courtesy, very cleverly and politely says that she, the lady, knows far more of such art than him: 'Of þat art, bi Þe half, or a hundredth of seche/ As I am' (1543). Here, Gawain's commitment to 'cortaysye' cannot be doubted, since a few lines earlier, when the lady boldly tells Gawain that he was strong enough to take her by force, he replies that force of such kind was against the rules of his land. The playful

[29] A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study*, Cambridge University Press, 1970, 200.
[30] Quoted from Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study*.

conversation between the two quite sufficiently brings out the imprecise nature of the concept of courtesy: she is employing one version of courtesy, the social practice of elegant seduction, to get Gawain in trouble, and he is adhering to another version, deference to ladies, to stay out of trouble. She is employing the social stance of the courtly lover whereas Gawain's is expressing the personal sense of honour, of being noble. Here Gawain is not really faced with a moral dilemma, even if one were to view the situation in the perspective of traditions of sexual hospitality. It 'is taken for granted' that 'he should not commit adultery,'[31] moreover the poem too is clear that 'He cared for his cortaysye, lest craþayn he were(1773)'. The ambiguous circumstances presented in the temptation scene have been examined by various critics over the years, and its background, its nature and its importance have been discussed and debated quite exhaustively.[32] My argument, however, hinges on the interplay of 'cortaysye' and 'traþwe', a quality symbolized by the pentangle mentioned earlier and a virtue Gawain epitomizes. I wish to examine how Gawain relates these concepts to the idea of chivalry, both before and after this extremely significant dalliance with hostess in the bedchamber.

The third and final visit of the lady to Gawain's bedchamber is important because it is here that Gawain is caught off-guard. On the earlier two occasions, during the provocative flirtations of Lady Hautdesert, Gawain had seemed awkward but well in control, matching her in banter. On the third morning, the lady presents Gawain with a girdle which, she says, could protect his life. This comes at a time when we have already

[31] J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, 96.
[32] Lawrence Warner, 'Mary, Unmindful of Her Knight: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Tradition of Sexual Hospitality', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013) 263-87.

been told by the poet that Gawain slept like a man with heavy thoughts since ‘þat destine schlde þat day dele hym his wyrde’ (1752). It must be noted that before the lady offers Gawain the girdle, he had already refused the expensive ring she first offered him, saying that he could not accept a gift from her since he had none to give in return. He does not accept the girdle immediately either, and the lady does question him because it was ‘simple in hitself’. Gawain finally takes the girdle only when he learns that it will protect him, viewing it as ‘a juel for þe joparde þat hymiugged were’ (1856).

As I have recounted above, there is a range of suggestive parallels between the hunting of animals by the host and the hunting-like activities carried out by the hostess during her three morning visits to Gawain’s bedroom. The pledge taken about the exchange of winnings between the host and Gawain is what links the two actions of the plot, and it is this wager that is the deciding factor in the poem’s final outcome. According to the agreement, Gawain, who is to remain indoors and be entertained by the hostess, must present the host whatever he has earned at the castle during the day, and the host in turn would give Gawain whatever he gains from the hunt. On the first two days, the host gifts Gawain the doe and the boar that he has hunted in the forest, while Gawain, in return, and bestows the kisses he received from the lady on the host’s cheeks. On the host’s questioning as to how Gawain received these kisses, Gawain tactfully replies: ‘þat watz not forward’, because ‘Forȝehaf tanþat yow tydez, trawe non oþer/ȝemowe’ (1395-7). On the third occasion, Gawain does not relinquish the green silk girdle to the host as he should have according to his pledge. The host, however, keeps his side of the promise and gives Gawain the fox which he has hunted that day. In return, Gawain gives the host

only a kiss but not the girdle, which he knew would protect his life, and it is for this failing that he is later delivered a cut on his neck by the Green Knight. The lady had earlier 'begged him' to keep the girdle a secret:

> And biso3thym, for hir sake, disceuer hit neuer,
> Bot to lellylaynefrohir lorde; þe leudehymacordez
> Þat neuerwy3eschulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne
> For no3te; (1862-65)

Is Gawain then being discreet or indiscreet in not returning the girdle? Certainly, he accepts it in the first place only to protect his life from the impending axe stroke from the hands of 'an aghlichmayster' who is described as half a giant. Faced with such an adversary, must Gawain present his neck and take a stroke without availing of all possible means to protect himself? Surely, even a knight of Gawain's prowess would hesitate to put himself in such a position. Moreover, taking the girdle from the lady also entailed that he could not speak about it to anyone, including the host. In other words, Gawain is completely trapped: he must have the girdle to protect his life, but possessing it entails being dishonest to either the lady or his host. He must compromise his 'trawþe' in one way or the other, or surely die. Gawain's dilemma during this entire scene reveals the fragile base on which chivalry is founded. One understands the enormity of Gawain's dilemma when we consider that the version of 'courtesy' he had earlier advocated before the lady had seemed a virtuous idea compatible with 'trawþe'. The fact that they finally prove incompatible might tell against the validity of either 'cortaysye' (since Gawain has to either deceive his host or disobey his hostess) or 'trawþe', as it becomes contingent on the demands of 'cortaysye', or possibly both. The entangled concepts of 'cortaysye' and

‘trawþe’ appear untenable, offering no help but instead aggravating Gawain’s predicament.

The episodes in the bedchamber and the connected hunt are also, in a sense, a ‘teaching’, an initiation during which Gawain must learn that there are areas beyond the grasp of the five virtues and that one’s actions do not always have straightforward results. In the bedchamber, Gawain successfully wards off the advances of the lady, but we learn later that her advances were in fact another ruse, just as the beheading game will prove to be at the end. Gawain, in this poem, confronts something far more complicated than just a carnal dilemma in the bedroom and a putative test of his valour at the Green Chapel. His experience at the castle is not only unexpected but unique, being as it is a complex personal encounter between three individuals at many levels, not a love triangle and certainly not a sexual arrangement. The events can also be taken as two separate series of encounters, between Gawain and Bertilac and Gawain and the lady, with a third in the background between Bertilac and his lady. Morgan le Fay lurks behind all these relationships. Gawain’s encounters with Bertilac and the lady constitute two separate and conflicting strands. In both cases, he is operating at an extremely individual level. Both in taking the girdle from the lady and then concealing it from his host, Gawain is not following any code of conduct. There seems to be no code that he could follow: he is quite literally clueless. He accepts the girdle and also breaks his promise to his host, and for this breach of faith, the Green Knight delivers him a scratch on his neck. It is the physical equivalent of the mark on his integrity when he resorted to falsehood. On

realizing how he has been betrayed by his fear of death and desire for survival, Gawain is overcome with grief and shudders inwardly:

> That al he schrank for shame that the schak talked
> The forme words upon folde that the frekenelde
> 'Corsed worth cowarddyse and couetyseboþe!
> In yow is vylany and vyse þat virtue disstryez.' (2372-75)

The poem reaches its logical end with the return of Gawain to Arthur's court. Camelot rightly rejoice sat and celebrates Gawain's return since he has completed the adventure that began at the start of the poem, yet we may wonder whether anyone--the poem's audience, the knights at court or Gawain himself-- expected such an ending. The narrative voice of the poem is, however, absolutely clear that this *is* the end of the poem and the adventure it narrated:

> Þus in Arthurus day þis aunterbitidde,
> Þe Brutus bokez þerofwyttenesse;
> Syþen Brutus, þe boldeburne, boȝed hider first,
> After þe segge and þe assutewatzsesed at Troye,
> Iwysse,
> Monyaunterez here-biforne
> Haf fallen sucheer þis.
> Now þat bere þe croun of þorne,
> He bringvus to his blysse! Amen (2522-30)

The poet rounds up the poem with the mention of Brutus and the siege of Troy, just as he had begun it in the first Fitt. The maxim at the end, 'Honysoyt qui mal pence', is a Latin phrase meaning, 'It would be shameful to think ill'. The inclusion of this maxim may

have been the work of the scribe rather than the poet himself, nonetheless, it seems to warn us against presuming anything else about the conclusion of the adventure, since this maxim was also inscribed around the shields bearing the coat of arms of the Knights of the Garter. The maxim then seems to endorse the chivalry displayed by Gawain in the poem. After all, the Most Noble Order of the Garter was established by Edward III around 1348, only a few decades before the poem, and was the most esteemed order of chivalry. Yet, in spite of the poem's connection with the legend of Brutus and its suggestive references to chivalry by using the motto of the Garter, the reader, especially the modern reader, may indeed question the outcome of Gawain's adventure. Nor is such questioning not simply read into Gawain's conduct by the reader. Gawain himself, as my following arguments may bear out, seems to be having similar qualms. What is significant is that a single adventure is shown to produce such varying conclusions. The Arthurian court to which Gawain returns after the adventure at the Green Chapel completely dismisses Gawain's fault; instead, they rejoice at the knight's return after having completed the adventure. Bertilak acknowledges that Gawain 'lakked a lyttel'(2366)by first taking the girdle from his wife and then not exchanging it as promised, but does not think it to be a serious transgression, so that he can proclaim Gawain to be the 'þe fautlestfreke'(2364). Bertikak concludes:

> ...and sothly me þynkkez
> On þe fautlestfreke þat euer on foteȝede;
> As perle bi þe quite pese is of prys more,
> So is Gawayn, in god fyth, bi oþer gay knyȝtez. (2363-65)

Gawain, however, views his own conduct far more seriously and says that now he was 'fawty and falce, and ferdehaf ben euer/ Of treachery and vntraþwe'(2382-3). The different verdicts given by the court, by Bertilak and by Gawain himself make it difficult to arrive at a conclusion on Gawain's actions in the poem. Nor does it help the reader in any way to guess the poet's intention -- that is, if he had one. As J.J. Anderson says:

> The poet lets the three judgments, that 'Gawain has failed in part', 'Gawain has failed completely', and 'Gawain has not failed at all', stand against each other, and gives no sign as to which one we should accept. Critics have shown that any one of the three may be justified as the right one, depending on the way we read the poem. But the fact that the poet gives no guidance in the matter suggests that he does not intend us to see one of the judgments as carrying more weight than the others, but rather wants us to weigh the issues for ourselves: he presents alternatives for us to consider.[33]

Indeed, the poem does present us with different alternatives to consider, and by doing so, lays bare a new range of characteristics that define heroic masculinity and, further, question and problematize it.

It has been said [34]about the knight who is a romance protagonist that he journeys towards a realization of selfhood. I have shown in my previous chapters how various knights move towards this realization by negotiating the tensions evoked by the dictates of an idealized sense of heroism, which by the twelfth century came to be embodied in the

[33]J.J. Anderson, 'The Three Judgments and the Ethos of Chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', The Chaucer Review*, Vol 24 No 4 (Spring, 1990), 339.

[34] See Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse*.

concept of chivalry. In my previous chapters, particularly that on Chrétien de Troyes, I have discussed how the martial aspects of chivalry come into conflict with the ideals of love endorsed by the same society. I argue that the pressures exerted on the individual by the overlapping of values, societal expectations and their own newly discovered awareness compel the knight to forge a new kind of masculinity. The process of self-formation, or rather re-formation, is nowhere more visible than in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This is so because the author has given us a heightened sense of Gawain's dilemma. Gawain's battle with his emotions, his moral bearings and his psychological fear of the impending beheading match, where *he* will have to lay down his head, is palpable. The intensity of this scene, that takes place at the Green Chapel, is primarily the result of the fact that this test happens indoors, within the bedroom, in privacy. Moreover, the moment of crisis is not as well defined in most romances as it is here. In *The Knight of the Cart,* Lancelot's hesitation before entering the cart could have been taken as the moment of crisis, but its split-second nature and Lancelot's almost instantaneous decision to ride the cart averts any major new self-awareness or self-discovery. His devotion to the queen and the love he has for her do not have any severe consequences in Chrétien's narration of their story. Perhaps that is the reason for the incomplete nature of the romance: Chrétien could not or did not know how to reconcile the demands of martial valour and feudal class identity with the expectations of courtly love. In later versions of the story, especially in the French romance cycles and right up to Malory, we see how Lancelot's assertion of his love for the queen over his allegiance to chivalric ideals results in the dissolution of the Round Table itself. A similar moment of crisis is witnessed in Chaucer's *The Franklin's Tale*, where we find that Arveragus is not able to resolve his

dilemma, but the catastrophe is somehow averted. In the case of Gawain in this poem, the quandary that he has to negotiate begins with the lady's entering his bedroom in line 1186 of the third Fitt and continues till line 2428 of the fourth Fitt, where Gawain blames women for mistakes made by men worthier than him:

> And alleþay were biwyled
> With wymmenþatþayvsed (2424-25)

These lines have been read as Gawain's misogynist diatribe,[35]couched in the 'encoding of received wisdom',[36] since most of the readers as well as Gawain would be familiar with diatribes on this subject in sermons or homiletic works. But the total thematic context of this poem moves far beyond this conventional misogyny. The lady has in fact helped Gawain arrive at a greater awareness of himself. She has not led him astray, as the conventional misogynic interpretation would suggest. She does seem to be aware that her conduct towards Gawain will have the consequences that result, although the issue is left tantalizingly open. The lady does not simply wish to seduce Gawain, but uses her influence over him to lead him to a more inclusive understanding of things. In fact, only a few lines earlier, Gawain had already acknowledged his indiscretion:

> Now am I fawty and falce, and ferdehaf ben euer
> Of trecherye and vutrawþe (2382-83)

But the moral and psychological outcome of the crisis Gawain experiences is still more forceful than this confession couched in conventional terms might make us think. It

[35]Catherine Batt, 'Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, the Pentangle, and Narrative Space', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol 22 (1992) 117-139.
[36]Ibid., 137.

results in Gawain's broader understanding of life and values and, no less, of his masculine identity as shaped and defined by the feminine. He may not spell it out in words, but his decision to wear the girdle as a symbol of his fault does indicate the lasting impact left on him by the lady, the awakened consciousness she arouses in him. The encounters between Gawain and the lady take place outside the conventional masculine code of chivalry, unlike the male-to-male bargain between Gawain and Bertilac; but that too acquires a whole new dimension in juxtaposition with the bedroom narrative. The consequences of the bargain between the two males is newly defined by Gawain's parallel transactions with the lady.

The games in which Gawain is implicated at the castle expose the vulnerability and inadequacy of the ideal of masculinity that Gawain, as a knight, must emulate. I may briefly revert again to Lancelot's momentary dilemma in Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Cart* when he hesitates before jumping into the cart in order to save the queen. But Lancelot's hesitation breaks only a subtle code of chivalric love. Gawain's situation reflects a more crucial moral conflict, involving such fundamental issues as love of life and the desire to protect it, as well as one's duty towards one's host, all of which demand a more basic integrity and 'trawþe'.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the strand of action that takes place in the castle -- the scenes in the bedchamber in particular -- are crucial because it is there that the knight comes into contact with the feminine sector of experience. Gawain's encounter with the woman introduces a completely new dimension to his understanding of values, conduct and indeed himself. In the many adventures that make up Gawain's celebrated career as a

knight, even those he undergoes in this poem before he arrives at the castle, Gawain could rely on the five virtues that made him an exceptional knight. The adversaries he fought prior to meeting the lady in his bedroom were forces that he was familiar with. The poem mentions dragons, wolves, bulls and bears among his adversaries; we might include his encounter with the Green Knight at the beginning of the poem. Although the Green Knight is an unusual opponent throwing out a bizarre challenge, what he proposes is a variant on the customary feats of valour. Gawain has to face something very different during his stay at the castle and his dealings with the lady of the castle. This woman is not simply a conventional counter in a courtly love situation, like Guinevere in *The Knight of the Cart*; she is an individual with a personality of her own, even if manipulated by her husband or Morgan le Fay: she presents Gawain with a very original kind of encounter to which none of the conventional responses apply. Gawain is thus required to work out a response all by himself, conduct himself by his individual understanding of an unprecedented situation. Perhaps for the first time in his chivalric career, he is on his own.

Here lies the special importance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There is no other knight in the Arthurian corpus who engages as intimately as Gawain does with the female 'other', at least not at the level that Gawain does in this poem. Needless to say, many (perhaps most) Arthurian romances recount the knights' sexual encounters at greater or lesser length; some also speak of sexual temptations the knights ward off or succumb to. Some French romances of the thirteenth century even present Gawain as a rakish

character.[37]He faces a precarious situation in *Le Chevalier L'èpèe*: in this romance, he is threatened by a sword above his head while he is trying his best to resist his host's beautiful, and naked, daughter.[38]But in all such cases, the encounters with female sexuality do not have the same consequences for either plot or character as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In this poem, the unfolding action of the plot depends upon Gawain's acts of omission as well as commission in the bedchamber. Of course the poem owe a general debt to almost everything Arthurian that has come before it, but there is no Arthurian source available for the exchange of winnings motif and its link with the temptations in the bedroom.[39]Again, though Gawain's practice of chivalry as a whole comes under scrutiny, the questions raised here are more at the level of personal or individual ethics, outside the usual compass of chivalric concerns. In this poem, the knight is drawn beyond the conventional ethics of feudal chivalry and courtly love onto a new plane of personal conduct and code of values.

'Cowarddyse' and 'couetyse', or fear and desire, says Gawain, are responsible for ruining his virtue. The interrelation of desire and fear is significant, and the agent who brings about this understanding is a woman. It may be added that although it is Morgan le Fay who has ultimately put together the entire plot to test the valour of Gawain and indeed of Arthur's court, we see and understand her plan through the workings of lady Hautdesert. The association she shares with Gawain is exceptionally intimate. It is not a sexual liaison although there is an obvious undercurrent of sexual attraction that the lady holds

[37]See Ad Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the French Arthurian Romance*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
[38]Elisabeth Brewer, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Sources and Analogues*, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1992, 109-12.
[39]J.A. Burrow, 'The Fourteenth Century Arthur' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 80.

for Gawain. Instead, she relates to Gawain as the source of his personal and moral transformation and self-understanding. In no other romance, even till the time of Malory, is one likely to come across such a female agency, who influences the knight positively and intimately at the same time. Chrétien, indeed, presents a notion of chivalry that is open to question, largely through the introduction of female characters. Enide, in his *Erec and Enide*, does to an extent lead Erec to discover his true calling of chivalry, but her role in the tale does not lead Erec to question the code of chivalry in any serious way. Subsequent romances, too, often lay bare the tensions that exist between chivalry and love; but nowhere do we find such a profound questioning of chivalric values. The impact made by the lady of the castle on Gawain in the final episode of the poem is unprecedented in romance literature.

To return again to *The Knight of the* Cart, it is true that Queen Guinevere has a similar influence on Lancelot as he strives to be the best knight in her service; but their association does not bring about any new realization in Lancelot as happens in the case of Gawain in the present poem. Both Lancelot and Guinevere are basically attuned to the code of chivalry and the conventions of courtly love. In the only instance when they pose a threat to the code of chivalry, in Malory's work, they bring about a sense of disintegration rather than transformation. Such instances point to the deficiencies at the heart of conventional chivalry and courtly love. In Malory's *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*, Isode the Fair may be said to have a positive or self-enhancing influence on two knights, but definitely not of the kind found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The knight Palomides, who is a Saracen, constantly woos Isolde but is always rejected by her;

in the end, he seeks to convert to Christianity in the hope of pleasing Isolde. Her association with Tristram, though adulterous, is also positive, since it is her magic which can heal any bleeding wound that Tristram suffers. Finally, when King Mark takes her away from the forest where she had lived with Tristram, and Tristram is wounded, Isolde sends him a message that he should marry Isolde le Blaunche Maynes of Brittany. This is because Isolde from Brittany too is able to heal Tristram's bleeding. Malory tells us that Tristram agrees to marry the other Isolde, but could not consummate the marriage since he still loved Isolde the Fair of Ireland:

> And other chere made he none but with clyppnge and kyssyng. As for other fleshelylustys, sir Trystrames had never ado with her: suchemencionmakyth the Frenyshebooke.[40]

Malory, as we know, made use of Arthurian sources from France as well as England to compile his narrative. Here, he explicitly cites a French source rather than his indigenous tradition. This alone indicates the exceptional nature of the intimacy that takes place between the lady of the castle and Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Earlier, when Gawain prepares to ride out in search of the Green Knight, it seems to him, the court and the reader that he is well guarded by his weapons and his horse, and that his virtues will never fail him. His success seems near-certain. Morgan le Fay has, however, planned the knight's adventure in such a way so as to expose the limits of heroism in both Gawain and Arthur's court. The poem seems to be emphasizing what Gawain lacks rather than what he excels in. But it also shows his ability to realize that he lacks something: the

[40] Malory, *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 273.

subtlety of his engagement with himself indicates a new kind of virtue, a refinement of understanding or 'internal heroism' that is a new landmark in the development of the courtly-chivalric convention. He is not simply discredited at the end of the poem; rather, he is set up as an estimable character in a new, subtler way.

Morgan's stratagem is designed not just to show the limitations of the code or codes practiced by the Arthurian court[41] but, more appropriately, to allow Gawain to acknowledge the existence of fear, failure and falsehood, which makes for a richer validation of his humanity. The green girdle becomes a token of 'þefaut and þefayntyse of þeflesche crabbed' (2435), which he says will remind him of his failings whenever he rides out in triumph. By wearing the girdle as his new talisman, Gawain is accepting the duality or even multiplicity of his life and world. He is not rejecting the pentangle, the court or the Virgin Mary. But his experience in the castle of the Green Knight and the self-discovery that follows, an experience explicitly of 'Cowarddyse and couetyse', makes for a fuller and profounder compound with the former range of virtues. This is what truly makes him a pearl that 'quite pese is of prys more'(2364) as the Green Knight says of Gawain, setting him apart from the other knights in Arthur's court. This awareness of the intricate relationship between the various and opposing aspects of the human condition, especially the knightly condition, is what makes Gawain truly unique, not just in this poem but in the entire Arthurian corpus: this is the understanding that Morgan initiates. The manipulative 'games' designed by her and executed by the lady of

[41] See Piotr Sadowski, *The Knight on his Quest: Symbolic Patterns of Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, London: University of Delaware Press, 1996.

the castle lead Gawain to ultimately question the idea of chivalric masculinity or 'heroism' as accepted by the Arthurian court.

Gawain's extraordinary encounter at Castle Hautdesert is a stratagem designed by Morgan le Fay who had sent Bertilak de Hautdesert to Arthur's court just as she had plotted everything else that followed. It is through this design worked by female agencies that Gawain learns about 'villainy' and 'vise', of how 'Cowardice and counties' are as much a part of his masculinity as are the other qualities enforced by the chivalric code. Gawain emerges transformed after his unique experience. He is no way, especially now, 'a cardboard figure, or the somewhat ridiculous other of all knightly adventure', as Haidu disparagingly views him.[42] His decision to continue wearing the 'blykkande belt' (2485) implies a sense of individuality that separates him from all other knights. It is true that the Arthurian court readily appropriates the girdle as a mark of solidarity, but the awareness arising from the experience of the 'Crystemasgomen' is something exclusive to Gawain. Gawain does not wear the girdle for the same reason as the other knights of the Round Table. He tells the Green Knight that he will wear it for 'þisluf-lace schalleþe my hert' (2438). This humility to accept imperfection is what makes Gawain's journey from 'trawþe' to 'faut' so compellingly real, even modern.

The poem begins in the midst of a conventional chivalric society of the kind that gave shape to the values and systems of European feudalism. But by the middle of the poem, we find that the ideals foisted by the chivalric society seem incomplete, even inept. Gawain, who begins his journey as a representative of this society, is recognized and

[42]Peter Haidu, *Subject Medieval /Modern: Text and Governance in the Middle Ages,* Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004, 100.

celebrated as an epitome of chivalric masculinity when he enters the castle. His subsequent experience and the knowledge he eventually gains direct him towards a more expansive masculinity. The final temptation scene, when he is offered the green girdle, brings him face to face with the question of survival, and it is his final meeting with the Green Knight at the Green Chapel that reveals to him what survival truly entails. He now grows aware, for the first time perhaps, of the artificial and fragile nature of the conventions that have so far governed his actions and personality. Now that he is conscious of the far more complex nature of reality, and witnessed how limited his five virtues are, he cannot laugh along with the other knights of Arthur's court, as that would be to trivialize his experience. Gawain at this point has come to accept that 'faut' is now, and perhaps always was, part of his 'trawþe'. It is this realization and this acceptance that singles him out from his peers of the Arthurian court and of the romance tradition. He now comes across as an individual, indeed a pearl that 'quite pese is of prys more' (2364).

Like the twelfth-century romances by Chrétien de Troyes, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* venerates as well as undercuts the chivalric ethos, but in a different way. We are presented with a picture of knighthood that is vying with the often contradictory norms of the aristocratic feudal society. The conflicts and contradictions in Chretien's knights arose from within the chivalric code; those in Gawain place the chivalric code against a more inclusive understanding of life. Chrétien's works, in particular, can sometimes expose the limits of the stereotypical masculinity of the chivalric code. In the figure of Gawain as presented in this poem, we find a knight who, as a result of his encounter with

feminine agencies, stands on the brink of a more dynamic and practicable masculinity to replace the romanticized heroic ideal.

Conclusion

This dissertation traces the process of change in the perception as well the construction of the masculinity of the warrior-knight during the later Middle Ages, using works of earlier date to bring out the change. My study involves the examination of a number of English romances, of the fourteenth century, and also considers some works from French literature of the twelfth century, chiefly the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. The aim was to examine the relative contribution of various factors to bringing about a broader and more flexible understanding of the masculinity of the knight-warrior. The socio-political causes that result in the evolution of a new idea of knighthood have been recognized and discussed by a number of scholars; hence my focus has been on the growing importance of women characters in the romances, and how the interaction between them and the concerned knights brings about a re-structuring of the latter's masculinity. Each of these knights tries to re-structure himself in response to the changing expectations demanded of him in a new socio-cultural milieu. Such re-shaping of the knight's personality is necessitated, I argue, to accommodate a new dimension of his personality resulting from his association with the female characters he comes to encounter. In this way, the knight is seen to be re-negotiating his masculinity.

In *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland*, I identify certain core values of a pre-feudal martial society that remain important components of the knightly code in the following centuries. I particularly emphasize the qualities of loyalty and sense of honour, or nobility in action, that are noteworthy traits in both Byrhtnoth and Roland. These principles are so important that they must be asserted even to apparent excess

(Byrhtnoth's *ofermode* and Roland's *démesure*), leading in both cases to the defeat and death of the heroes and their followers. The events commemorated in the two poems are separated by nearly two centuries; moreover, they belong to completely different socio-historical communities and adopt different historical perspectives; but the values are equally important in both. The societies of both Byrhtnoth and Roland uphold loyalty and honour, and these become the most memorable and exemplary characteristics of the hero of the early feudal age. I also draw attention to the point that these virtues that link the two hero-warriors to the Teutonic ethos of the early Middle Ages in a general way.

From the late eleventh century, however, we find a very different notion of heroic masculinity starting to emerge. The later Middle Ages, or the period now recognized as the second feudal age, forms the backdrop of the chapters that discuss major romances from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. My analysis centres round the manner in which these romances present the figure of the knight, his engagement with the much more diverse and complex code of conduct that has by now become a condition of his knighthood, and the way he must further remould these codes to arrive at a viable relationship with the female characters who, for the first time, play an in increasingly important part in the narrative. Through such examination, I try to understand the reasons behind the change in the notion of heroic masculinity over these centuries.

My contention is that in romance literature from the twelfth century onwards, the knights present a set of very different models of heroic masculinity. Collectively as well as individually, they bear out a notion of masculinity which is multi-dimensional as opposed to the uncomplicated one-dimensional masculinity of the earlier warrior-heroes. The key

factor responsible for this change is the changing concept of chivalry, a code of conduct that has by now become an integral aspect of knighthood, indeed creating the figure of the knight out of the warrior of earlier times. Further, the code of chivalry is found to be at odds with another code, that of courtly love, though the latter is actually an extension of the chivalric code itself. The discrepancy is brought to the fore most prominently in the knight's interaction with the women characters who, by now, represent a considerable force in the narrative. It is the knight's relationship with one or more women, his beloved or perhaps some other lady whom he encounters (as Gawain does), that transforms him. The hero-warrior has to reorient his understanding of things, resulting in a complex and dynamic masculinity.

In my chapter on the romances of Chrétien de Troyes from the late twelfth century, I have tried to explain how the new concepts of chivalry, courtesy and courtly love create a totally new mental world for the knight. This is further complicated by the presence of female characters with whom the knights have to engage in a prescribed manner dictated by the new tenets which are part of his socio-cultural environment. The chapter on certain key works by Chaucer takes my argument closer to this new reality that the knights have to encounter. Chrétien's knights do are more sustainably engaged in chivalric activities such as jousts and tournaments; while the knights in these works by Chaucer also undertake such activities, their feats are reported rather than depicted, except in the case of Palamon and Arcite – who fight each other for the sake of love. As this indicates, physical engagements *per se* are no longer at the heart of their experience as knights, nor are such engagements the focus of the plot. The main content of the narrative has now

shifted to their experience vis-à-vis a female, not a male counterpart. It would not be entirely wrong to refer to the women in the narratives as 'opponents', since the relationship between the knights and their ladies, at least in the romances I consider, is often one of contention or at least negotiation; but then again, 'opponent' would imply a degree of aggression which the women characters do not show evidence of– in fact, in most cases they are in love with the male heroes. The knights are challenged at a more interiorized level by the ladies with whom they share a relationship, and the narratives are concerned with the course of this relationship between the knight and his lady. It is this interaction that, I argue, gives shape to a new, more fluid and dynamic concept of masculinity.

In my reading of Chrétien de Troyes, I have discussed the manner in which the chivalric hero is presented. I examine how, even at this early stage of development of the new concept of chivalry, the experiences of Chrétien's knights reveal the limitations of this social code. Knights like Yvain and Lancelot are specially found to stumble in their effort to find a balance between the practice of chivalry and the demands of love. It is possible that the sub-titles of the two romances, *The Knight with the Lion* and *The Knight of the Cart*, suggest a dichotomy or a splitting of identity resulting from the counter-pulls at work upon the two protagonists. The 'lion' and the 'cart' are not part of the courtly culture of this feudal community. In a way, both Yvain, in naming himself the Knight with the Lion, and Lancelot in being named the Knight of the Cart, demonstrate their fractured identities; and in both cases, this change in name and even identity (especially in the case of Yvain) happens as a result of their love for a lady. Their role as lovers and

their commitment as knights seem to pull them in different directions. Their predicaments expose the overall weakness and contradictions of the societal norms the knights must adhere to: we realize that although the notion of chivalry comprises the idea of courtly love as well, the two practices are not really compatible. This incompatibility or inconsistency between the two codes, that between them define the masculinity of the knight, becomes even more apparent when one considers the incomplete state of *The Knight of the Cart*. It is often presumed that Chrétien abandoned this romance half-way for others to finish because he was unable to resolve the conflict between Lancelot's love for the queen and his duties as Arthur's knight. Perhaps the problems in trying to balance these two equally demanding components of chivalry on a secular plane is what led Chrétien to give his next romance, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*, a completely different spiritual and religious orientation.

Two centuries later, in the romances written by Chaucer, the discrepancies within the ideals of chivalry are further revealed. The changes affecting the feudal structure of the society, and new cultural and intellectual changes in the fourteenth century, may be considered as factors making for a still more complex figure of the knight in these romances. In the presentation of female characters too, we find that the women now occupy a larger narrative space. More importantly, it is the manner in which the women characters are presented that has a direct effect on the personality of the knight. Criseyde and Dorigen are much more active characters than the women in Chrétien's romances, with far more influence on the outcome of the action, although neither of their tales reaches a satisfying resolution. Troilus' love and devotion for Criseyde turns him into a

lover who not only uses the new language of love to express his emotions, but seems just as comfortable in the role of a lover as of a warrior, indeed with detrimental effects on his martial career. However, it is Criseyde's 'betrayal', a circumstance that the convention of love does not address, that exposes the inadequacy of his mental resources. Similarly, Arveragus' inability to satisfactorily balance the demands of chivalry and courtly love makes one question the manner in which *The Franklin's Tale* ends. There is no clear resolution of the problem, just a contrived conclusion.

Chaucer's romances expose the untenable nature of knightly conventions, revealing the inadequacy and artificiality of the chivalric code of conduct. The nature of chivalry itself was in crisis at the time, as the feudal structure had begun to disintegrate. This, in turn, affects the ideal of knighthood, which had hitherto been protected by the hierarchical structure of feudal society. By the fourteenth century, knighthood had begun to lose its social relevance. As a consequence, the code of chivalry also became less relevant to the ethos of the age. But I also argue for more radical influences that transform the personality of the knight. From this time onwards, that is the closing decades of the fourteenth century, the chivalric ideal grows more private and individualistic, no longer primarily a socially-validated ideal. The dilemma faced by Arveragus relates to this new interiorized chivalry. Arveragus' concern for protecting his honour is not primarily in relation to society. His 'honour' is a personal ideal of nobility and good faith: he is concerned about keeping his word to his wife and also his wife's word given to Aurelius. What creates an impasse is that trying to uphold one kind of honour places another kind in jeopardy.

In the case of Gawain, this highly personalized version of chivalry takes on a still deeper connotation of personal worth. His chivalry in the older sense of the word – that is to say, martial prowess and the code of conduct associated with it – is never questioned, but his encounters with the lady in the bedchamber, followed by the revelations at the Green Chapel, lead him to question the nature of the chivalry that he has followed so far. At the end of the poem, Gawain seems to arrive at an understanding of the fragile nature of the knightly ideal that governs his conduct. Back at Arthur's court, his questioning of his own 'worth' leaves him unable to join in the camaraderie of his fellow knights. He does not accept the Green Knight's absolution, nor is he comfortable with the relaxed complacence of the court. He must evaluate his conduct in terms defined by his own experience of things. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the change in the idea of heroic masculinity takes a further turn. Gawain's experience incorporates all the factors that had transformed the knights discussed earlier, but the outcome of that experience is very different, affording no satisfactory conclusion. We may find a partial parallel in the dilemma faced by Arveragus in *The Franklin's Tale*, where too we may not be entirely satisfied by the resolution reached. In Gawain's case, we can reach no resolution at all. There are varying *understandings* of his situation: Bertilak's, the Arthurian knights' and Gawain's own. Each of these conclusions is as valid as the others; but by that very token, they are all incomplete, allowing us to reach no conclusion at all.

Gawain, in this poem, is different from the knights of the other romances in a still profounder respect. The conduct and experiences of the other knights reveal to us, at varying levels, the contradictions and inadequacies of the chivalric code of conduct;

Gawain's singularity lies in that he alone recognizes and questions these contradictions and inadequacies. Moreover, Gawain's experience at the castle of The Green Knight is the most prominent example of another very important factor that I have indicated earlier: the role of women in these narratives. Here there is a woman behind a woman, Morgan le Fay behind Bertilac's lady. Interestingly, Gawain does not have a relationship of love with either woman. Instead, they play a controlling part in his experiences in completely different ways, posing new challenges to the other value systems that the knight is expected to follow. These new tensions compel Gawain to seek a different, more inclusive expression of his masculinity.

It would indeed be anachronistic to raise the question of gender with respect to the two works treated in my first chapter: both Bryhtnoth and Roland belong to a social context which is dominantly male, and we see them only on the battlefield. Their masculinity is not tested or defined against an understanding of the feminine opposite, or in terms of other social factors and values. Chrétien's twelfth-century romances provide the first instances of a masculinity that engages with the feminine opposite, interacting with women characters to create new complex challenges of value and conduct. But it is in the works of Chaucer in the fourteenth century that we find the knights engaging with gender as a living concern. Gender now becomes a vital issue, and the knights acquire a gendered identity in one way or another. Along with Gawain, although in a different way, they define themselves in a context of gender not unlike in the modern scenario.

Although my discussion revolves around the masculine identity of the knights, I am implicitly articulating the growing role that women play in the romances, and how their

role brings about a redefinition of masculinity. This also points to the changing position of women in the respective societies I discuss. There is certainly a growing importance of women in the literature of the late Middle Ages, continued and enhanced in the subsequent period. In one memorable example from the late fifteenth century, in Boiardo's romantic epic, *Orlando Innamorato*, a woman is presented as a knight: the niece of Charlemagne who fights the 'infidels', Bradamante. The prominence given to her may be politically motivated, since Boiardo, it is believed, was trying to please his patrons by tracing an impressive genealogy for his patrons: suggesting Bradamante's marriage to Ruggiero establishes the family of his patrons, the Estense. Whatever be the reason, what is striking is that a woman could actually be presented as a knight, a warrior, that too in a narrative that is derived from the exploits of an eighth-century hero-warrior. The poem commemorating the deeds of Roland mentioned the name of Aude, his betrothed, only in passing. Bradamante and Ruggiero return in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and still later, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* also has a female knight, Britomart.

These examples take us beyond *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but indicate how it is appropriate for me to end with this poem, preparing the ground for fresh revaluations of chivalry in a new context of gender and individual identity. Gawain epitomises the value system of late feudalism and the chivalry that reflects it on the literary and cultural plane. At the same time, at the end of the poem, he questions this very mentality in a new situation of self-discovery that also articulates the implicit values of a new social milieu. The understanding of himself, and the self-conscious nature of the change that is initiated

in the figure of Gawain, points forward to the increasingly self-aware masculinity of future male protagonists.

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