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Ana Rita Martins Capela e Silva

Orientadora: Professora Doutora Maria Angélica Varandas

Tese especialmente elaborada para a obtenção do grau de Doutor no Ramo de Estudos de Literatura e Cultura, na especialidade em Estudos Ingleses

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Abstract

"Romance is a notoriously slippery category," warns Barbara Fuchs in the introduction to her work *Romance* (1). In fact, romance has been a source of debate for scholars and while today medieval romance is viewed as "the principal secular literature of entertainment in the Middle Ages" (Pearsall, "Audience" 37), the most popular "in its capacity to attract a large and heterogeneous medieval audience" (McDonald 2) as well as "the dominant non-devotional genre" (Chism 57) of the period, Middle English (ME) romances in particular have been called the "ugly ducklings of medieval English studies" (Knight 99).

Starting off by examining issues of classification, authorship, performance, audience, language, verse and form, as well as themes and motifs, this thesis seeks to focus on ME romance, namely the so-called popular ones, that have for long been regarded as less worthy of consideration. Our goal is to analyse what characteristics differentiate this set of texts from those belonging to other medieval literary traditions. Furthermore, because our interest also lies in exploring notions of heroism in the medieval period, special attention is paid to the figure of the hero and its many guises. Granting that ME romances are narratives that involve "somebody doing something," and that "the somebody, if an individual, is the hero" (Frye, *Anatomy* 33), we propose that to discuss medieval romance implies examining the hero, a figure who embodies the values of his people, thereby providing a useful index of its ideals (Bolgar 120) and beliefs. It is through the analysis of heroism and how it is represented and conceptualised, namely in the ME romance *Havelok the Dane*, that we seek to understand how the English community began to *imagine* its identity in post-Conquest England. We will also argue that as fictionalisations of the past, romances can open a literary discursive space wherein England as a nation could be imagined and articulated.

Keywords | ME popular romance; *Havelok the Dane*; heroism; identity; England.

Resumo

O Romance é uma categoria incerta, avisa Barbara Fuchs na introdução ao trabalho *Romance* (1). De facto, o romance tem sido discutido por críticos e estudiosos e embora hoje o romance medieval seja encarado como o principal género literário de entretenimento secular (Pearsall, "Audience" 37), o mais popular ao atrair um público vasto e heterógeneo (McDonald 2) e a forma literária predominante no campo da produção não-devocional (Chism 57) do período, os romances medievais em inglês médio (IM) em particular foram considerados por Stephen Knight como os "patinhos feios" dos estudos medievais ingleses (99).

Atendendo a estas ideias e partindo de uma primeira abordagem que procura estabelecer um contexto teórico que, por sua vez, permita definir e compreender as origens, desenvolvimento e conceptualização do romance na Idade Média, esta tese irá focar-se no romance escrito em IM, nomeadamente no conjunto de textos designados por "populares" que, durante décadas, foram considerados menores. As razões que levaram críticos e académicos a encarar este conjunto de textos com alguma incúria são variadas e serão exploradas ao longo deste estudo. Contudo, parece-nos claro que um dos principais motivos para a desconsideração e, por vezes, até desdém (com autores como Thomas Percy a chamar a este conjunto de narrativas "produções pouco artísticas" e "poemas obsoletos" (5)) com que o romance popular em IM tem sido encarado está relacionado com o facto de encontrarmos em território insular uma tradição diferente que não partilha necessariamente os temas, motivos e formas do romance continental. Com efeito, o romance popular em IM apresenta vários desafios à academia contemporânea incluindo: que textos podem ser abrangidos por esta designação; o que nos revelam estas narrativas sobre o período; quem as produziu e para quem; como podem ser interpretadas, entre outros. Assim, e apesar de podermos abordar este conjunto de textos a partir de uma pluralidade de perspectivas, um dos elementos que mais nos interessou explorar foi a representação de heroísmo e a sua relação com dois conceitos-chave: soberania e identidade no romance popular medieval, em particular no poema anônimo *Havelok the Dane*.

Escrito em *Northern Midlands* e datado de cerca de 1280-90, o romance em IM *Havelok the Dane* está preservado quase integralmente num único manuscrito, o Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Laud Miscellaneous 108 (MS Laud Misc. 108). Pouco se sabe sobre a produção, escrita e finalidade desta obra antes de 1633, mas a maioria dos críticos concorda que terá começado a ser compilada nos finais do século XIII (Bell e Couch 1) o que faz de *Havelok the Dane* um dos primeiros romances escritos em IM de que há registo. Preservado num manuscrito

profundamente hagiográfico, onde o único outro romance, também anônimo, é *King Horn* (finais do século XIII), *Havelok the Dane* relata as (des)venturas de dois protagonistas: Havelok, filho do rei Birkabeyn da Dinamarca e único sucessor legítimo ao trono dinamarquês, e Goldeboru, filha do soberano de Inglaterra, Athelwold, e herdeira da coroa inglesa. Acompanhando a infância, juventude, casamento e eventual ascensão ao poder das personagens principais, mas dando maior relevo ao herói masculino, o narrador-poeta segue a estrutura frequentemente encontrada noutros romances populares em IM: o(s) protagonista(s), depois de ser(em) injustamente exilado(s), tem(têm) de reaver a(s) sua(s) terra(s), posição social e restabelecer a ordem na(s) sua(s) comunidade(s). Do mesmo modo, *Havelok the Dane* recorre a temas (como, por exemplo, a importância da lei ou a jornada do herói) e motivos (separação e reunião, viagens por mar, a vingança, entre outros) bem como a formas tipicamente associadas ao romance popular em IM. Contudo, como recorda Daniel M. Murtaugh, *Havelok the Dane*:

> is not primarily an adventure nor a series of adventures; it is first and foremost an idealized biography cast in the form of a tale of action. The biography concentrates, not on the most exciting moments of Havelok's life, but rather on those episodes which delineate most clearly the poet's conception of the ideal king. (613)

Conforme o excerto acima atesta, ao contrário do que por norma encontramos no romance de cavalaria medieval, *Havelok the Dane* não se foca nas aventuras de um protagonista em busca de glória, fama ou em defesa de um ideal, mas sim no percurso de um herói que se tornará no rei ideal de dois espaços: Inglaterra e Dinamarca. Descrito por Herzman, et al., como uma metáfora para a realeza (75), Havelok vai gradualmente personificar a figura do monarca ideal, o *rex pacificus*, cujo reinado inaugura um período de paz, fecundidade e riqueza, em particular em Inglaterra. Por conseguinte, Havelok não incorpora apenas todas as qualidades associadas ao herói cavaleiresco, ele é também o bom soberano porque, por um lado, tem um direito legítimo e quase-divino, como iremos provar, ao(s) trono(s) e, por outro, porque a sua bondade e santidade são apenas ultrapassadas pelo amor que sente pelos dois reinos que governa e pelos povos que eles integram. Este ponto, iremos discutir, é de especial interesse para a nossa leitura do texto uma vez que o narrador-poeta nos parece empenhado em delinear e delimitar política, económica, legal e culturalmente Inglaterra e Dinamarca, sempre com ênfase na primeira. Talvez por isso *Havelok the Dane* seja considerado um dos romances em IM que expressa uma comunidade política imaginada, participando no que Diana Speed proclamou ser o discurso da nação (145), nos finais do século XIII e inícios do século XIV.

Esta tese procura mostrar como este romance em IM participa neste discurso através da utilização de estratégias literárias inclusivas e exclusivas que servem, em última instância, para estabelecer e consolidar a identidade heróica de Havelok e, por analogia, a identidade da nação inglesa descrita no poema.

Identidade é, por esse motivo, um conceito importante no presente trabalho já que nos parece que a identidade inglesa, em particular a das comunidades que se estabeleceram nas zonas de Ânglia oriental e Linconshire, é de grande interesse para o narrador-poeta. De facto, embora concordemos que Havelok se posiona entre duas identidades, a inglesa e a dinamarquesa, e é precisamente esse enquadramento sociocultural (Faletra 371) que lhe permite, por um lado, integrar as duas comunidades e, por outro, facilitar a sua união, cremos que o desenvolvimento de uma identidade de grupo (nacional) – ligada ao passado Anglo-Saxão e, ao mesmo tempo, às povoações oriundas do norte da Europa que se estabeleceram em território inglês – é um elemento-chave neste texto. Esta identidade, iremos defender, é expressa e construída por intermédio de uma personagem principal muito peculiar, Havelok, cujas características físicas, psicológicas, emocionais e até étnicas contribuem para que se distinga das restantes personagens. O heroísmo por este demonstrado e o modo como Havelok é representado e conceptualizado permite-nos compreender melhor como a nação inglesa começa a imaginar a sua identidade num período pós-Conquista Normanda e de crescente separação da Europa continental, nomeadamente de França. Além disso, o próprio manuscrito, cujo tom nacionalista já foi apontado por outros estudiosos (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*; Bell and Couch; entre outros), parece confirmar que *Havelok the Dane* partilha as mesmas preocupações que os restantes textos nele incluídos. Possivelmente por isso, Kimberly K. Bell e Julie Nelson Couch consideram o MS Laud Misc. 108 uma antologia particularmente útil para melhor compreeder a cultura inglesa no período da Baixa Idade Média (18).

Tendo em mente estes pontos e metas, a presente tese encontra-se dividida em cinco capítulos com objectivos diferentes, mas interligados. Num primeiro momento, capítulo 1, “On Romance: From Romanz to Romance”, procura-se perceber a importância do romance medieval atendendo ao contexto literário, cultural e histórico em que foi produzido. Além disso, embora não tenha como propósito apresentar uma investigação sobre o romance nos séculos que antecedem e sucedem o período actualmente denominado por Idade Média, tentar-se-á chegar a uma definição que nos permita compreender não só que narrativas podem ser consideradas romances em IM, mas também perceber como e porque é o romance em Inglaterra díspar do romance em França, Itália, Espanha (Furrow 71) ou Portugal. Num segundo momento, capítulo 2, “‘What’s the Matter?’: Middle English Romance and the Matters of

Britain and England", iremos analisar questões de classificação, autoria, *performance*, público, língua, verso e forma assim como os temas e motivos associados a um conjunto de textos cujas preocupações parecem mais focadas nos aspectos fundamentais da existência humana (Field, "Popular Romance" 29). O objectivo é elancar e analisar as características que contribuem para distinguir estas narrativas – os romances populares em IM – daquelas pertencentes a outras tradições literárias, nomeadamente à Matéria da Bretanha, desde o século XII em particular, mas não exclusivamente. Os primeiros dois capítulos servem, por isso, para estabelecer uma base teórica que, esperamos, irá permitir compreender como o romance ajudou, por um lado, a conceber e promover um novo sistema de valores e comportamentos ideais e, por outro, contribuiu de forma considerável para a construção de uma figura heróica que marcou o período medieval: o cavaleiro.

A personagem do herói dos romances de cavalaria medievais tem seduzido académicos (Aertsen; Ashe "The Hero"; Bloomfield; Bolgar; Cartlidge, "Introduction" *Heroes*; Connell; Couch; Eckert, "The Redemptive Hero"; Huppé; Keyes; Lowrey; Rouse "Crusaders"; Varandas "O Rosto do Herói"; entre outros) e o público em geral. De facto, e de acordo com Northorp Frye em *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), na literatura o enredo gira em torno de alguém que faz alguma coisa ("the plot consists of somebody doing something") e esse alguém, se for um indivíduo, é o herói (Frye, *Anatomy* 33). Assim, neste estudo propomos que o debate em torno do romance, neste caso do romance medieval em geral, implica sempre uma análise do herói que se distingue "pela coragem, temeridade e intrepidez, pela obediência a um código de valores que exalta um carácter justo e leal, bem como um comportamento altruísta na defesa de um senhor, comunidade ou território e na manutenção e demanda de ideais de paz e de justiça" (Varandas, "Rosto" 29). O herói do romance cavaleiresco desempenha ainda um papel fundamental na defesa dos ideais da sociedade a que pertence não só porque se comporta de acordo com estes que, por sua vez, são reiterados e definidos ao longo da narrativa através das várias (des)venturas e testes que o herói deve ultrapassar (Richmond 17), mas também porque o herói acaba por frequentemente personificar estes ideais. Por este motivo, o herói é interpretado como um elemento crucial num trabalho de ficção – daí que a história comece com o herói (Keyes 50) – e uma personagem indispensável para a compreensão de uma cultura e da sua história pois serve para nos mostrar que características e comportamentos são encarados como ideais pelo público, providenciado um catálogo particularmente útil dos valores e princípios de cada período (Bolgar 120).

Embora tradicionalmente o herói possa ser um guerreiro, nobre e/ou cavaleiro, sugerimos, tal como advogado por Helen Cooper na obra de referência *The English Romance*

in Time. Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare, que ao longo dos primeiros quatro séculos desde o seu aparecimento, sensivelmente a meio do século XII, nas cortes reais francesa e inglesa, o romance é inseparável dos ideais de cavalaria e do seu representante máximo, o cavaleiro. Assim, se o protagonista ainda não foi adubado cavaleiro aquando do início da narrativa, esta irá focar-se na sua educação e nas aventuras que lhe permitem ser digno do título de cavaleiro (Cooper, *English Romance* 41).

Consequentemente, o terceiro capítulo da presente tese, "'Isn't There a White Knight upon a Fiery Steed?': The Knight in the European Middle Ages", é dedicado à evolução do guerreiro a cavalo. O cavaleiro – figura que marcou a Idade Média europeia e formou uma das três ordens distinguidas no século XI por Adalberão, Bispo de Laon, no *Poème au Roi Robert (le Pieux)* (c. 1030), os *bellatores* – vai fazer convergir sobre si próprio elementos inesperados e até mesmo aparentemente contraditórios como a cortesia, a coragem, a honra e a nobreza, bem como a força bruta, a agressão e a autoridade militar. Apesar dos propósitos destes guerreiros montados não serem sempre claros ao longo dos 1000 anos que perfazem a Idade Média, tendo, por isso, sido apelidados por autores como Richard Barber de camaleónicos (*The Knight and Chivalry* 21), o cavaleiro foi consistentemente associado pelos autores medievais a ideais de heroísmo. Por conseguinte, o terceiro capítulo tenta traçar a evolução do guerreiro a cavalo para compreender porque foi este grupo associado a conceitos de heroicidade praticamente desde a sua formação. Pretendemos ainda demonstrar como o romance ajudou a dar forma e a promover um novo sistema de valores e comportamentos, chamado cortesia, que prevaleceu no seio de uma esfera social associadada, por norma, às cortes. Relacionados com a franqueza, companheirismo, amizade, pureza e compaixão, os ideais corteses são também de grande importância ao promoverem a harmonia e segurança da sociedade em tempos de paz. Por seu lado, o romance, por ser um espaço ficcional priveligiado e isento de constrangimentos, teve uma posição priveligiada na construção, representação e divulgação deste mesmo sistema durante a Idade Média. Além disso, acreditamos que o romance contribuiu de modo significativo para a forma como a figura do herói foi imaginada e enaltecida ao assimilar ideais heroícos, religiosos e corteses e canalizá-los, adequadamente seleccionados, reforçados e/ou amplificados, para a esfera da cavalaria (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 94). Todavia, porque esta tese se foca em romances populares em IM, é crucial percebermos que embora os protagonistas destes textos partilhem características com os heróis do romance cavaleiresco, nomeadamente o Arturiano, os primeiros têm um conjunto de qualidades que os distinguem.

O quarto capítulo, "'He Stood Above All': Champions, Heroes and Kings in Medieval English Romance", será devotado à análise de representações de heroísmo no romance

medieval, servindo para comparar e contrapôr aquelas que nos parecem ser duas tradições distintas mas concomitantes: a da Matéria da Bretanha, desenvolvida maioritariamente na Europa continental mas também presente em território insular, e a do romance popular em IM, tendo especial atenção ao romance *Havelok the Dane* e ao herói que nos é aí apresentado.

Por fim, o quinto e último capítulo, "(Re)Shaping Heroism, Kingship and Identity in *Havelok the Dane*", começa por fazer uma análise do manuscrito onde o texto se encontra, o MS Laud Misc. 108, para depois se focar nas duas fontes escritas que antecedem o romance em IM, um episódio na crónica *L'Estoire des Engleis* (c. 1130-35) de Geoffrey Gaimar e *Lai d'Haveloc* de autor anónimo (c. finais do século XII a inícios do século XIII), e, por fim, analisar o poema em IM. Neste último momento, pretendemos mostrar que o romance *Havelok the Dane* oferece aos seus leitores e/ou público uma narrativa absolutamente inglesa ("wholly English", Skeat iv) onde o herói e a comunidade por si representada, isto é, os que não têm ascendência anglo-saxónica, mas escandinava e que também fazem parte do tecido da nação (Tracy 149), são integrados numa visão unitária de uma comunidade política imaginada.

Palavras-Chave | Romance popular em inglês médio; *Havelok the Dane*; heroísmo; identidade; Inglaterra.

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List of Abbreviations

MS Laud Misc. 108	Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Laud Miscellaneous 108
ME	Middle English
MED	Middle English Dictionary
OE	Old English
OF	Old French
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
SEL	*South English Legendary*
SGGK	*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
TEAMS	Teaching Association for Medieval Studies

Herkneth to me, gode men -
Wives, maydens, and alle men -
Of a tale that ich you wile telle,

Havelok the Dane, lines 1-3

INTRODUCTION

"Thoruth England yede the speche, (…) he was strong and ek meke"

Romance cannot be quarantined into a generic category; instead, it infects other genres, particularly epic, as an often unwelcome, or at least vexed, strategy of errancy and multiplicity.

<div align="right">Fuchs, *Romance* 72</div>

We begin this thesis by fittingly recalling that medieval romance cannot be quarantined, it cannot be limited by tight bounds or categories neatly organised to fit contemporary literary studies or concepts developed by modern literary scholars for that matter. Instead, medieval romance seems to transgress borders, tear down walls, cross over audiences, languages and peoples, openly challenging us to embrace its seemingly transgressive nature and "readiness to breach the rules both of literary decorum and of literary realism" (Cartlidge, "Introduction" *Boundaries* 1). Its infectious nature, as Fuchs so aptly points out (72), spreads to other genres or could it be that – in an unexpected turn of events – it is (willingly) infected by others? Either way, medieval romance remains in the twenty-first century an elusive, slippery category within which readers may find many diverse and sometimes contrasting texts. It changed diachronically and synchronically across what we now call the European 'Middle Ages', a term that by itself frequently offers challenges and has prompted much scholarly debate as well. Indeed, while research on medieval romance, especially the Arthurian one,[1] has been done by many specialists around the world, much is still to be studied, namely when it comes to ME popular romance, the main form of literature the following pages will focus on.

One of the reasons for this might have to do with the fact that when the first romances began to be written in England, they were in Latin, French or Anglo-Norman, which makes romance in English a latecomer to the European medieval literary and cultural scene. Another reason might be because studying ME romance, especially the so-called popular ones, means acknowledging not only the existence of a different tradition, that does not necessarily share the same themes, motifs, and forms of Continental romance tradition, but also one that has been regarded as inferior in quality (Percy; Ellis; Ker; Stevens). Claimed to be "the pulp fiction of medieval England, the 'principal secular literature of entertainment' for an enormously diverse audience" (McDonald 1), ME popular romance has offered great challenges to contemporary scholars when it comes to which set of texts can be included under this heading, how these may be interpreted, what they reveal about the period of their production, why they were produced

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[1] See *A History of Arthurian Scholarship* for a comprehensive and analytical account of the development of Arthurian scholarship from the eighteenth century, or earlier, to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

as well as by whom and for whom, *inter alia*. Although this set of texts allows a myriad of approaches to be taken, in this study we are interested in looking at the representation of heroism and kingship in ME popular literature, specifically in the romance *Havelok the Dane*.

Written in Northeast Midlands and dated to circa 1280-90, *Havelok the Dane* survives in only one manuscript[2] written in ME, the profoundly hagiographic Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Laud Miscellaneous 108.[3] Little is known about the provenance of the MS Laud Misc. 108 before 1633, but it may have started being assembled as early as 1280 (Bell and Couch 1), which would make *Havelok the Dane* one of the earliest romances written in English. This ME popular romance focuses on the life of two royal protagonists: Havelok, the male heir to the Danish throne, and Goldeboru, the only successor to the English crown, their ill-fated childhoods and their journey to regain their lawful position as the rulers of two kingdoms, Denmark and England. *Havelok the Dane* makes use of themes (such as the development of the hero towards maturity, national or regional identity, and the importance of the rule of law) and motifs (like separation and reunion, sea voyages, and revenge and marriage) as well as formulaic patterns traditionally associated with ME popular romance. Once identified as "one of a very small number of Middle English romances that (…) retain their charm" (Halverson 142), *Havelok the Dane* has been read "as a guide for the proper behavior of the wise monarch, as a lesson for the king who is willing to heed it" (Staines 623) and as one of the ME popular texts that expresses an "imagined political community" engaging in "the discourse of the nation" (Speed 145) of late-thirteenth- to early-fourteenth-century England. In this thesis we thereby propose that the ME romance of Havelok participates in this 'discourse' through inclusive and exclusive literary strategies that ultimately strengthen an English sense of identity and help shape a new type of hero.

Havelok the Dane, we will contend, is a fundamental romance that attests the new vision the English community began to shape of and to themselves, especially when feelings of separation from the Continent began to emerge after the Norman Conquest. In addition, through the use of distinct strategies by which to represent the protagonists' unparalleled qualities, we believe a new set of heroes, or main characters, is fashioned. These newly constructed heroes, like Havelok, are both linked to the territory that is England and to an Anglo-Saxon past or heritage, often embodying characteristics associated with the new warrior class, the *bellatores*,

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[2] Another manuscript, the Cambridge University Library Add. 4407 (late fourteenth century), contains some lines believed to belong to the ME romance of Havelok as well but the fragmented nature of these do not allow us to analyse differences or similarities between the two texts, which is why the latter will not be analysed in this thesis.
[3] Henceforth shortened to MS Laud Misc. 108.

and the figure of the ideal, legitimate ruler. What is more, the insular hero-king's fight is for a higher cause: justice and the people he rules over. In the case of *Havelok the Dane*, the audience is faced with two peoples, the English and the Danish, both of whom are for a time unsuitably governed by traitors that attain authority through betrayal and disloyalty, and who must therefore be punished. However, what makes this ME romance, this 'male-Cinderella' tale (Barron 69; Peck; Herzman, et al. 74; Eckert 139), so relevant to this study is the main male character, Havelok, who – we will argue – plays a key role in the creation of a complex, sometimes conflicting and ethnically different medieval England and it is through him that the latter is brought together. Havelok shares with the English kingdom the same exceptional nature and his great qualities, like those of the kings before him, become intertwined with those of the nation. For these reasons, we believe that in *Havelok the Dane* we find a story and a hero that are "wholly English" (Skeat iv), where difference is acknowledged but integrated into a single vision of an imagined community.

Identity is, for this reason, a key concept in this thesis since we will contend that the identity of the English people is also what is at stake in *Havelok the Dane*. Taking this into account, by identity we mean the "multi-faceted phenomenon that embraces a range of human attributes, including language, religion, ethnicity, nationalism and shared interpretations of the past. It is constructed into discourses of inclusion and exclusion, of those who qualify for membership, and those who do not. Identity refers to the processes, categories and knowledges through which communities are defined as such, (…). [Furthermore, c]entral to the concept of identity is the idea of the Other – groups, both internal and external to a state – with competing and often conflicting beliefs, values and aspirations (…) [that] are thus fundamental to representations of identity, which are constructed in counter-distinction to them" (Ashworth et al. 4-5).[4]

In order to establish the aforementioned points, in the first chapter of this thesis, "On Romance: From *Romanz* to Romance," we propose to begin by exploring various definitions of romance to find ways to better conceptualize and understand broader problems of the genre or mode as well as its importance within the literary, cultural and historical context of the Middle Ages. To do so we have considered different and sometimes opposing views regarding

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[4] In *Cultural Studies. Theory and Practice*, Chris Baker also argues that "(…) what we think of as our identity is dependent on what we think we are not" (249). On the same note, Antony Easthope suggests that "[a]ll collective identity (clan, nation, region, ethnic group) identifies self by denying the other, demarcates inside from outside, stretches a distance between 'us' and 'them'. The condition for collective identification – 'my blood, my family, my kin, my clan, my nation, my race' – is an ever-present and potentially violent expulsion of those who are not 'my blood, my family, my kin, my clan, my nation, my race'" (219-220).

key concepts, focusing specifically on ME romance as well as its origins, forms, and the cultural and literary backgrounds that led to its development. However, the goal of this chapter is neither to provide an in-depth analysis of romance throughout the centuries nor to do an exhaustive distinction between romance, novella and novel. Instead, the overall purpose of this brief study is to consider how romance in England is "centred differently from romance in France or Italy or Spain" (Furrow 71), ultimately attempting to provide a working definition (in subchapter 1.2) that aims to identify which works of fiction are here read as 'ME romances'. Following this line of reasoning, Chapter Two, "'What's the Matter?': Middle English Romance and the Matters of Britain and England", attempts to establish distinctions within the extant corpus of ME romances and to set texts, like *Havelok the Dane*, apart not only from Continental tradition but more significantly from other literary traditions developed in medieval England from the twelfth century onwards, namely that of the Matter of Britain. In this chapter, we also hope to offer a definition as to which texts can be acknowledged as 'ME popular romances'. By addressing issues of classification, authorship, performance, audience, language, verse and form, as well as themes and motifs, we wish to establish what characteristics differentiate this corpus from others in order to narrow the scope of this research.

On this point, it is important to clarify that the term 'romance' is here essentially used to identify a specific set of texts whose conception and development can be traced to the Middle Ages. Notwithstanding, we would also like to begin by acknowledging that the word has been used to classify narratives that pre-date the medieval period, the so-called classical romances. In *The Form of Greek Romance*, Bryan P. Reardon approaches this matter stating that "[t]he study of ancient romance poses special problems (…) because (…) there is virtually no explicit ancient theory on the matter" (7). Reardon goes on to add that the reason why there are no records or references to romance in Classical Antiquity is due to the fact that "[p]rose fiction arrived late on the scene, centuries after the other genres, and when it did arrive it was at first apparently not thought to merit the serious attention of the cultivated" (7), thereby suggesting that romance, as narratives with a set of identifiable characteristics, had already begun to be developed in Ancient Greece. Antiquity, though, never actually theorised romance – "Aristotle does not say anything about the genre of romance, nor does anyone else (…)" (Reardon 7) – using other terms instead, such as *plasma* (for a fictitious creation) or *historia* (for an account of what has been discovered), for different aspects of these texts.[5] As a result, when studying classical romance, one is inevitably working with a category that would not have been applied

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[5] See Reardon 3-14 for a detailed discussion.

by the authors, critics and audiences or readers at the time the texts were produced, as the term only emerges in the Middle Ages.

For medievalists, the fact that the term 'romance' first occurs in the medieval period is often seen as an indisputable piece of evidence that confirms its construction and development is distinctively medieval. Nevertheless, other researchers have been quick to point out that "[e]sta indefinição terminológica não [é] (…) argumento suficiente para banir estes textos da história do romance, tanto mais que a tendência hodierna vai no sentido de um anulamento das fronteiras modais ou genéricas" (Pinheiro 14) and dispute that not only does a genre need not have a substantial purpose but also that the absence of a term does not mean the object did not exist (Pinheiro 15). Marília Futre Pinheiro concludes that:

> (…) o género é um modelo empírico, que é definido institucionalmente pelas relações entre o conjunto de obras que a tradição histórica incluiu numa classe determinada. Dito assim, os nomes de géneros são simples abreviaturas que se destinam a enumerar um conjunto de obras que partilham de características comuns, sendo por isso o seu referente a colecção de objectos que a análise isola e descreve. Na prática, uma obra pode existir sem que haja para ela uma designação genérica. (15)

Possibly for this reason five Greek texts are conventionally known as Greek romances; they are: Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (first century AD), Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesiaca* (second century AD), Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* (late second century AD), Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* (late second century AD), and Heliodorus' *Ethiopica* (third or fourth century AD). Acknowledging the survival of these texts and the debate around these theoretical concerns does not mean agreement, though, especially given that researchers like Reardon have suggested romance "may be described generally as narrative fiction" and that "romance inhabits an imagined world" (3), which seems to us like a very broad and loose way of approaching the term.

Taking this into account, it is key to underscore that the goal of the first two chapters (and the research here presented) is not to prove that romance was solely developed in the European Middle Ages but to show that it indelibly marked the period during which it was enthusiastically developed and explored. As we intend to attest, romance helped shape and promote a new system of values, called courtesy, as well as ideals, which included chivalry and love. Its influence travelled well beyond royal or noble courts, effectively holding a privileged position in shaping the medieval hero by selectively absorbing heroic, religious and courtly

influences from elite society and channelling them (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 94) to create an idealised figure: the hero-knight.

Because our interest also lies in exploring notions of heroism in the medieval period, this inevitably led us to include a section of this thesis, Chapter Three, "'Isn't There a White Knight Upon a Fiery Steed?': The Knight in the European Middle Ages," on the warrior estate, the *bellatores* as they would come to be referred to. The reasons for including this chapter have to do with what we believe is the construction of a crucial figure to the development of concepts of heroism in the later Middle Ages, that of the mounted warrior. In fact, the knight is placed at the centre of the narratives since the very construction of romance in medieval times. Like Helen Cooper so aptly notices:

> Throughout the first four centuries of romance, until the mid-sixteenth century, romance is inseparable from ideas of chivalry, and from the primary exponent of chivalry, the knight. If the protagonist is not already a knight when his story opens, it will be concerned with his education in prowess, love, and just action that constitute his winning of his spurs. (*English Romance* 41)

We will demonstrate that the shaping of heroism and the development of romance go hand-in-hand as the latter consistently, though not solely, outlined the nature of the first, serving to promote qualities – like prowess, loyalty, courage and largesse – that became intrinsically linked to the knightly order and, hence, to heroism. While Chapter Three explores how a group of men went from warriors on horseback to an order (*ordo*) with its own set of norms and ideals as well as the implications of such an evolution, Chapter Four, "'He Stood Above All': Champions, Heroes and Kings in Medieval English Romance," looks at how heroism was conceived and examines the hero's many guises, namely in the Arthurian (mostly continental) tradition and in the ME popular one.

As we will also establish, the worlds of ME popular romance distinguish themselves from the ones imagined in the thriving continental Arthurian romance tradition. In fact, in this study, we will argue that what audiences from at least the late twelfth century onwards find are two concurrent but distinct (chivalric) romance traditions. On the one hand, there is the continental, which includes Arthurian romance, and, on the other, there is the insular, which features a historical and geographical specificity, drawing its material from the (pseudo-) history of pre-Conquest England (Ashe, "Hero" 135). In the latter, the main male characters are generally monarchs or their sons who, wrongly exiled in their youth or childhood, must win back their land(s) and social position, thereby regaining their rightful place in society. As we

moved forward in our research, it became clear that the identity of the hero in romance, although preserving some key values also associated with the chivalric *ordo*, like courage, selflessness, courtesy, prowess and largesse, shifts from one tradition to another – a point we also seek to explore when studying the ME *Havelok the Dane*.

Thus, the final chapter of this thesis, "(Re)Shaping Heroism, Kingship and Identity in *Havelok the Dane*," seeks to analyse the ME *Havelok the Dane* in greater depth taking into account the different theoretical concepts already mentioned while also bearing in mind this text's literary ancestors, the episode in Geoffrey Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engleis* (c. 1130-35) and the Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Haveloc* (c. late twelfth- to early thirteenth-century).

CHAPTER ONE

ON ROMANCE: FROM *ROMANZ* TO ROMANCE

(…) romance is, as a genre, notorious for its indifference to limits – its apparent readiness to breach the rules both of literary decorum and of literary realism.

<div align="right">Cartlidge, "Introduction," Boundaries in Medieval Romance 1</div>

(…) the romance, because it is the most prestigious of the secular genres in a culture largely – but far from completely – dedicated to the spiritual, becomes the inevitable jousting ground for medieval ideas of literary values and meaning.

<div align="right">Furrow, Expectations of Romance 6</div>

1.1. Definition, Origins, Form and Context

"Romance is a notoriously slippery category" (1), warns Barbara Fuchs in her "Introduction" to her work *Romance*. In fact, as a genre, romance has been a source of debate for scholars and even though it has a long history (or perhaps because of it), the term remains elusive and a comprehensive definition is yet to be found. To start with, it might be useful to consider the definition of romance provided by the *OED*. Given the abundant supply of possible definitions, an abridged version, which is fairly limited to the definitions relevant to our current study, follows:

1. A medieval narrative (originally in verse, later also in prose) relating the legendary or extraordinary adventures of some hero of chivalry. Also in extended use, with reference to narratives about important religious figures.
2. a. A Spanish historical ballad or short epic poem, typically composed in octosyllabic lines. b. Music. Any of various kinds of short vocal or instrumental piece, typically simple, informal, or lyrical in character.
3. a. A fictitious narrative, usually in prose, in which the settings or the events depicted are remote from everyday life, or in which sensational or exciting events or adventures form the central theme; a book, etc., containing such a narrative. (…) c. The genre of literature which consists of romances (senses A. 1, A. 3a); romances as a class.
4. a. An extravagant fabrication; a wild falsehood, a fantasy. (…)
5. a. The character or quality that makes something appeal strongly to the imagination, and sets it apart from the mundane; an air, feeling, or sense of wonder, mystery, and remoteness from everyday life; redolence or suggestion of, or association with, adventure, heroism, chivalry, etc.; mystique, glamour. b. Ardour or warmth of feeling in a love affair; love, esp. of an idealized or sentimental kind.
6. A love affair; a romantic relationship.
7. A story of romantic love, esp. one which deals with love in a sentimental or idealized way; a book, film, etc., with a narrative or story of this kind. Also as mass noun: literature of this kind.
8. Originally: the vernacular language of medieval France, as opposed to Latin. In later use also: any of various related Romance languages (see sense B. 1a), such as Provençal (Occitan) and Spanish. Now esp.: the Romance languages collectively.

A quick overview is enough to realise that the term encompasses a wide variety of meanings with categories that span from the literary to the linguistic. The profusion of definitions provided by the *OED* seems to generate perplexity and possibly misunderstanding rather than clarification. However, it does point in some interesting directions. Most noticeably there are three distinct meanings attached to the word 'romance' that are relevant to this study: one linking it to literature (Def. 1, 2, 3 and 7)[1], another to idealised feelings of romantic love (Def. 6 especially, but also 5b and 7), and to language (Def. 8). If we bear in mind the origin of the term 'romance' such division is interesting as originally the OF expression *mettre en romanz* was used to describe the process of translating into vernacular French (Krueger, "Introduction" 1) narratives from the learned language, Latin.[2] In the early Middle Ages, "*enromancier, romançar, romanz* meant to translate or compose books in the vernacular" while the "book itself was then called *romanz*, roman, romance or *romanzo*" (Beer 4). This act of linguistic and cultural transposition, which occured roughly between 1150 and 1165, aimed at giving lay audiences access to texts that had formerly only been available in Latin and led to the development of a particular kind of narrative called *romans* as well as a set of themes, motifs and literary strategies associated with literature written in vernacular languages. These romances became more than a mere rendition of the original texts as translators began to adapt, expand and transform the stories.[3] Thus, the seemingly disparate meanings offered by the *OED* are actually conjoint and help understand what can be regarded as the development and theorisation of a literature that indelibly marked the European Middle Ages, the romance.

In a narrow literary sense, romance was the name given to the narrative poems that emerged around mid-twelfth century in the royal courts of France and England, where Anglo-Norman was the literary language of the elite.[4] Simultaneously, or soon afterwards, romance fictions were created at other francophone courts both in England and on the Continent (Krueger 2). The exact geographical origin of romance is hard to determine, especially since:

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[1] Definition 4a. may also be linked to this point, though perhaps less clearly so, given than romance is identified as "a fabrication" and "a fantasy" which, we believe, implies some sort of narrative is created.

[2] In *História da Literatura Portuguesa*, António José Saraiva and Óscar Lopes state that, "Ao conjunto de falares da România (...) dá-se o nome de *Romance* (ou *Romanço*) que vem do advérbio *romanice* ('à maneira românica, vulgar'), oposto a *latine* ('à maneira latina, literária'). A palavra romance (neste caso com a variação em *rimance*) designa também um género de composição transmitida oralmente, em que pela primeira vez a língua falada ganha forma literária" (18).

[3] Geoffrey of Monmouth's works in Latin (*Historia Regum Britanniae*, 1136; *Vita Merlini*, c.1150), for instance, can be taken as an example of this transposition since, though not romances, they inspired later romance authors who reinterpreted and renewed the Arthurian tales developed by the first.

[4] After the Battle of Hastings in 1066, William, the Conqueror, became king of England. This battle was an event which deeply affected the English literary, cultural, linguistic and political landscape. The relevance of the Norman Invasion to the development of romance in Great Britain will be explored in Chapter Two.

until the Norman dialect of the invaders took on a distinctive insular form, no clear division can be made between literature produced in northern France and in England; the same patrons employed writers on both sides of the Channel and many new developments in a revolutionary age originated on the English side. (Barron, *English Romance* 48)

Likewise, romance can hardly be said to have had a beginning *per se* as there is no clearly identifiable moment or text in which its origin might be pinpointed beyond doubt.[5] Bearing this in mind, it is nevertheless clear that there is a sense of closeness between the period and the genre for it is indisputable that the latter had a clearly distinguishable moment of development in the early twelfth century:

a conspicuous moment when a species of magical narrative coalesced in an extraordinary pattern, out of a field of forces in culture and history, to create an exemplar for the romances that followed in the three hundred or more years to come, with an impact that ultimately traveled well beyond the Middle Ages itself. (Heng, *Empire* 2)

Much like Heng, we believe one of the most significant narratives written in this period in England, albeit not a romance, was Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136), which seems to be a part of what Heng calls "a species of magical narrative" that led to the creation of "an exemplar for the romances that followed" (2) as it deeply influenced (and continues to influence) the Arthurian Cycle.[6] Not only was it Monmouth who established King Arthur's genealogy as Uther Pendragon and Igraine's son, but he was also responsible for the early development of Merlin and the first to mention Morgen, one of the literary predecessors of the witch Morgan le Fay.[7] As Helen Cooper advocates, Monmouth's texts[8] "set many of the stories of romance on their way" (*English Romance* 23). In addition, his work inspired Wace,

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[5] It should, nevertheless, be kept in mind that the end of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth was a period during which lyric poetry started being developed in Occitania. Performed as music and composed in Occitan, this poetic genre deeply influenced medieval western literature as it was through the *canso* (*canzo* or *chanson*) that troubadours introduced the conventions of courtly love into literary tradition. Therefore, when thinking about romance, its development and beginning, one must necessarily consider this key influence as well. Lyric poetry was quite popular in France, but also in the Iberian Peninsula where, for example, the Galician-Portuguese lyric, also known as *trovadorismo* or *trobadorismo*, became one of the high points of poetic history in both Portugal and Spain.

[6] This is not to say that there are no other important narratives written in pre-Conquest or Anglo-Saxon England. However, for this specific study, Monmouth's text is particularly important due to its crucial influence on later Arthurian romances. Indeed, one may even argue that Monmouth's works are still sources of inspiration for modern reworkings of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, whether these are literary or on screen(s).

[7] Note that Merlin, for instance, appears in Monmouth's earlier work *Prophetiae Merlini* (c. 1130-1135).

[8] Here Cooper includes *Prophetiae Merlini* in addition to *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

an Anglo-Norman author, who wrote *Roman de Brut* (1155), where the Round Table is first described. Wace's text was in turn used as a source by Laȝamon to compose *Brut* (1204), the earliest account of the life and exploits of Arthur written in Middle English. In some of these authors' narratives we can trace the origins of the courtly ideals linked to the Arthurian court, which Chrétien de Troyes would develop in *Érec et Énide* (c. 1170), *Cligés* (c. 1176), *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (c. 1175-1181), *Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion* (c. 1176) and *Perceval ou Le Roman du Graal* (c. 1181-1191).

The romances produced in the Middle Ages were typically concerned with love – a "love affair" (Def. 6, *OED*) – and the adventures of aristocratic characters and their chivalric pursuits; thus, they are mostly "adventures of some hero of chivalry" (Def. 1, *OED*). Often organised around a quest, medieval romances associate the masculine battlefield world of the *chanson de geste* with the increasing interest of the royal courts in *fin'amors* or, as it is now often called, courtly love.[9] The narratives involve a variety of marvellous or supernatural elements, magical objects and characters, imaginary animals, like dragons or unicorns, as well as a strict code of conduct with which characters have to comply. Notwithstanding, there is hardly a set of qualities that can fully comprise all the characteristics of medieval romance. As Albert C. Baugh points out:

> under this heading literary historians have traditionally included narratives of the most diverse kind, ranging in subject matter from pious tales, suitably dressed up, to history or pseudo-history in fictionalized form, and varying from a few hundred lines to as much as twenty thousand. ("ME Romance" 1-2)

Thus, a linear or restrictive definition is best opted out. In a broad sense romance has progressively been regarded as "a cluster of properties" (Beer 10) or "a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary *topoi*, including idealization, the marvellous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity" (Fuchs 9). In *English Medieval Romance*, W.R.J. Barron upholds that, more and more, romance is regarded as a mode, distinguishing three

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[9] The term *amour courtois,* translated into 'courtly love,' was first used by the French writer and scholar Gaston Paris in the article "Étude sur les romans de la table ronde: Lancelot du Lac," *Romania* 12 (1883) to describe the kind of love between Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere in Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charrette*. Although it is not a medieval term in the historical sense, scholars have used it to describe the kind of love promoted by medieval romances, namely the Arthurian ones. According to Gaston Paris, courtly love has four distinctive traits: 1) it is illegitimate and furtive; 2) the lover is inferior and insecure whereas the beloved is elevated; 3) the lover must earn his lady's affection through feats of courage in which he proves his devotion, valour and physical prowess; 4) love is an art and a science and, therefore, subject to many rules (518-519).

fictional modes: mythic, romantic and mimetic.[10] In addition, in her innovative deconstructive study on how romance functions within texts, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (1979), Patricia Parker focuses on what romance does and does not do within a text, recognising that romance elements may appear within texts that are not *de facto* romances, or vice-versa, we might add. Bearing in mind the romances written in the Middle Ages, medieval writers, in fact, do not seem concerned with issues of categorisation. Taking as an example the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* (c. 1300), an anonymous metrical romance translation/adaptation of the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* (c. 1220), the author uses conventional romance literary strategies[11] while incorporating hagiographical material and themes,[12] which shows how fine the lines separating medieval genres were.[13]

Therefore, when analysing medieval romances, it is discernible that, at least for the authors, romance was a flexible term. The boundaries separating the epic, *chansons de geste*, and the Breton lay,[14] among others, from romance are blurry, making it evident that there is a tendency for some characteristics of medieval chivalric romance to spread beyond its specific limitations or, as Fuchs puts it, infect other texts (72). Perhaps that is because "no work perfectly fits a single genre and the genres themselves change over time as more works play with(in) them" (Chism 58). This primordial elasticity or predisposition, which further makes the term romance inexact (Burrow 143), might be the reason critics have found medieval

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[10] Like Northrop Frye, whose contribution we will address next, Barron draws from Aristotle's *Poetics* when he argues for these three modes, claiming that in the mythic mode "the hero is superior in *kind* to other men and their environment, since he is a divine being, the subject of a *myth*" while in the romantic "the hero is superior to other men in *degree* (not necessarily, though frequently, in rank, but rather in personal qualities) and to his environment by virtue of his superlative, even supernatural, abilities." Finally, in the mimetic mode the hero "is superior neither to other men nor to the environment in that, however admirable or abject his personal qualities, he is subject to the criticism of others and to the order of nature in his actions" (2).

[11] These include using motifs typically associated with medieval popular romance like disguise, exile-and-return and sea voyages as well as the use of historical themes such as the crusades. For a thorough analysis of the romance, see Wiggins and Field's 2007 edited volume, *Guy of Warwick. Icon and Ancestor*.

[12] *Sir Isumbras* (c. 1350), a secularised retelling of the legend of Saint Eustace, is another possible example of a medieval romance that, because it combines secular and religious themes, might be considered a hagiography as well.

[13] Narratives that feature moral and/or religious themes, and describe biographies, which are either very close to the lives of canonised saints or are related to them, are identified (or labelled) as homiletic. According to Dieter Mehl, "[i]n all homiletic poems, the plot is completely subordinated to the moral and religious theme, even though this is occasionally lost sight of (…) all the adventures of the hero or heroine contribute to it, either by illustrating some particular Christian virtue in the hero or by commenting on the exemplary pattern of the action. One could describe these works, therefore, as either secularized saints' legends or legendary romances because they occupy a position exactly in the middle between these genres" (85).

Mehl identifies two story-patterns he considers typical of the homiletic romances. First, the ones that "describe the history of men in whose lives God intervenes very directly, usually by a miracle, in order to chastize them and eventually to save them" (85), which include *Robert of Sicily*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Cleges*. Second, romances that "describe the fate of women who, though innocent, have to endure great hardships and persecution, but at last withstand all sufferings and dangers by their exemplary constancy and piety" (86); these encompass *Emaré*, *The King of Tars* and *Le Bone Florence of Rome*.

[14] These terms will be addressed in subchapter 1.2.

romance so hard to pin down. It has also led some to propose a broader notion to define it, one that could be applied to a variety of verse or prose texts in different historical settings (Fuchs 5). In the twentieth century, an influential author of this understanding of romance was Northrop Frye, who described romance as one of the most relevant modes of literature in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and in his later work devoted particularly to romance, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976).

Following Aristotle's *Poetics*, in *Anatomy of Criticism*'s first essay, "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes," Northrop Fyre suggests different works of fiction are the result of an assorted variety of "elevations of the characters" (33). Since "in literary fictions the plot consists of somebody doing something," and "the somebody, if an individual, is the hero," then fictions can be "classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (*Anatomy* 33). Frye goes on to describe five literary modes, classifying romance as a mode that features a superior kind of hero. Following Frye's arguments, romance narratives have the following characteristics: a) they take place in a world similar to ours, but not quite like ours, as the laws of nature operate differently; b) the stories include: b.1) wondrous feats of courage; b.2) magical weapons and/or animals; b.3) supernatural foes;[15] and b.4) objects of extraordinary power; c) all these elements are acknowledged and accepted by the reader or audience as they "violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established" (*Anatomy* 33), that is, the peculiar elements frequently found in romance do not interfere with one's belief in the story when immersed in the romance;[16] d) the hero is a man who, albeit human, possesses specific characteristics that make him superior to others and to his surroundings, "superior in degree to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvelous but who is himself identified as a human being" (*Anatomy* 33).[17] Even though this definition focuses on the hero, excluding other elements (such as the possibility of a heroine,

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[15] Although Frye does not explicitly say so in his description, one can assume that the "terrifying ogres and witches" (*Anatomy* 33) he mentions will take on the role of antagonists or enemies of the hero.

[16] By stating that, once established, the extraordinary elements of romance do not disrupt the rules of probability, Frye's definition reminds us of J.R.R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories" where Tolkien proposes that in contrast to reality (the Primary World), there is a Secondary World where the mind can enter, a sub-creation of the story-maker. When inside it, "what he relates is 'true': it accords to the laws of that world. You therefore believe it (…)" (132). Likewise, Frye seems to suggest that once 'inside' the romance narrative, readers will believe it independently of whether it is verisimilar to 'our world' or not completely so.

[17] Frye's other modes include the mythic tragedy in which "the hero is a divine being" (*Anatomy* 33); the high mimetic mode where the "hero is a leader" (*Anatomy* 34) and, therefore, belongs to the epic and tragedy; the low mimetic mode whose hero is "superior neither to other men nor to his environment," making him "one of us" (*Anatomy* 34) and linking him to comedy and realistic fiction; and finally, the ironic mode in which the hero is "inferior in power and intelligence to ourselves" (*Anatomy* 34).

like in the late-fourteenth- to early-fifteenth-century poem *Emaré*), it expands the notion of romance from a specific genre into a more general type of production.

Moreover, Frye reinforces the idea that romance is a flexible literary form by drawing our attention to the five modes' interchangeability claiming that, "while one mode constitutes the underlying tonality of a work of fiction, any or all other four may be simultaneously present" (*Anatomy* 50). Frye is also interested in romance as one of the four pregeneric elements of literature, the "*mythoi* or generic plots" (*Anatomy* 162), that has a sequential and processional form in which the essential element of plot is adventure (*Anatomy* 186).[18] Because of its innate serial nature, the author argues, romance "tends to limit itself to a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climacteric adventure, usually announced from the beginning, the completion of which rounds off the story" (*Anatomy* 186-187), that is, of course, the quest.

A literary plot that features most pre-eminently in the Grail adventures of the Vulgate (c. 1215-1235) and Post-Vulgate (c. 1230-1240) Cycles of Arthurian romance, the quest is divided into three stages: first, the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures (*agon*); second, the crucial struggle (*pathos*), usually a battle in which the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and third, the exaltation of the hero (*anagnorisis*). This structure can also be found in what has been considered one of the greatest anonymous romances written in ME: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*).[19] Dated to the fourteenth century, *SGGK* depicts the Green Knight's arrival at King Arthur's court on New Year's Day where he challenges the monarch to a beheading game. As Arthur's knights fail to accept the test, it falls upon Gawain to take up the task that will take him on a journey to the Green Chapel (the equivalent to Frye's perilous journey) to confront the Green Knight (the crucial struggle). Finally, both humbled and wiser, Gawain returns to the court and is hailed as a great knight (exaltation of the hero). Although this is a short and reductive summary of *SGGK*'s plot, it is obvious the text fits Frye's three-fold structure.[20]

In the third essay of *The Anatomy of Criticism*, "Archetypical Criticism: Theory of Myths," Frye states that the central form of the chivalric quest-romance is dialectical, that is, there must be a conflict between two opposite forces: a protagonist or hero and an antagonist

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[18] Frye mentions four *mythoi* that, according to the author, form two opposed pairs, comedy and tragedy and romance and irony and satire. For more information on the remaining terms, see pages 163-86, 206-23 and 223-39, respectively.

[19] *SGGK* is found in only one manuscript: London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A X/2, fols. 94v-130r.

[20] Further on in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye identifies a fourth distinguishable aspect of the quest: "the disappearance of the hero, a theme which often takes the form of *sparagmos* or tearing to pieces" (192).

or enemy – a structure also found in the poem *SGGK* in the characters of Gawain (the protagonist/hero) and the Green Knight/Sir Bertilak and Morgan le Fay (the antagonists/enemies). As Frederic Jameson pinpoints, "the most important of those organizational categories [in romance] is the conceptual opposition between good and evil" (140), which supersedes all other elements. The presentation of these archetypes in romance, especially in a medieval one, is often characterised by a feeling of wish-fulfilment and a persistent nostalgia, reflected in an idealisation of both characters and places. When invoking the heroes and courts of old, medieval (and post-medieval) authors frequently describe them as possessing a grandness no longer seen. In fact, the antique seems to be of prime importance in romance, which expresses a yearning for what came before and can no longer be attained or re-enacted. *SGGK* fully voices such feelings of longing and idealism in the descriptions made of Arthur's Camelot: it has "alle þe mete and þe mirþe þat men couþe avyse" ("all the meat and merry-making men could devise," line 45), "Al watz hap vpon heȝe in hallez and chambrez ("all was happiness in the height in halls and chambers," line 48) and "With all þe wele of þe worlde þay woned þer samen" ("all delights on earth they housed there together," line 50). The knights are "þe most kyd" ("the most celebrated," line 51), the ladies are "þe louelokkest (…) þat þe court haldes" ("the loveliest … to live in all time," line 52) and the King "þe comlokest (…) þat þe court haldes" ("the comeliest … ever to keep court," line 53).[21] Similarly, in the poem *Havelok the Dane*, Athelwold (England) and Birkabeyn's (Denmark) reigns are described as epitomes of good rule, serving as models for kings to come, namely the hero Havelok and his spouse Goldeboru.[22] Athelwold in particular[23] is not only the strongest man ("the stalwortheste man at ned," line 25) but also the greatest king of early days, the flower of England – "Engelondes blome" (line 63) – whose laws are the fairest, and who is loved by all, rich or poor, young or old:

> It was a king bi are dawes;
> That in his time were gode lawes
> He dede maken and ful wel holden;
> Hym lovede yung, him lovede holde – (…)
> And al for hise gode werkes.
> He lovede God with al his micth
> And Holy Kirke, and soth and ricth.

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[21] In this study we will resort to J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon's edition of the ME poem while all the translations of *SGGK* into modern English are taken from Brian Stone's version.

[22] Greater attention will be paid to the idealised nature of Athelwold and Byrkabeyn's reigns in Chapter Five.

[23] Athelwold and Birkabeyn are described in overtly similar manner. A more comprehensive analysis of both characters is fully done in Chapters Four and Five.

Ricthwise men he lovede alle, (…)
Wreieres and wrobberes made he falle (lines 27-39)[24]

The time of the narrative or exact location of the heroes' land is most often undisclosed[25] and, in truth, for many romances it is of little importance in the continuous literary search for a golden age where the ruling estate[26] can projects its ideals.[27] The protagonists/heroes represent the principles and moral values held by the nobility whereas the antagonists/enemies embody the threats to their ascendancy, which explains why romance usually involves aristocratic characters or individuals who are revealed to come from an aristocratic family after living for a period of time as members of a lower social estate,[28] that is, among those who work. However, this does not imply medieval romance is a socially conservative form. On the contrary, by taking advantage of the distant past in which the narratives are set, authors could insert contemporary matters, ideologies and institutions into their renderings, making romance a *locus* where current social, political, national and economic problems might be addressed. Therefore, "its mythic, estranged, 'once-upon-a-time' mode of telling can actually provide ways of coming to grips with difficult cultural problems (…) from safer or more elucidating distances" (Chism 57). Considering ME medieval romances in particular, this is noticeable in *Athelston*, an anonymous text dating from the late fourteenth century.[29]

Athelston begins with four men who swear an oath of brotherhood and truth to each other. One of them, Athleston, becomes king after his cousin dies without an heir. He then proceeds to give the title of earl to two of his sworn brothers, Sir Egeland, The Earl of Stone, and Sir Wymound, The Earl of Dover, while the third, Alkyre, he makes Archbishop of Canterbury. The intrigue begins when, motivated by rivalry and envy, Sir Wymound accuses Sir Egeland of betrayal. Believing him, Athleston decides to kill the alleged traitor as well as

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[24] All the quotes from the ME *Havelok the Dane* are taken from Herzman, et al.'s 1999 edition published by Medieval Institute Publications.

[25] As *Havelok the Dane* and *SGGK* attest, this does not always happen.

[26] At the beginning of the eleventh century, Adalberon (Bishop of Laon) in *Poème au Roi Robert (le Pieux)* (c. 1030) suggested medieval society was divided into three orders or estates that lived in unity; these were: the *bellatores* (those who fight), the *oratores* (those who pray) and the *laboratores* (those who work). Though this was neither the only social scheme developed throughout the Middle Ages, nor the prevailing one in the ten centuries that make up the period, it was one of the most successful (Le Goff, "Introdução" 15).

[27] Yet, as we shall see in the following chapters, this may not always be the case given that ME popular romances pay special attention to issues of location and time, often setting the plot in pre-Conquest England.

[28] The main character, Florent, in the metrical poem *Octavian* (c. 1350) and well as Havelok, in *Havelok the Dane*, are examples of this second plot structure, though Havelok grows up aware of his heritage while the first does not.

[29] *Athelston* is preserved in one manuscript, the Caius College Library, Cambridge MS 175. In this work, we have resorted to Herzman, et al.'s 1999 edition from which we have taken all the quotes.

his wife and children. Before that happens, the Queen sends a messenger to Alkyre who intervenes and pleads for his friend's life. At first, Athleston refuses to yield, leading to a struggle between the king and the archbishop. Finally, an ordeal by fire takes place, which proves both the Earl of Stone and his family's innocence and serves to find the true traitor, Sir Wymound. Although relatively brief (812 lines) and with a small cast of characters, *Athleston* addresses some of the greatest concerns in the Middle Ages: the struggle between the secular and the ecclesiastical spheres, questions of Good and Evil, the defiance of tyranny and the importance of the rule of law.[30] Issues of moral character are equally stressed through the corruptive forces that follow Athleston's quick rise to kingship and his grave miscarriage of justice. The monarch's blind wrath and misjudgement even impel him to kill his unborn child in a scene of extreme cruelty:

> On here bare knees doun she [the Queen] felle,
>   And prayde yit for hem alle.
> (…)
> With hys foot – he [Athleston] wolde nought wonde –
> He slowgh the chyld ryght in here wombe;
>   She swownyd amonges hem alle. (lines 277-84)

This passage accentuates the extent to which the king has lost rational judgment and also serves to oppose Athelston's disregard for his family against Sir Egeland's efforts to keep his own alive and well. Family being one of the central themes in ME romance, the dichotomy between the two would certainly not have been missed by the poem's audience. Moreover, such scenes of violence can be regarded as a literary strategy used to question social and ethical codes, namely chivalric ones. In fact:

> The interrogation of the chivalric code can take the form of serious failures in terms of lack of courtesy or violations of oaths to even more severe moral failings in terms of violence against women, betrayals, and would-be usurpation of power by those very persons most expected to be loyal: brothers or stewards. (Charbonneau and Cromwell 108)

Therefore, while medieval romance can be used to emphasize and cement socially accepted rules, behaviours, and the moral code enforced by the Catholic Church, it can also denounce and condemn them. Undeniably, romance is ideologically complex, engaging with the interests and fantasies of heterogeneous groups of people (Gaunt 48). Although its history is bound up

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[30] For an analysis of the importance of English law in *Athelston*, see Young 95-118.

with the development of an elite lay culture and prosperous households throughout the Middle Ages, romances are hardly ever mere reflections of courtly ideals. What is more, the very notion of courtly love and the code it promoted can be seen as revolutionary given that it reworks the values of feudal society through its emphasis on love:

> The courtly love code adopted the terms of law and religion, their quibbles and ecstasies, but shifted the poles of their significance. The vital relationship is not now between man and society, man and God, but between two lovers: the lady and 'her man'. (Beer 22)

In its various origins, romance narratives are striking due to their authors' ability to reimagine shared stories in different social contexts and distinct geographic locations, shifting ethical systems to fit particular audiences (Krueger 1). The reformulation of narratives is equally visible through the restructuring of romance.

The shape of romance has been considered of paramount importance when it comes to circumscribing the term, possibly because by distinguishing a specific structure (or how a text presents itself visually) one might better narrow its definition. Some critics, like Frederic Jameson in "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," have argued that one's sense of genre derives from a specific association of form and content. Consequently, neither structure nor subject matter are, if taken separately, sufficient to define a literary composition. The distinction between form and content, though, is not a clear one since their association means that the first, by itself, can signal the second. In that case, the aesthetic effects produced by the formal and structural characteristics of a text cannot be separated from its subject matter and implicitly its ideology. When it comes to medieval romance in particular, efforts to link it to a particular form have been thwarted by its continuous transformations and transgressions.

When the term romance started being used in the second half of the twelfth century, verse was the preferred vehicle for the composition of these narratives. In fact, the great majority of romances written in England were in verse, especially in tail-rhyme stanza, which seemed to be the most popular form and continued to appear until the sixteenth century. In France, on the other hand, romance writers discovered prose in the late twelfth century, so by the following century French authors had begun to write in prose.[31] The change was, to a certain

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[31] In France, romance developed into two distinct directions in the thirteenth century. On the one hand, shorter episodic texts tended to be written in verse compositions, which focused on a limited time span and on the adventures of a single knight or of two (the second one was generally Gawain). On the other hand, texts depicting extended time-periods, such as a character's full lifetime, multiple generations or universal history, were written in prose. Owing to this division, some themes became exclusively written in prose, most notably the Grail material.

extent, a result of the emerging view that prose was essential to the presentation of truth whereas verse was progressively held as falsifying the text since:

> in order to accommodate the demands of metre and rhyme, an author or translator must introduce distortions, such as unnatural syntax, additional syllables, or a word chosen for rhyme rather than meaning. Since anything that takes precedent over the direct communication of meaning falsifies the text, it follows that only prose, unfettered by artifice, could convey truth. Indeed, to some commentators, verse became a virtual synonym for "falsehood." (Lacy 168)

Nevertheless, English writers remained committed to verse. One of the best-known late medieval English texts, *The Canterbury Tales* (late fourteenth century), by Geoffrey Chaucer, is mostly in verse (except for *The Tale of Melibee* and *The Parson's Tale*). Even when translating and adapting from French prose into English verse was preferred. Important prose romances, like *L'estoire del Saint Graal*, *Merlin*, *Lancelot* and the *Morte Artu*, which are a significant part of the Vulgate Cycle, were translated into verse: into the four-beat couplets in *Arthour and Merlin* (c. 1250-1300), into loose alliterative verse in *Joseph of Arimathie* (c. 1350), into an extended ballad stanza in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* (c. 1400), and into more four-beat couplets in Henry Lovelich's *History of the Holy Grail* (c. 1400) and *Merlin* (c. 1445), respectively (Putter, "Metres and Stanza" 111). The text which is considered the first English translation of the Matter of Britain[32] into prose, the *Prose Merlin*, dates from a much later period: the middle of the fifteenth century (Conlee), a time when a widespread transition from verse to prose took place in England.[33]

The shift from verse to prose around the second half of the fifteenth century took place for several reasons. First, while the traditional forms of versification were well suited for oral delivery, which was fairly common in the previous centuries, it slowly became outmoded in the eyes of a growing audience of readers (Putter, "Metres and Stanza" 112). Second, prose started being connected to historical truth and moral gravity so, in order to avoid the stigma of improbability and extravagant fiction, which was now associated with romance, early printers avoided using the word verse in titles and prologues of romances.[34] Consequently, even though couplet and tail-rhyme romances continued to be read in the age of print, it seems that early printers either shared a prejudice against old romances or at least believed they would do better

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[32] On the origin and use of term Matter of Britain, see Chapter Two.
[33] Thomas Malory's work *Le Morte Darthur* (1485) is another example of this.
[34] See for instance the following titles: *The Historye of Guy of Warwick* (Pynson, c. 1500) or *The Book of the Most Victoryous Prince Guy of Warwick* (Copland, 1565).

in the marketplace if packaged as historical matter (Putter, "Metres and Stanza" 112). Third, prose seemed a better fit for the length and narrative complications (like the prolongation of a knight's ordeals or the simultaneous advancement of multiple plots) that characterise medieval romance after the twelfth century. The growing number of plots within plots, the introduction of more characters, more paradigms of love, honour and courage, as well as more description became progressively common. In the end, although their names, locations and associations changed, the characters, tales and paradigms were very much the same, which contributed to the growing feeling that romance narratives were merely a repetition of the same patterns and plots with minor alterations. This assessment, repeated throughout the centuries, led to a loss of prestige and to their gradual association with 'low' culture.

Nevertheless, while, on the one hand, the multiplication of similar storylines and length of medieval romances have been frequently criticised, on the other hand, their repetitiveness and consequent predictability have been viewed as a possible reason for their popularity. Audiences who (as opposed to later readers) listened to romances being performed whether earlier on by minstrels at courts or later by other performers at gentry households might well have enjoyed the predictability of the narrative and, in fact, anticipate it given that:

> (…) partisans of popular romance did not seek the novelty of plot, individualized character, verbal ambiguities, subtle allusions, or variation in theme and image so dear to Chaucer. (…) they expected to hear lyrics they already knew, performed to a memorable beat that allowed them to vocalize along with the performer. Anyone who has attended a modern sporting event easily understands the power rhythmic clapping, whether initiated by the crowd, the scoreboard, or the piped-in music of the rock group Queen (…). It was just this kind of participatory and moving experience that made the reading event so enjoyable for the audiences of chivalric romances, and made the romances so disreputable with the keepers of high culture. (Hahn, "Gawain" 230)

Romance narratives continued to be popular well into the end of the fifteenth century and acquired a new life through the changes of form, from verse to prose, manuscript to print,[35] and from oral to written transmission. In England the most widely known romances at the end of the Middle Ages were composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Besides narratives pertaining to the Matter of Britain, *Bevis of Hampton* (c. 1324), *Guy of Warwick* (first half of the fourteenth century), *Richard Cœur de Lyon* (early fourteenth century), *Sir*

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[35] William Caxton, the first English printer, introduced the printing press into England in 1476. Set in Westminster, Caxton's press was responsible for producing a number of important romances in print, such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (first edition in 1476) and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte darthur*.

Isumbras (c. 1320-50), *Sir Degaré* (c. fourteenth century), *Sir Eglamour of Artois* (c. 1350) and *Octavian* (c. mid-fourteenth century),[36] all ME verse romances, enjoyed continuous popularity. Romance in this period preserves the old chivalric values and orthodox piety and displays a coherent set of moral values, like courage and loyalty, in both public and private life. Intriguingly, English romance in particular tended to promote an ideology that was more consistent with Christian morals than its French counterparts. Aside from versions of the stories of Tristan and Lancelot, romances of adultery are practically non-existent. Instead, English heroes and heroines show their moral excellence through endurance. In addition, some prose romances offer models of the art of conversation and social intercourse to lovers, though not exclusively, while others provide advice on the profession of arms and could serve as manuals to military practice. As a result, the concept of orders of knighthood and the ideals promoted by chivalric romances translated from the text into the historical world and vice-versa. In jousts, for example, many of the accompanying rules and ceremonials derived from earlier romances and at the same time provided models for new ones.[37]

In the sixteenth century, although romances of chivalry were not necessarily more sophisticated in style or content, they had become mass works of fiction with a fixed set of *topoi* that included, but were not limited to: a male protagonist, who is invariably of royal blood; a historically (and sometimes geographically) remote setting; separation and reunion; a journey or quest; magic and the marvellous.[38] Furthermore, despite their marked artificiality, chivalric romances often presented themselves as historical texts, trying to achieve "pseudo-historicity."[39] This attempt to legitimise the text is reminiscent of earlier romances that sought validation by alluding to a textual tradition, like Chrétien de Troyes' does in *Cligés*,[40] for

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[36] Since all of the romances mentioned in this short list have survived in more than one manuscript, the identified production dates coincide with the earliest manuscript in which each of the texts is found.

[37] Examples of the intertwining of romance and the real world can be found well before the fifteenth century. Edward I, for instance, was probably the one responsible for the construction of the Winchester Round Table (c. 1250-80), which was repainted around 1522 when Henry VIII had his effigy painted over Arthur's with the rose of the Tudors added in the middle of the Table. Edward III (1312-1377), on the other hand, actually founded the Order of the Garter in 1348, a chivalric order that followed the model of Arthur's fellowship and whose motto 'Hony soyt qui mal y pence' ('may he be shamed who thinks badly of it', *OED*) appears after the conclusion of *SGGK*.

[38] Besides chivalric matters, the main sources for romance narratives in the sixteenth century were classical legends, folktale, history, and Greek texts, which were rediscovered and soon became widely translated and imitated.

[39] See Eisenberg, especially "The Pseudo-Historicity of the Romances of Chivalry" in *Romances of Chivalry in the Spanish Golden Age*.

[40] In the prologue to *Cligés*, Chrétien claims the story he will retell can be found in one of the books at St. Peter's Library in Beauvais and that the manuscript which contains the true story is very old, making it more worthy of belief because of it, "Ceste estoire trovons escrite / Que conter vos vuel et retreire, / Anu n des livres de l'aumeire / Mon seignor saint Pere a Biauvez / De la fu li contes estrez, / Don cest rimanz fist Crestiiens / Li livres est mout anciiens, / Qui tesmoingne l'estoire a voire;" (lines 18-25).

example. Later romances also claimed authority by mentioning previous sources, writers or historians whose original tale the author would retell and re-evaluate. In *Le Morte Darthur*, which was first published about three centuries after *Cligés* in 1485, Thomas Malory repeatedly tells the reader his narrative is based on French books: "Here endyth the secund boke … whyche drawyn was oute of Freynshe" (495); "Thus endith the tale (…) that was breffly drawyn oute of Freynshe" (587); "as the Freynsche booke sayth" (644, and again in 645); "Thus of Arthur I fynde no more written in bokis that bene auctorysed" (689), inter alia.[41] These narratives clearly show how romance intertwines with and within a textual tradition that both amplifies and revisits earlier material, providing new versions or segments of the same storyline.

However, such claims to historicity were often a target for those who saw in medieval romance a potentially noxious influence on impressionable readers, emphasizing their improbability and artificial nature. When Miguel de Cervantes wrote *Don Quijote*, fully titled *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* (*The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*), published in two volumes in 1605 and 1615, the author presented a reader, Don Quijote, who is so besotted by romances, so convinced of their historical truth, that he ceaselessly attempts to fit their parameters into reality, making him "the most famous victim of the deluding power of romance" (Beer 41).

Considered one of the most influential works of the Spanish Golden Age (c. 1492-1681), *Don Quijote* addresses many of the controversies over romance: the anachronism of chivalric ideology, its contradictions, the difference between the world of books and the real world, among others. Throughout the narrative Don Quijote follows the conventions of romance to build his identity as a knight: he selects an idealised paramour, Dulcinea of Toboso (who is in fact the swineherd Aldonza Lorenzo), is dubbed a knight (in a pretend ceremony led by an innkeeper), finds himself a squire, Sancho Panza, and departs on a journey that begins with him fighting giants that happen to look like windmills. Don Quijote's bravery seems genuine enough but it is clearly inconsistent with the world he lives in so:

> When he attacks the windmills he believes himself to be attacking giants: his courage is real, but at the same time its monstrous disproportion casts an ironic light upon the 'heroic' ideal. The balance constantly shifts between the claims of the ideal and the actual. (Beer 41)

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[41] All the quotes from Malory's text are taken from Stephen H.A. Shepherd's 2004 edition, which is based on the Winchester Manuscript, London, British Library, Additional 59678.

Under romance's spell, Don Quijote is not satisfied in merely enjoying its idealised world within his own mind. Instead, he must carry the narratives out in the real world. In *Don Quijote*, Cervantes thus parodies chivalric romance by exposing its lack of authenticity, questioning its viability and, ultimately, the very reality of romances. The attempt at pseudo-historicity is also a point of criticism, which is especially evident when the narrator states he found the second part of *Don Quijote* among scrap papers for sale in Toledo's market.[42] Yet, Cervantes' two-volume narrative puts into evidence romance's enduring popularity. In fact, although a taste for new kinds of narrative was emerging, some ME romances, like the aforementioned *Bevis of Hampton* (with eighteen early prints dating from c. 1500 to c. 1711), *Guy of Warwick* (with seven early prints dating from 1497 to 1609) and *Sir Isumbras* (with five early prints all dating from the first half of the sixteenth century), to name but a few, showed remarkable longevity, surviving in multiple print copies made by early Tudor publishers, namely Wynkyn de Worde and William Copeland. According to Helen Cooper, "[b]oth *Guy* and *Bevis* were as familiar as the legends of Robin Hood or King Arthur (or indeed of Valentine and Orson) until the start of the twentieth century" (*English Romance* 33). However, it is clear that romance's popularity was waning: the rise of prose, social changes, the growing opinion that the ideals of knightly romances were obsolete, and the declining of chivalry contributed to the demise of medieval romance.

1.2. Medieval Romance in Middle English: A Working Definition Proposal

Today medieval romance is considered "the principal secular literature of entertainment in the Middle Ages" (Pearsall, "Audience" 37), the most popular "in its capacity to attract a large and heterogeneous medieval audience" (McDonald 2) as well as "the dominant non-devotional genre" (Chism 57) of the period. However, despite its obvious appeal to past audiences and the fact that its themes permeate medieval literary culture in general, ME romances in particular have been called the "ugly ducklings of medieval English studies" (Knight 99). Perhaps one of the reasons for such claim has to do with the difficulties often met when attempting to define ME romance.

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[42] We do not mean to say that there had been no critiques to romance before Cervantes' work. On the contrary, in medieval romances, like *SGGK*, we can already find some scenes that seem to comment negatively on romance's structure and ideals, so, for instance, Gawain's journey and adventures to Hautdesert are summed up in eleven lines, which shows the Gawain-poet possibly did not consider the great digressions found in many other romances relevant to the plot. Geoffrey Chaucer's "Tale of Sir Thopas" (included in *The Canterbury Tales*) is another example of how medieval authors could be critically aware of the problems within romance.

First, as already stated, the word romance has come to comprise a variety of meanings throughout the centuries. From the *romanz* translations of the twelfth century to the later debates on romance as a genre or mode, one single, commonly accepted definition is yet to be found. Second, not every medieval work of fiction that calls itself romance is what a modern scholar would like to call a romance, or vice-versa. A complete list of works that name themselves romances would comprise a large number of widely different narratives that few would think of classing together. Considering, for example, two editions of the poem *Emaré* (late fourteenth- to early fifteenth-century) published in the twentieth century: on the one hand, one finds in the collection *Six Middle English Romances* (1973), edited by Maldwyn Mills, the poem regarded as "[one] of six romances belonging to the central tradition of English romance-writing" (back cover); on the other hand, the same poem is identified as a Breton lay in TEAMS' later collection *The Middle English Breton Lays* (1995), which proves that academics struggle when it comes to qualifying a text as a ME romance. Third, by the fourteenth century, while the flourishing of romance had given way to derivative works of fiction in France and Germany, in England old romances were taken up again and reworked/adapted to suit new tastes. However, "the classic form of the courtly love novel that had evolved in France, only provided a very vague model for the English adapters" (Mehl 2). As a result, studying ME romance inevitably means analysing a different tradition, which in turn implies one must acknowledge it may not share the same themes, motifs, and forms of other European narratives. Finally, and fourth, early publishers and the academia often regarded ME romances, in particular those that fall outside the Matter of Britain, as inferior in quality when compared to the remaining continental productions, which deeply affected how the first were (and are) studied.[43] Looking for instance at the collection edited by Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765),[44] the ME romances compiled are described as possessing "a pleasing simplicity" as well as "many artless graces;" they are "artless productions," "obsolete poems" that lack "higher beauties" (5). Due to the popularity of Percy's collection, his remarks have "made an indelible mark on the way popular romance continues to be read" (McDonald 5) and are echoed in later works, such as George Ellis' *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances* (1805), W.P. Ker's *Epic and Romance. Essays on Medieval Literature* (1896; 1908)[45] and in

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[43] Notable exceptions are the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower and Margery Kempe.

[44] Percy's collection is based on the manuscript now known as the Percy Folio or MS. 27879. Currently, it is part of the British Library and consists of 520 paper pages, containing 195 individual items. The manuscript mostly has ballads but also metrical romances like *Sir Degaré* and *The Squire of Low Degree*, Arthurian texts, and eight Robin Hood ballads.

[45] Although Ker's study remains one of the most comprehensive modern analyses of English medieval romance and ballads, these are often deemed derivative and inferior to epic against which they are measured. ME romance

John Stevens' *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches* (1973) where the romance *Bevis of Hampton* is referred to as a "fantasy of the rippling biceps" (180).

Efforts to define ME romance are, thus, frequently entangled with judgments about its classification, its literary worth as well as anachronistic assumptions. In "Definitions of Middle English Romance," John Finlayson suggests ME romance:

> is a tale in which a knight achieves great feats of arms, almost solely for his own *los et pris* in a series of adventures which have no social, political, or religious motivation and little or no connection with medieval actuality. At this level, it is not unlike the basic cowboy film, or the simple novel of action in which the hero undergoes a series of adventures, which sometimes become a progressive sequence, and emerges victorious and unscathed at the end. (55-56)

This definition is very much prejudiced against this set of texts as Finlayson holds there is in fact no real point or motivation to the adventures undertaken and, ergo, to the narrative itself, which is deemed "basic" and "simple." Furthermore, ME romances have been described as "intended for the relaxation and amusement of a mixed society" (Griffin 57), a fact that has also generated a number of preconceived assumptions about the quality of ME romance. Seeking to provide an answer to the uncertainties, hesitations and bias constructions around ME romances, it seems reasonable to begin by looking at how medieval English authors understood the word *romaunce* (Strohm, "Storie" 348) itself.

As already established, the OF expression *mettre en romanz* was originally used to describe the process of translating into vernacular. Thefore, there is a clear connection between the language in which a text is written and its identification as a *romaunce*. However, *romaunce* might have other meanings; it might indicate a narrative poem, any sort of narrative or an authoritative source and even when texts call themselves *romaunces* this designation "raises almost as many problems of interpretation as it solves" (Strohm, "Storie" 354). Hence, the term could be applied to a number of texts as medieval understanding of *romaunce* and its sources is obviously much less circumscribed than the modern one. *Romaunces* might then vary in character to include works of fiction like *Bevis of Hampton* and *Sir Isumbras*, but also the *Life of St. Gregory* (c. 1188-1200), *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (c. 1400) or *The Laud Troy Book* (c. early fifteenth century). Therefore, in order to provide an objective, comprehensive definition of ME romance, it is equally important to consider what other terms

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is, thus, described as owning a "rude sweetness" while popular tales have an "unconscious grace" (15). When compared to the epic, which "implies some weight and solidity[,] (…) romance means nothing, if it does not convey some notion of mystery and fantasy" (4) and is considered to be "of a lower order" (15).

were used to describe the narratives in production and what differences there were between them. With this goal in mind, a number of possible terms are revealed since:

> Middle English writers lacked any truly neutral terminology for describing narrative genres – narration emerged only at the end of the period, and the nearly synonymous process was never widely popular. As a result, Middle English writers classify their narratives with a number of different terms, reflecting such criteria as relationship to actual events (*storie*, *fable*), mode of narration (*spelle*, *tale*), language (*romaunce*), literary tradition (*romaunce*, *legend*, *lyf*) proportion of represented action to argument (*geste*, *treatise*), and movement of the fortunes of the protagonist (*tragedie*, *comedie*). (Strohm, "*Storie*" 348)

According to Strohm, the term *storie* was used to identify pseudo-faithful, historical accounts that aimed at providing a sense of authenticity to the narrative. An example of this can be found in the ME Troy narrative, *Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy*, an alliterative poem translated from Guido de Colonna's *Hystoria Troiana* and dated to around the fourteenth century. In it the author, much like other ME writers of Troy narratives, highlighted the authenticity of his source, which he qualified as a *trety* or *treatise* (lines 154, 7906, 8283, 8870, 9072, 9694, 13403, 13406) but also as a *gest* (line 12772) and a *boke* (lines 9942, 13786). In what was surely an attempt to stress historicity, in three occasions, the author uses the term *storie* (lines 922, 12165, 12552). In addition, the writer laments for poets who "With ffablis and falshed fayned þere speche" (line 34) while he seeks "þe truth for to telle" (line 51).[46] As it is somewhat hinted on line 34, from the Latin *fabula*, *fāble* was "(a) a fictitious or imaginative narrative or statement (…); (b) a short fictitious narrative meant to convey a moral (…)" (*MED*, def. 1). Joyce E. Salisbury argues, on the other hand, that fables "offer short fictional tales in which animals (and less often, inanimate objects) speak" highlighting that "[f]rom such tales of animal actions and speech, humans were to see their own flaws and draw morals for future action" (105).[47]

The word *spelle* was commonly used throughout medieval England to refer to speeches and oral narratives overall; it might also be applied to any account delivered orally (Strohm, "*Storie*" 353). At the same time, the term *tale*, from the OE *talu*, was also in use to designate oral narratives. Of the two, tale was probably the most used in common parlance, as we can see most notably in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, where the term occurs time after time in

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[46] The version of the text here used is George A. Panton and David Donaldson's edition for the Early English Text Society, which is based on the sole manuscript to have survived until contemporaneity, the Unique MS, the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow.

[47] For a more detailed discussion of the term 'fable', see Whitesell 348-66 and Perry.

the title of the various narratives/tales. Therefore, *spelle* seems to have had a somewhat more restricted meaning, usually used for oral narratives of limited scope and linked to what is now thought of as metrical romances, like *Havelok the Dane*. Since it fails to offer any insight into the storylines, *spelle* may not be as useful a term as *storie*, but it does offer some useful information given that "the general sense of *spelle* and tale as 'speech' determined their more specific literary uses" (Strohm, "*Storie*" 354). The same can be said of the word *geste* (from OF *geste*; Latin *gesta*), meaning 'deeds' or 'actions,' which seems to establish the literary use of the term *geste* for narratives of battles or other feats of arms.

Broadly speaking, *geste* might be applied to any written account of actions and is considered to be "active, martial, peopled by men and heroes" (Beer 24) as opposed to romance, which "tends to be contemplative and to give a major role to women and to affairs of love" (Beer 24-25). In addition:

> The *chanson de geste* is a type of heroic poem dependent on values essentially associated with war. Valour is the main ingredient of a warrior's character, but this valour need not be tempered by *mesure* or by *courtoisie* as it must be in a romance hero. (Finlayson, "Definitions" 53)

The hero of the *chanson de geste* can be distinguished from the one of romance, seeing as the first "displays great, sometimes immoderate valour in the cause of his king or overlord" (Finlayson, "Definitions" 53) and the second usually fights for a private ideal of behaviour. An example of the hero of *geste* can be found in *La Chanson de Roland* (c. 1040-1115) or *Fierabras* (c. 1170) while Lancelot in Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* might well be regarded as a paradigm for champions in Arthurian romance. Considering English literature in particular, though, Melissa Furrow has suggested that for readers in medieval England, *geste* and romance did not operate as different genres. In fact, because "what is central to romance in England is more often martial, less often erotic, more often corporate, less often individual, as much Roland as it is Tristan" (96), there seems to be a failure to distinguish them.[48]

The terms *legende* and *lyf* too seem to share some common literary grounds with the first commonly used by contemporary critics to include saints' lives (as well as passions and miracles), a form the second is also linked to.[49] Yet, as Strohm notes, the ME *legende* was first adopted because of the popularity of Jacobus' *Legenda* in the middle of the fourteenth century

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[48] For a discussion on the similarities between the *chanson de geste* and romance in England see Furrow, Chapter Three.

[49] Check Strohm, "*Passioun*" for the differences between *lyf*, *passioun* and *miracle* (155-61).

(Strohm, "*Passioun*" 162) with Chaucer being the first ME author to employ the word more extensively. Consequently, "[i]n general (…) a person in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century who encountered *legende* in a literary context would have thought first of Jacobus's *Legenda* or a Middle English version of the *Legenda*" (Strohm, "*Passioun*" 164). *Lyf*, on the other hand, was not only a generic term widely resorted to but also a very inclusive one, often employed alone or/and in combination to describe a variety of situations. Bearing this in mind, the word is habitually associated with hagiographic narratives that, as a rule, feature a set number of characteristics, which include:

> a brief account of the birth and early upbringing of the saint; a brief account of the conversion and some good works of the saint; a prolonged account of the trial, sufferings under torture, resolute conduct, and eventual death of the saint; and very possibly some added attention to miracles wrought at the shrine of the saint or by the relics of the saint after death. (Strohm, "*Passioun*" 156)

Indeed, medieval authors seemed to presuppose that "the telling of the life of a saint [would] involve this kind of process or movement through a recognized succession of scenes" (Strohm, "*Passioun*" 156).

Finally, *tragedie* or *comedie* are terms with some traditional authority, having been preserved in encyclopaedias, grammars and lexicons. The medieval basis for the distinction of the two terms lies on the people treated, the level of style, and the upward or downward movement(s) of the plot. Most commonly, the two terms were used to refer to the fortune of the characters within various narratives. An example of this kind of narrative can be found in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1381-1386).[50]

In view of the potential benefits of a distinction of terms when attempting to understand ME romance, it might be equally valuable to consider the terms 'epic' and 'Breton lay', both of which are closely associated with medieval romance. The epic genre has long been considered a predecessor of romance,[51] sharing with it many similarities as both deal with heroic adventure and achievement; they may be short or long, and written in prose or in verse. Moreover:

> Both genres interact in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as many romances continue to exploit the materials and traits of oral poetry not only to profit from earlier or alternate modes of discourse but to play on the mixed character of

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[50] For a more detailed analysis of these terms, see Strohm, "*Storie*", especially pages 357-58.
[51] See Griffin 57.

their own transmission and reception as written narratives read out loud in castle hall or manor house chamber (and in later centuries in bourgeois settings as well). (Bruckner 17)

On the whole, in the epic, an individual character of exceptional strength demonstrates his martial skills by leading his nation or comrades in a time of crisis, like *Beowulf*, traditionally considered to be an epic. Therefore, epic "is most often associated with stories of effective quests, corporate achievement, and the heroic birth of nations" (Fuchs 66); it is a "virile type of narrative, fit for the mead-hall" (Griffin 57) where love interests might be admitted but only incidentally and always obliging to larger dynastic and foundational concerns: "dynasty and glory are the point; love is not" (Herzman, et al. 2). The differences between epic and romance are conventionally understood to lie on the emphasis given to: a) the personal story of the main character, which is far greater in the second; and b) love, a privileged driving force in romance that will also make women important players in the action. In the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*, Jay Rudd adds that another difference to be commonly found is that the "epic plot was simple and straightforward, while the plot of romances was often episodic and even rambling" (547). Nevertheless, while the war-theme is preferred by epic authors and amorous and adventurous themes favoured by romancers "since neither the epic author holds exclusively to the one nor the author of romance to the others, the mere choice of theme cannot be employed as an infallible means of distinguishing the two" (Griffin 51-52).[52]

As for the ME Breton lay, its definition as a distinct genre has been a concern for modern scholars. According to Dieter Mehl, the lays "were originally a form of prose narrative, told between songs on certain heroes or local traditions, and designed to inform the hearers about the details of the story which could not be gathered from the songs alone" (40). In *A Literary History of England*, A.C. Baugh suggests that whether a story is called a Breton lay or not depends chiefly on: i) whether it says it is one; ii) has its scene laid in Brittany or contains a reference to it; or iii) tells a story found among the *lais* of Marie de France (196).

In the late twelfth century, Marie de France, who was born in France but lived in England, developed a refined and subtle form of tale in verse, presumably based on the original narratives Mehl mentions, in the work entitled *The Lais of Marie de France* (second half of the twelfth century). Thus, she codified the literary genre and immortalised this tradition of Breton storytelling. In her work, she encompassed *Guigemar, Equitan, LeFresne, Bisclavret, Lanval,*

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[52] For more on the differences and similarities between the epic and romance, check W.P. Ker's Chapter II.

Deus Amanz, Yonec, Laüstic, Milun, Chaitivel, Chevrefoil, and *Eliduc*.[53] Marie de France's lays, followed by OF imitations in the thirteenth century, are set in Brittany, Wales or Normandy and "tell a concise story in which a knight undergoes a strange adventure and which often ends with a surprising turn of plot" (Mehl 40). The plots usually include a discussion of the problems of courtly love, addressing "matters of courtesy, chivalry, and courtly love, concerns of interest to her [Marie de France's] multi-lingual, aristocratic audience" (Laskaya and Salisbury, "Introduction"). The ME Breton lays[54], in particular, were composed at some point between the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century and the early fifteenth century; these include: *Sir Orfeo* (1330-40)*, Sir Degaré, Lay le Freine, Erle of Tolous, Emaré, Sir Gowther, Sir Launfal*, all of which seem to support Baugh's proposed definition. *Lay le Freine* and *Sir Launfal* can be found in Marie de France's original lays; *Sir Degaré* is set "In Litel Bretaygne" (line 9); and the remaining works mention Brittany or some lost Breton source, "In Breteyne this layes were wrought" (*Sir Orfeo*, line 13).[55]

Notwithstanding, all the works identify themselves either as *contes*, stories, *gestes*, or romances, further highlighting that medieval authors felt no need to clearly constrict the different literary productions. Naturally this only adds to discord and serves to question the validity of calling the Breton lay a genre at all. In fact, some researchers see the lays as a shortened form of romance[56] while Maldwyn Mills claims the Breton lay is:

> a short narrative poem, of which the range of possible subject-matter was very nearly as wide as that of the romances themselves, but which – partly because of its brevity – had a special aptitude for dealing with the tales of the supernatural. ("Introduction" xxiv)

Mehl too highlights that the most noticeable difference between the Breton lay and other short romances lies in "the fairy-tale-like character of the action with its (typically Celtic) blending of reality and otherworld" (41). Thus, a single formulaic pattern can hardly be found or applied to the lays, which, much like other medieval texts, display some resistance to conform to a single cohesive system of categorisation.

As a result, although the distinction of terms used throughout the Middle Ages can be useful in the sense that it helps understand and organise one's view of these narratives, their

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[53] See Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante's *The Lais of Marie de France*.
[54] If taken without the preceding identification "Middle English," "the Breton lay may refer to any of the poems produced between approximately 1150 and 1450 which claim to be literary versions of lays sung by ancient Bretons to the accompaniment of the harp" (Laskaya and Salisbury, "Introduction").
[55] All the quotes from *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Orfeo* are taken from Laskaya and Salisbury's 1995 edition.
[56] For more on this line of argument, see Finlayson, "The Form" 352-68; Beston, 319-36.

grouping into neat, clearly-bound categories seems to be by and large ineffectual. The main reason for this has to do with the very nature of ME romances, the variety of subject-matter, form, length, and the geographical locations covered are simply too vast so that "it is practically impossible to generalize about the romances because there is so little they have in common" (Mehl 28). Strohm too advises caution when employing ME generic terms, drawing attention to the fact that the "writers of late antiquity and the Middle Ages simply did not pay very sustained attention to the genre of a literary work" (Strohm, "*Passioun*" 164). Naturally, this does not mean there are not some qualities that are more commonly found than others. Still, if the terminology used in the Middle Ages remains confusing, with a number of narratives that could actually fit under different headings, how can we provide a definition that might adequately fit this whole range of texts? Considering this, recent research has underscored the possibility of looking at ME romances as prototypes.

Broadly speaking, prototype theory holds that "a category is defined not by its boundary but by its best examples (its prototypes); that the attributes of the prototypes are not necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in the category but rather describe relationships between members" (Liu 338).[57] In addition, membership to a category is rated, meaning that some members might be better examples of that same category than others. Applying this theory to ME narratives would mean some of the texts can be read as better representatives of the medieval romance than others, not due to their literary quality, but because they have a particular set of characteristics. Therefore, works like *Havelok the Dane*, *Beavis of Hampton* or *King Horn* could be regarded as prototypes of ME romance since they share qualities generally accepted as pertaining to that set of texts. According to Yin Liu:

> It is fitting for Middle English romance to be defined in terms of prototypes, of 'best examples,' for these texts are about exemplarity. The protagonist of a Middle English romance is unfailingly described as the best knight of the world, or the most beautiful woman; the knight's personal armor is always the best ever made, his horse the strongest, his battles the most spectacular; the protagonist's hardships are invariably the worst ever suffered. Just as a prototype provides information about the category for which it is a central case, the prototypical romance protagonist provides information about the ideological systems of which he or she is imagined to be exemplary. (347)

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[57] For further details on prototype categories see Rosch 27-48; Fowler 37-38; Ungerer and Schmid, 7-63; J. Taylor 41-83.

Adopting the prototype theory would bring some advantages to the field of literary studies, namely when facing a wide and varied set of texts, like those often found under the heading 'ME romance' since change, ambiguity and diversity would be expected both diachronically and synchronically. Furthermore, if a genre is "constantly transformed through textual production as new texts add new features and thereby new expectation" (Gaunt 46), we might make use of prototype theory to develop an inclusive, flexible designation in which ME narratives are linked through a series of chains. Looking at *King Horn* (late thirteenth century),[58] for instance, the motifs present throughout this text can be linked to works like *Octavian* or *Sir Isumbras*, but also to *Emaré*, a statement which at first might seem contradictory since the last one focuses on the hardships of a female heroine. Nevertheless, all these narratives share several common motifs: sea journeys, exile and return, family, marriage and reunion. Likewise, in *Emaré* the fate of the protagonist is somewhat similar to that of the Empresses in *Octavian*: both are falsely accused of betrayal and set adrift, but heroically live to see the fragments of their families pieced back together. *Octavian*, in turn, can be associated with romances like *Richard Coer de Lyon* as both deal with kings and conquest. Thus, texts are connected through chain relationships that may well reach over traditional genre boundaries and narratives that at first might seem irreconcilably different can be related. In *The English Romance in Time. Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare*, Helen Cooper seems to support a similar approach:

> The romance genre – any genre, indeed – is best thought of as a lineage or a family of texts (…). A family changes over time as its individual members change, but equally, those individuals can be recognized through their 'family resemblance': a resemblance such as might lie in a certain shape of nose or mouth (…) even though no one of those is essential for the resemblance to register, and even though individual features (hair colour, eyebrow, habits) may contradict the model. (…) Similarly with romance, any of the features that might be taken as definitive for the genre may be absent in any particular case without damaging that sense of family resemblance, though the dissimilarity increases (…). (*English Romance* 8-9)

Yet, even if we agree on the advantages of referring to prototype theory, which bears some similarities to Cooper's "family resemblance theory,"[59] it does not truly solve the problem of definition since we must still consider a set of characteristics to assist in the

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[58] Although *King Horn* was most likely based on the Anglo-Norman poem *Horn et Rimenhild*, it is one of the ME texts that have for the longest been acknowledged as a clear example of a ME romance seeing as it encompasses motifs that traditionally belong to romance tradition in England. The most common motifs and themes of ME romance will be analysed in subchapter 2.5.

[59] Cooper seems to be borrowing her "family resemblance theory" from Ludwig Wittgenstein's work *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) where the author debates the concept applied to language use and meaning.

identification of the best 'examples' (using Liu's term) or 'models' (as Cooper puts it) of ME Romance.[60]

As already established by now, a single comprehensive list containing all the qualities of ME romance is necessarily fated to exclude an element or another, as will any sort of listing. Notwithstanding, for clarity's sake, throughout the remaining of this research, narratives identified as ME romances will be deemed to include works of fiction that are: written in ME, although they may have an Anglo-Norman and/or a French original version; produced between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries; aimed at an aristocratic audience while others are believed to have been heard or read in gentry households, mostly in urban areas, but not exclusively so. Furthermore, the heading ME romances will include narratives that deal with the adventures of a male hero, who is usually a knight (whether belonging to King Arthur's court or not), but can also be a king or the son of one, or a heroine, most often the daughter of a ruler or a nobleman; the protagonist, who may be English or not, is usually a Christian but, especially when female, might also be a Saracen or simply identified as a heathen; main characters generally follow a knightly code of conduct with courtly love taking a prominent place in some of the narratives, though also unspecified in others. The tales can involve marvellous or supernatural elements, magical objects and characters, but these do not inescapably need to be present; animals can also be a part of the story, whether they are imaginary or not. Narratives include moral and/or religious themes, a struggle between opposite forces, a quest of love or of another kind; action might take place in Britain, other parts of Europe, like Italy or Greece, or in more exotic locations, such as the Middle East, and cover a small period of time or trace different generations of the same family.

Despite the shortcomings of such itemisation, the variety of ME romance is made clear by this short working definition. However, once having determined what sort of texts can be included under this heading, we are inevitably confronted with other complications. In fact, the definition of ME romances provided above remains extremely wide raging: it may include narratives about King Arthur and his Knights as well as those which represent an English literary tradition that is little concerned with courtly love or codes of chivalry, but more so with "the bases of human existence in society" (Field, "Popular Romance" 29). Since the latter is the main focus of this study, it is vital to reflect upon how this set of manuscripts can too be

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[60] In *Expectations of Romance: The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England*, Melissa Furrow suggests a similar strategy: using 'radial categories' to analyse medieval English romance. While the author establishes that there is no defining trait that characterises every romance, she argues there are 'central romances' that can help modern scholars understand which texts medieval audiences perceived as belonging to this set (43-94).

defined or qualified as opposed to and distinct from the better-known narratives of the Matter of Britain.

CHAPTER TWO

'WHAT'S THE MATTER?': MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE AND THE MATTERS OF BRITAIN AND ENGLAND

Popular romance is the pulp fiction of medieval England, the 'principal secular literature of entertainment' for an enormously diverse audience (…). But this is not a reason to dismiss it.

McDonald, *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England* 1

Romance in England is (…) centred differently from romance in France or Italy or Spain.

Furrow, *Expectations of Romance* 71

2.1. The Problem of Classification

In the second half of the twelfth century, the French poet Jean Bodel wrote *La Chanson des Saisnes*, which he begins by classifying the three narrative subjects in medieval Western literature that no one should be without, the Matters of France, Britain and Rome:

> Qui d'oir et d'antandre a loisir et talant
> Face pais, si escout bone chançon vaillant
> Don li livre d'estoire sont tesmoing et garant.
> Jà nuls vilains jugleres de ceste ne se vant,
> Qar il n'an sauroit dire ne les verse ne la chante.
> Ne sont que .iij. matières à nul home attandant:
> De France et de Britaigne et de Rome la grant;
> Et de ces .iiij. matieres n'i a nule samblant. (lines 1-8)

Under the expression Matter of Britain Bodel describes narratives that "sout si vain et plaisant" (line 9): the tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Bodel's categorisation deeply affected the following centuries and soon the Matter of Britain came to include all the narratives, in any language, that focused on the Arthurian Cycle. As a result, under this heading are such varied works as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Vita Merlini*, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Laȝamon's *Brut*, but also works like Chrétien de Troyes' romances, Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône* (c. 1220), Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (thirteenth century), the anonymous *SGGK*, Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, the romances of the Gawain Cycle (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), to name but a few. Even today literary and cinematic retellings of Arthurian narratives are regarded as belonging to the Matter of Britain, a term that now encompasses any fictional account, independently of its plot and setting, in which Arthur and/or (one or more of) his Knights feature as main characters, with King Arthur's court often remaining the centre from where the heroes depart and to where they return. The advantages of using this term are obvious since it helps comprise and delimitate Arthurian studies, whether medieval or contemporary. Therefore, it seems only natural that researchers of those ME romances which fall outside the scope of the Matter of Britain should

look for a designation that might likewise help include and restrict this vast set of manuscripts. Most frequently, the choice has fallen on the phrase 'Matter of England', an option that raises many questions.

First, the designation Matter of England did not originate in the Middle Ages; it was never used by Bodel or any other medieval author. In fact, the first reference to it seems to have been made in *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* (1906) written by the American scholar W.H. Schofield who comprised under this heading the romances *Havelok*, *Waldef* (early thirteenth century), *Beavis of Hampton*, *Guy of Warwick*, all the versions of *Horn* (including the Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn* as well as *King Horn* and *Horn Childe*), *Athelston*, Robin Hood ballads, *Gamelyn* (c. 1340) and other outlaw tales.[1] Throughout his study Schofield appears to regard the concept of Matter of England as a means to describe content and trace back a native narrative or saga that initially had to "assume the exterior semblance of French poetry in order to maintain its dignity" (259). Yet, he does not attempt to justify his choice of terminology, introducing a term that, because it echoes Bodel's categorisation, sounds satisfactorily medieval and adaptable enough to be applied to a set of English romances that had so far been dubbed 'non-cyclic' or 'miscellaneous'. Perhaps due to the authority seemingly conveyed by Schofield's work, in 1911, H.L. Creek (another American researcher) published "Character in the 'Matter of England' Romances" in which he identified *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick* as the most important romances in the Matter of England (429). Creek failed to mention, though, what other romances might be included under this heading, begging the question: if these four are the most significant ones, what others are included in the group? Furthermore, the term 'Matter of England' remains unexamined and unexplained, so concerns like what romances it refers to or where the term originates from are not answered (or even addressed). By doing so, Creek conveys a sense of established authority since to all appearances no clarification is needed. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that the designation 'Matter of England' did not develop in medieval Europe but through the work of American literary historians who were followed by other specialists in the creation of a new Matter.

Second, even if we accept this new subject matter that emerged from Schofield and Creek's work, when discussing the Matter of England, scholars remain unsure about which romances are or ought to be included in it. *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1974), edited by George Watson, for instance, contained a section entitled "Matter

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[1] See Schofield 258-82.

of England" (quotation marks included) in which *King Horn*, *Horn Childe*, *King Ponthus and the fair Sidone* (mid-fifteenth century), *Havelok*, *Athelston*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Gamelyn*, *Richard Coeur de Lion*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and *William of Palerne* (c. 1350-61) are included. About roughly a decade later, albeit recognising that "[i]t is doubtful if, on its own, such a formal categorization can tell us very much" (54), W.R.J. Barron distinguished *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, *Guy of Warwick* and the Greenwood romances (which encompass *Gamelyn*)[2] as texts pertaining to the Matter of England. Looking at the set of texts identified by Schofield, Creek, Barron and Watson's *Cambridge Bibliography*, it is clear some romances (such as *Havelok the Dane* and *Guy of Warwick*) seem to gather scholarly consensus about their place within the Matter of Britain while others (like *Waldef* and *Richard Coeur de Lion*) do not command equal support. Therefore, when making use of such terminology, we are actually referring to an indistinct set of texts, which makes the heading 'Matter of England' an ambiguous and potentially difficult designation.

In addition, and third, the use of a classification by matter has been successively questioned over the last decades since it does not offer actual insight into the romances themselves, grouping them merely by theme, but disregarding linguistic as well as formal and stylistic aspects. Several scholars make this point, notably Pearsall who claims a division by matters is "misleading where it lumps together quite dissimilar romances because of some superficial coincidence of plot-material" ("Development" 16). Finlayson's essay, "Definitions of Middle English Romance," also purposefully questions the benefits of employing such subject-based organisation:

> Nor is the classification by matières much more useful. To begin with, Jean Bodel's three matières obviously exclude many poems accepted as romances and in addition include poems which belong to the genre known as the chanson-de-geste. Moreover, to know that a poem is about Arthur, Charlemagne, or antiquity is to know only the subject, which is no more useful for critical purposes than to know that Hamlet is about a Danish prince of that name. (45)

Dieter Mehl makes a similar point, highlighting that, while Bodel's proposed arrangement might be applied to the author's period, when it comes to later poems that "have not necessarily anything in common beyond the fact that they cannot be fitted into any of the *matières*," the classification is "unsatisfactory" (31).

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[2] Barron also discussed *Bevis of Hampton* and *Athelston*; see Chapter 4.

Fourth, besides the controversy around the suitability of organising medieval romances by matters, there are added problems with the word England. In many romances (like *King Horn*) the issue of location is a complicated one since the exact site of the action remains undisclosed; kingdoms are undetermined and so is the time period. Consequently, the apparent immediate link between this set of manuscripts and England as a clearly identifiable nation is, in some romances, put in doubt. What is more, issues of nationality or nationalism, which have been explored in connection to the Matter of England have also been criticised by some scholars (Crofts and Rouse 80). Finally, the Matter of England is a designation developed in the twentieth century, so it is well worth pointing out that it only:

> becomes necessary and visible not as evidence of a late medieval sense of national identity with which it has since been associated, but rather when 'England' becomes a multi-national, international, concept – a shared past, reaching across the Empire of the nineteenth century and North America. (Field, "Curious History" 31)

This is not to say that there are no ME romances that contributed to the development of English identity in the Middle Ages, on the contrary.[3] However, we must consider what the nature of this Englishness is and how romance(s) has(have) contributed to its maturity. In this context, resorting to the heading Matter of England as an umbrella term for all ME non-Arthurian romances limits the many ways in which these texts can be read and may lead us to ignore "that each text presents its own unique contexts, meanings, and problems" (Crofts and Rouse 95).

In the article "The Curious History of the Matter of England," Rosalind Field argues against the use of the term Matter of England, supporting the points explained above and fittingly summing up the main problems of using this terminology:

> it [the Matter of England] is a hybrid term, both elements of which are problematic and ill-defined. It is a classification of texts, about which there is no clear agreement, which has no medieval justification (…) and which has been appropriated very effectively to describe the historiographical debate of the twelfth century. It is a term used to yoke together romances that may have more significance in terms of differences rather than similarities, and it carries an ideological weight in its assumptions about national literature and language (…). It is a cause of confusion rather than clarification. (39)

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[3] We will approach issues of nation and national identity in the last chapter of this study.

Considering all the disadvantages of resorting to this designation, which ultimately only remains attractive to scholarship today because it seemingly brings order to a miscellaneous set of manuscripts, other alternatives might be more suitable. Over the years many scholars have suggested very different approaches to the classification of non-Arthurian ME romances. In 1987, W.R.J. Barron suggested a breakdown by years, having listed 116 romances produced between 1225 until after 1500, a catalogue from which he excluded Chaucer and Gower's works. However, as the author himself acknowledges, such itemisation is not without its flaws given that it is liable to constant alteration as advancing knowledge allows greater discrimination between the manuscripts' dates and the actual date of their composition (53-54). The same can be said about grouping these manuscripts by geographical area, which is also likely to suffer successive adjustments with the increasing ability to identify the original manuscript's dialect, after it was copied in other regions. A classification by form or metre leads to similar problems since, although it would be possible to subdivide these romances into three main subgenres – alliterative romances, metrical romances and tail-rhyme romances –, such categorisation seems necessarily fated to ignore issues of content so romances that may not have anything in common beyond their form may well be grouped together. Furthermore:

> one of the reasons why it remains hard to classify romances, whether into 'matters', according to the cycles they form or can be grouped into (cyclic and non-cyclic), or by metre, is that their French (and other language) models come from different genres, and influences on the resulting product may be given precedence according to the critic's preference for one or another. (Radulescu, "Genre" 36)

Notwithstanding, formal divisions have been used to order this set of texts and a correspondence has been suggested between the different metrical poems and their narrative types. Alliterative romances are linked to the heroic, to "accounts of large-scale fighting" (Mills viii); metrical romances in couplets to tales of chivalric adventure, including "leisurely and detailed stories of love" (Mills viii); and tail-rhyme stanzas to saints' lives and romances of pious edification, that is, "tales of suffering and piety" (Mills viii). Like all attempts at bringing together such a large range of tales, this one does not seem to fit specific examples, such as *William of Palerne* or *Ipomadon A* (late fourteenth- to mid-fifteenth-century) (Field, "Romance in England" 170), both lengthy romances of chivalry written in rhyming couplets.

Thus, all the apparently simplest forms of organisation, that is, by subject matter, date, geographical location and/or form, have downsides. The non-Arthurian English texts "do not constitute a tradition or follow an obvious evolutionary process, do not in themselves define

the kind to which they belong or constitute sub-categories within it, indicate the readership or even the social class for which they were intended" (Barron 219). How then can a satisfying categorisation be found? Plus, all things considered, is such a goal feasible? So far, to our knowledge, no definite terminology has been widely accepted by scholarship although some relevant efforts have been made by scholars who have sought to think about the nature of this set of texts in less constrictive modes.

One of the best-known hypotheses regarding the categorising of ME romances that lie outside the major cycles was proposed by Laura Hibbard Loomis in her ground-breaking work *Medieval Romance in England: A Study of Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances* (1924). Hibbard Loomis grouped a total of thirty-nine romances under three titles: "Romances of Trial and Faith"[4], "Romances of Legendary English Heroes"[5] and "Romances of Love and Adventure"[6]. Under the first heading, which might be regarded as including edifying romances, the mood seems to be predominantly one of endurance or distress that is caused either as a just punishment for a past sin or due to human malice; frequently, at the end of the story, its hero (or heroine) achieves some measure of sanctity, although that is not always the case. In the second, the dominant *ethos* is masculine; the texts underscore shared battles (as opposed to individual combats) and the need for supporting one's sworn companions (Mills vii). Finally, the third and longest listing concerns stories about the interaction of love and chivalry and, for that reason, it is closer to the Continental tradition with complex plots that could be extended through the combination and/or introduction of new battles.

While Hibbard Loomis' approach is an interesting one, when carefully examined, it is ultimately not so different from using the expression 'Matter of England'. Even though the author clearly acknowledges and identifies the different subject matters within the English *corpus* (as opposed to the more general Matter), it is still a rather broad distribution by themes. Therefore, if we accept the author's proposed division, we chance missing the connections, the "family resemblance" Cooper talks about (*English Romance* 8-9), between romances that are seemingly different but still share motifs, themes and/or location(s). Furthermore, as Maldwyn Mills suggests, the "three terms will often prove more useful to describe parts of romances –

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[4] In "Romances of Trial and Faith" Loomis included *Isumbras*, *Florence of Rome*, *Emaré*, *Erle of Tolous*, *King of Tars*, *Gowther* (*Robert the Devil*), *Robert of Cisyle*, *Amis and Amiloun*, *Amadas* and *Clegés*.

[5] This heading encompasses *King Horn*, *Horn Childe*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Beves of Hampton*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Reinbrun*, *Athelston*, *Richard Coeur de Lion* and *Gamelyn*.

[6] The third heading "Romances of Love and Adventures" consists of *Apollonius of Tyre*, *Seven Sages of Rome*, *Floris and Blauncheflur*, *Orfeo*, *Partonope of Blois*, *William of Palerne*, *Ipomedon*, *Generides*, *Chevalere Assigne* (*Knight of the Swan*), *Knight of Courtesy* (*Châtelain de Couci*), *Squyr of Lowe Degre*, *Octavian*, *Eglamour*, *Torrent of Portyngale*, *Triamour*, *Roswall and Lillian*, *Lay le Freine*, *Degaré*, *Degrevant*, *Eger, Grime and Graysteele*.

and especially the longer romances – than wholes" (vii). Mills' argument seems especially valid when looking at lengthier texts such as *Guy of Warwick*, which is indeed about a legendary English hero, as Hibbard Loomis classifies it, but as Guy fights to win the hand of his beloved Felice, it is also a chivalrous romance concerned with love. Moreover, when the romance ends and Guy returns from the Holy Land as a humble hermit, the text has clearly changed (or perhaps evolved) into a romance "of Trial and Faith" or "penitential" according to Radulescu in "Genre and Classification" (40-43). As a result, Hibbard Loomis' proposal also restricts the wide-ranging and various associations among non-Arthurian ME romances while, at the same time, fails to provide a solution for romances in which the subject matter changes as their story progresses. On the other hand, we might rightfully argue that given the sheer diversity of the English *corpus*, a categorisation that does not slight or overlook one or another characteristic of the texts can hardly be found, which may be why Loomis' headings have been generally well-accepted. In the last decades, though, researchers have been arguing for a different approach: the analysis of these miscellaneous ME texts in light of medieval popular culture.

Essay collections published in the late twentieth-[7] and early twenty-first-century[8] have addressed important issues concerning the notion of medieval popular culture as well as the less structured and well-ordered themes found in non-cyclic ME romance. However, the first problem we face when considering this possibility is the use of the term popular itself. The popularity of a medieval text has traditionally been calculated by scholars based on a) the number of surviving manuscripts and b) the external references to their circulation or enjoyment in the period they were produced and/or afterwards. These indicators have helped scholars determine how well-known and how wide each romance's distribution was. About ME romances in particular, Velma Richmond claims that:

> the popularity of the Middle English romance is clear over a period of several hundred years: through the survival of more than one hundred romances, often in several manuscript versions; in the choice of many such narratives for early printing, and the enthusiastic work of printers like Caxton, de Worde, and Pynson, who made personal, vital contributions to the genre; and by the sustained reprinting of certain favorites into the seventeenth century and the enthusiastic praise of many

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[7] See for example Hudson, Harriet. "Towards a Theory of Popular Literature: The Case of the Middle English Romances." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 23, 1989, pp. 31-50; Richmond, Velma B. *The Popularity of Middle English Romance*. U of Wisconsin P, 1975.

[8] McDonald, Nicola, editor. *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England. Essays in Popular Romance.* Manchester UP, 2004; Putter, Ad and Jane Gilbert, eds., *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance.* Routledge, 2013; Radulescu, Raluca and Cory James Rushton, eds., *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*. D.S. Brewer, 2011.

of England's great poets as well as critics like Sidney, Puttenham and Dr. Johnson. (3)

However, if we are to consider solely these two markers, then "[t]o judge by the number of surviving manuscripts and the lists of library holdings during the Middle Ages, serious works in Latin and devotional works in the vernacular languages were more widely read, and both were certainly more esteemed" (Ramsey 1) than romance. This assessment also leaves out what Ad Putter calls the "oral mode of publication" ("Introduction" 7). According to Putter, medieval romances were published not only in print, but also through verbal narration, a form that must be regarded as playing a major role in how existing manuscripts were transmitted. Therefore, if "romances survived not only by being copied or read, but by being orally recited and stored in living memories" (Putter, "Introduction" 10), it is unlikely that any study will be able to prove how many people heard a romance through performance. The same can be said about how widespread a manuscript's circulation was or, as a matter of fact, about the very number of surviving copies, since there is no research that can prove beyond doubt what their total number was.

Besides the problems arising from the lack of unquestionable proof of ME romances' popularity in the traditional sense, the term 'popular' itself brings further problems due to its frequent association with an "inferior, substandard culture" (Gilbert 17) and commercial purposes, which are often thought to hold far more importance than the text's quality. Both points clearly have a negative undertone linking popular culture and literature to a category of cultural practices and texts that do not qualify as high culture and are mostly understood as products enjoyed by the people *versus* the quality culture consumed by the intellectual elite. As a result, popular literature has recurrently been deemed "characterless, weightless pap, which will offend none but be acceptable to all" (Gilbert 18). In addition, it has become a label used "to convey a critical estimate of texts as unsophisticated and appropriate for a non-learned readership" (Hardman 150). This perceived simplicity in turn generates assumptions about audience and reception,[9] likewise disregarded as second-rate.

Interestingly, as already mentioned, this sort of consideration can be found in earlier academic papers on ME romances, especially the so-called popular romance, which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were "characterized above all negatively, by their failure to meet such desirable literary criteria as formal complexity and conceptual sophistication" (Gilbert 20). With this framework in mind, it becomes clearer why non-

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[9] An analysis of the ME romances' potential audience will be done in subchapter 2.2.

Arthurian ME romances have, in the last decades, been referred to as "popular romances"[10] since i) by all accounts about a hundred of these ME romances survived and some remained in print well into the seventeenth century so they are likely to have been familiar in the medieval period; ii) their audience appears to have resided outside the royal court, so the texts are deemed to have been enjoyed (in a very broad way) by the people; and iii) they seemingly lack the sophistication of great medieval literary works, such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* or Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1367-1386). All these arguments seem to point out the popular nature of non-Arthurian ME romances.

Taking this into account, placing this set of ME romances within the vague concept of medieval popular culture still remains a difficult task made more so due to the influence contemporary studies have had on the very notion of popular. As highlighted by Radulescu and Rushton, today:

> we understand the popularity of a text to refer to its accessibility to a wide audience, as witnessed by a particular text's circulation; the level of vocabulary and conceptual sophistication; and the appeal of the theme or topic it addresses. (…) the term urges us to consider a middle-class audience, and, in a modern context, mass production and consumption. (5)

Yet, concepts like "middle-class audience" and "mass production and consumption" cannot be applicable to medieval romances that must be thought of within a different set of principles. We must then leave behind modern constructions developed around the term popular and attempt to establish a suitable definition as to what it means when connected to the medieval literary tradition. With this goal in mind, several researchers have come up with feasible proposals. For Nicola McDonald a medieval popular text is:

> fast-paced and formulaic; it markets itself unabashedly as genre fiction; it is comparatively cheap and, in performance, ephemeral; it has a sensationalist taste for sex and violence; and it seems content to reproduce the easy certainties of sexist, racist and other bigoted ideologies. (…) 'Popular' in capacity to attract a large and heterogeneous medieval audience, as well as in its ability to provide that audience with enormous enjoyment, romance's popularity is likewise what excludes it from serious and sustained academic consideration: judged low-class, on account of its non-aristocratic audience, its reliance on stereotypes, formulae and conventional plot structures, and its particular brand of unadulterated good fun (…). (1-2)

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[10] This expression has been especially noticeable in the critical work published in the twenty-first century by scholars working in medieval English literature like Ad Putter, Cory James Rushton, Maldwyn Mills, Nicola McDonald, Raluca L. Radulescu, Rosalind Field, among others.

Following this line of thought a ME popular romance should: a) rely heavily on formulas; b) approach themes less focused on by Arthurian and other cyclic narratives; c) appeal (as far as we can tell) to a wide, varied audience; d) be overall regarded as inferior to the so-called elite medieval literature, thus falling outside the established canon; e) rely on recognizable plot-patterns, expressions and/or settings; and f) provide a sort of satisfaction or pleasure untainted by polished society. McDonald's description, which provides more of a list of qualities rather than a definition proper makes some interesting claims, especially when it comes to the use of sensationalist themes.

Traditional approaches to ME romances were inclined to focus on appropriate academic issues, like the relationships between manuscripts, their production, and authorship as well as on their use of more customary themes, such as marriage, reunited families, issues of kingship and social order, *inter alia*. On the contrary, modern criticism displays a tendency to increasingly turn towards the more disturbing images encountered in ME texts, their "sensationalist taste": incest, rape, torture, racial discrimination and religious intolerance, which had before been brushed off. While both academic approaches should be valued as they are equally relevant when analysing ME romances, it is important to acknowledge the dangers of trying to fit medieval texts into modern ideologies. Indeed, overemphasising violence and taboo subjects in popular romances might be damaging to their understanding too (Radulescu and Rushton 3). As Paul Freedom points out:

> Whether the medieval period is perceived as having a particular penchant for irrational persecution (the view of those emphasizing human progress) or as originating undesirable characteristics of modernity (the beginnings of colonialism, aggressive expansion, or intolerance), there is a temptation to look at the Middle Ages through the lens of contemporary concerns, through a certain hermeneutic of suspicion. (23)

In other words, as much as possible, it is imperative to study the medieval period in terms of its social and cultural reality. Therefore, to claim ME romances are "content to reproduce the easy certainties of sexist, racist and other bigoted ideologies" (McDonald 1) may be forceful. Such efforts to redeem medieval romance need to be carefully weighted as scholars of medieval popular romance persist in finding attitudes, behaviours, ideas and concepts which are not always fully articulated in the texts. In short, the attempt to link the expression 'medieval popular romance' to the English *corpus* of non-cyclic narratives must be done cautiously. With this in mind, Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton endeavour to provide a clear definition of what constitutes a ME popular romance:

> (…) those texts in Middle English, sometimes with origins in Anglo-Norman versions, which show a predominant concern with narrative at the expense of symbolic meaning. Such texts appear to have been widely read or heard, but have subsequently been ignored by scholarship as less worthy of study than the equivalent productions by Chaucer or the Gawain-poet, on grounds of representing an inferior level of literary achievement (...) we posit popular romances were primarily aimed at a non-aristocratic audience, allowing some themes and motifs travelled across social class boundaries. (Radulescu and Rushton 7)

Taking into account McDonald's and Radulescu and Rushton's theoretical frameworks, in this work the designation ME popular romance is applied to those romances written in ME in production between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries. They may originate in Anglo-Norman and/or French romances (like *King Horn*), thus *romaunces* in the early meaning of the word (that is, translations into vernacular), or be original works of fiction (like *Athleston*). Such texts are here viewed as having been widely read by or performed to an audience that did not necessarily belong to the court; they are thus viewed as popular, enjoyed by and written for the people. They are fast-paced, exceedingly depend on formulas and often use nearly identical sentence structures as well as plot-patterns, settings and locations. ME popular romances are not only "centred differently from romance in France or Italy or Spain" (Furrow 71) but also distinguish themselves from other ME narratives on account of their themes and motifs, which mostly deal with:

> the bases of human existence in society: getting born, surviving childhood, negotiating the family, finding a mate, facing threats, achieving justice and accepting mortality. And they demonstrate the enduring need to find meaning and even comedy in the narratives of human life. (Field, "Popular Romance" 29)

Furthermore, while ME popular romances share some of the preoccupations of their more sophisticated French counterparts, like concerns about courtly themes, which pervade Arthurian romances, these are generally (if present) less relevant.[11] Indeed:

> a distinct feature of popular romances appears to be the deliberate difference or deviation from norm (…) at times plots have relatively little or nothing to do with male protagonists progressing through to maturation or through actual knightly exploits, but rather focus on disempowered heroines, who engineer their own carers or life paths. (Radulescu, "Genre" 38)

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[11] ME popular romances' themes and motifs will be addressed in subchapter 2.5.

The presence of the supernatural and the marvellous is far more common in the narratives of the Matter of Britain too, playing a much smaller role in ME popular romance. However, when depicted, the *mirabilia* are mostly connected to what Jacques le Goff identified as the *miraculosus*, the Christian marvellous ("The Marvelous" 30).[12] The protagonists of ME popular romance are, as a rule, Christian men and women of noble birth, who are either English or raised in English territory (such as the main male character in *Havelok the Dane*), though, in some romances, the area or region where the action takes places remains undisclosed.

Other commonly found aspects could be provided to somehow help restrict this definition, but when looking at such a vast and diverse set of texts, narrower definitions have proven to be flawed and prone to overly generalised conclusions. Nevertheless, it is well worth adding that choosing to resort to the heading 'ME popular romance' does not mean we intend to impose uniformity on the romances here analysed since, as Ad Putter notes, it is not a magical term ("Introduction" 3) in the sense that it does not miraculously make all issues regarding classification disappear. Instead, we seek to be more inclusive, highlighting qualities that earlier research disregarded and current studies attempt to value. Furthermore, in order to better understand ME popular romances it is crucial to take into consideration other issues, such as who the authors of these texts were, what the manner of performance was, how language affected ME romances and whether it is possible to determine just who their audience was.

2.2. Authorship, Performance and Audience

Over the last decades, academic discussion has often focused on questions of authorship and composition of ME popular romance, especially so because these texts remain, with few exceptions, by and large anonymous.[13] Consequently, the issue of authorship is hard to solve and the results of a close enquiry into it are as diverse and elusive as the romances themselves. For a long time, it was assumed that most romances were composed by traveling minstrels who recited them at courts, public festivities, or even market places.[14] However, this hypothesis, often referred to as the minstrel theory, has been disputed. Firstly, because the mere fact that

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[12] For a better understanding of the supernatural and the marvellous in medieval western culture see Le Goff, "The Marvelous" 27-43.

[13] English author Thomas Chestre is one such exception. In what is a rare example of authorship, Chestre identifies himself as the writer of *Sir Launfal*, which is based on Marie de France's Breton lay *Lanval*: "Thomas Chestre made thys tale / Of the noble knyght Syr Launfale" (lines 1039-40). In addition, he is also believed to be the author of the 2200-line *Libeaus Desconus* and possibly of *Octavian*.

[14] On this theory see Percy 10-29.

minstrels, who were primarily performers, recited romances is not sufficient evidence of authorship. Even though most romances begin with i) a direct address to the audiences, ii) with a prayer and/or iii) an appeal to listen, many of these formulas (also known as minstrel tags) seek to establish contact between the author/reciter and the audience.[15] Furthermore, many of these tags appear in other medieval literature, thus providing little assistance when it comes to the authorship of romance:

> One can (…) easily discover that many legends, chronicles and didactic poems begin likewise by addressing an audience, often in exactly the same words as some romances. If one were to ascribe all these poems to minstrels, the minstrels' repertory would have had to be much more comprehensive than anyone has ever claimed. (Mehl 8)

Secondly, another point commonly used to support the minstrel theory is the frequent allusion to the presence and performance of minstrels in romances, which can be seen, for example, in the wedding of Guy and Felice in the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*:

> When he hadde spoused that swete wight
> The fest lasted a fourtennight
> …………………………………………
> Ther was mirthe and melody
> And al maner menstracie
> As ye may fortheward here.
>
> Ther was trumpes and tabour,
> Fithel, croude, and harpour
> Her craftes for to kithe;
> Organisters and gode stivours,
> Minstrels of mouthe and mani dysour
> To glade tho bernes blithe.
> Ther nis no tong may telle in tale
> The joie that was at that bridale
> …………………………………………
>
> Herls, barouns, hende and fre
> That ther war gadred of mani cuntré
> That worthliche were in wede,
> Thai goven glewemen for her gle
> Robes riche, gold and fe,
> Her giftes were nought gnede. (lines 181-210)[16]

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[15] Further analysis on the use of prologues in ME romances is done in subchapter 2.4.

[16] All the quotes from the ME popular romance *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* are taken from Alison Wiggins' 2004 edited volume. This edition is based on the only extant copy of the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* which appears in the National Library of Scotland Advocates' Manuscript 19.2.1.

Nevertheless, the fact that a poem refers to minstrels, *disours* or other entertainers as well as to offers of generous rewards for their performances is a *topos* found in a number of romances and cannot upon close inspection stand as evidence of authorship.

Thirdly, linguistic and narrative variation in manuscripts have also been pointed out as proof of minstrel authorship since a minstrel could have written down his story as: an insurance against forgetfulness; an aid to actual recitation, or for reading aloud; an offer to another minstrel as a way of exchanging manuscripts, that is, stories; to satisfy a patron; or even to make some money (Baugh, "ME Romance" 31). However, definite evidence of minstrel authorship is yet to be found since there is "no direct testimony that minstrels composed the stories they recited" (Baugh, "ME Romance" 4), which does not necessarily mean that there were no authors who might have been minstrels. Considering such lack of evidence, it is paramount to consider what exactly is known about minstrels and what their role in divulging ME popular romances was.

Professional entertainers, also known in ME as *jongleurs*, *gestours*, *disours*, *gleman* and *rimour*,[17] played a central role at court where some had regular employment; as wandering performers they were also "important means of communication and of spreading information of various kind" (Mehl 7). The minstrel could take on many different roles: i) entertainer, ii) musician, iii) jester, iv) performer of songs, and v) performer of epic and narrative poetry. All these functions might have overlapped since:

> Minstrels were everywhere and of many kinds. They ranged from those attached to the household of the king or a noble, and who enjoyed a reasonable degree of security, to those who tramped the roads and were little better than vagabonds. Some were probably of limited range, having perhaps the ability to play an instrument and sing a few songs. But many must have had a repertoire suitable for a variety of occasions and a variety of audiences, whether in a village square or public house, on the one hand, or, on the other, a baronial hall or monastery. (Baugh, "ME Romance" 10-11)

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[17] The entries in the *MED* show these terms most likely overlapped. However, small differences between the designations used have been pointed out, namely between the words *disour* (speaker) and *gestour* (teller of *gestes*). In addition, "[s]ome of the evidence suggests that the word *disour* designated a performer of narrative, but this specialization is not consistently implied (…). (…) [and a] similar picture emerges in the case of *gestour*" (Harris and Reichl 173). The term *gleman*, on the other hand, derives from the OE *glēoman*, which was a word used for the Anglo-Saxon performer. Finally, *rimour* has been associated with the role of composer or teller of rhymed tales (Putter, "Middle English Romances" 337). For more information on other titles associated with medieval entertainers, see Harris and Reichl 141-202.

Thus, the manner of performance is hard to determine beyond doubt, as even the words encountered in the texts are ambiguous or imprecise in their meaning. A verb like *singen* (OE *singan*) in ME had a very similar meaning to the Modern English *to sing*, but it could also mean, "to chant or recite verse" (*MED*, Def. 4) or "to make music, play a musical instrument" (*MED*, Def. 5). Furthermore, *singen* was often used in a stereotyped or vague sense, much like the collocations "read and singe," which in some contexts were only used as rhyme tags. The use of the verb *rēden* (OE *rǣdan*; *rēdan*; or *rǣdan*), which might mean "To read; engage in reading" (*MED*, Def. 1a) but also "to read aloud or chant" (*MED*, Def. 2a) or "to counsel, give advice; advise" (*MED*, Def. 8a), is equally problematic, especially in references like "Romanz reding on the bok" (*Havelok the Dane*, line 2327) that seem to point to the act of reading a romance, not its performance. The practice of reading in public, known as aurality,[18] was common as medieval audiences, which included middle- and upper-estates, enjoyed listening to books in company. According to Joyce Coleman, "[t]he audience's awareness of the book before them entailed an increased awareness of the fixity and authority of the text" and, more importantly, public reading defined "literature as a social event" (28). This is a key concept since reading a book out loud in the presence of others is a significantly different experience from reading by and to oneself. As Coleman argues, such events could "become a deep affirmation of the group's sense of self and togetherness (…) united in a feeling of sorrow or exhilaration" (29).[19]

Considering these arguments, when we find references to "Romanz reding on the bok" (*Havelok the Dane*, line 2327), they can be understood as: i) reading publicly or privately, ii) reciting aloud or iii) singing a romance, all of which could be done with or without the help of a manuscript; moreover, all these formats coexisted and continued to co-occur throughout the Middle Ages. In addition, although no melodies for narratives in ME have survived,[20] manuscript evidence implies some of these readings were possibly accompanied by the harp or fiddle in-between stanzas or at other suitable points in the text. So:

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[18] According to Joyce Coleman, aurality is "the reading aloud of written literature to one or a group of listeners" (1) and it was "the modality of choice for highly literate and sophisticated audiences (…) among the nobility of England, Scotland, France, and Burgundy from (at least) the fourteenth through the late fifteenth century" (1-2). Furthermore, aurality is distinct "from 'orality' – i.e., from a tradition based on the oral performance of bards or minstrels – by its dependence on a written text as the source of the public reading" (28).

[19] We may argue that this very sense of belonging to a group may help explain why some romances were so well-liked given that oral traits, like the repetitive use of formulas – so common in ME popular romance –, contributed to the texts' "culture-affirming familiarity" (Coleman 29).

[20] On this issue, see Reichl, "Comparative Notes" 66-69.

> Although there is no way of reconstructing a melody for an orally performed romance, we can assume that minstrels sang the text in styles ranging from recitative-like stichic melodies to more developed stanzaic melodies, all showing the 'family-likeness' of narrative (rather than lyric) melodies. (Reichl, "Comparative Notes" 76)

Interestingly, in some ME popular romances, minstrels are called harpists – "Hi sede hi weren harpurs" (*King Horn*, line 1485), "An harper had a geyst i-seyd" (*Sir Cleges*, line 484) – or fiddlers – "gigours" (*King Horn*, line 1486) –[21] which indicates the use of instruments was probably common. Ultimately, the reading of romance was a very particular event with a number of elements that are irretrievable up to a point since only the written text survived. The musical side of the performance might well be lost and an analysis of the complete event as a whole is non-viable, at least until new evidence is found. The same might be said about the use of any kind of manuscript during these performances, in other words, whether minstrels told the romances they read aloud (or sang) from memory or through the assistance of a manuscript or, depending on the occasion, both.

For some time, scholars believed in the existence of manuscripts used as working texts by minstrels who would resort to them to remember parts of a story before or during a performance. Allegedly, these so-called 'minstrel texts' were copies bound in small, plain volumes, with wide margins, very minor decoration, and with a long, thin format that would make them particularly suitable to be carried on journeys. In the second edition of the work *Lés Épopées Françaises* (1892), Léon Gautier identified seven manuscripts as probable minstrel texts; they are: Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS fr. 2493 (anc. 8201 and containing *Raoul de Cambrai*), fr. 2494 (containing *Aliscans* and *Bataille Loquifer*) and fr. 2495 (containing *Aspremont* and *Jehan de Lanson*); Paris, Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal, MS B. L. F. 185 (now Arsenal 6562; containing *Aliscans*, *Bataille Loquifer*, *Moniage Rainoart*, and *Moniage Guillaume*); London, British Library, MS Harley 4334 (includes *Girard de Roussillon*); Venice, Biblioteca San Marco, MS fr. XIV (containing *Beuves d'Hanstonne*); and the Digby manuscript (includes *La Chanson de Roland*). Although other studies have made an effort to provide expanded records of manuscripts of this format,[22] Gautier's remains the only attempt to provide a specific list of surviving minstrel texts. Such listing, though, has been criticised, especially because the manuscripts themselves are neither rough drafts nor do they show signs of heavy wear, as we would expect in texts used on a regular basis. In fact:

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[21] All the quotes from the ME romance *King Horn* are from Herzman, et al.'s 1997 edition, which is based on the Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Gg.4.27.2 (c. late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century).
[22] For more, see Duggan 38-39.

> While they have not received the care allotted to some of the fine illuminated manuscripts, neither do they bear the signs of a hard life on the road. It is true that they are somewhat battered, but none of them show clear signs of heavy damage of the kind suffered by a book that is hauled around from place to place in a saddlebag or pack. (A. Taylor 50)

Additionally, very few minstrels could have been in a position to acquire manuscript collections, which remained expensive throughout the medieval period. It seems likely that some minstrels might have collected popular stories, by reading and memorising or by oral transmission, and retold them. Yet, these versions, which were most probably shorter and clumsier, would hardly have been like those that were written down in manuscript collections (Mehl 9). Therefore, the question of authorship remains: who might have been the most likely authors of the anonymous ME popular romances?

At the moment, it seems that the first *romanz* translations of the twelfth century were a "clerk's vernacular retelling of stories from learned Latin sources" (Baswell 31). However, contrary to Continental romances, more concerned with authorial self-inscription into a literary tradition, ME authors seemed desinterested in leaving their names behind, so little is known beyond a doubt about the authors and their audiences. Most researchers now agree that the poems were more probably literary compositions devised by clerics, ecclesiastical or secular, as they could write and have access to manuscripts, books and patrons (Hudson). Still:

> For the most part (…) the origin of the romances has to be imagined as a rather more literary process, a process which could range from the careless hack-writer patching some tale together out of any motif and tag he could think of, to the educated poet, well versed in courtly as well as in religious matters (…). (Mehl 12)

The hack-writer is a figure that has often been used by academics to justify the oral and textual variety found in ME texts. According to the *OED*, a hack-writer is one "who hires himself out to do any and every kind of literary work; hence, a poor writer, a mere scribbler" (Def. 4a), and not a translator or writer who could creatively adapt a foreign text to an English audience. The theory of the hack-writer was proposed by Laura Hibbard Loomis who, in "The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible London Bookshop of 1330-1340" (1942), claimed

several scribes working together in a *scriptorium* in London might have produced the manuscript.[23] The author describes these writers as:

> men of generally humble literary attainments, of no literary ambition, and nearly all of whom were possessed of the same 'patter' of well-worn clichés, the same stereotyped formulas of expression, the same stock phrases, the same stock rimes (…) If these, for the most part, unoriginal and ungifted translator-versifiers were not what we should call literary hacks, what were they? ("The Auchinleck Manuscript" 607-608)

Although there is little evidence that such *scriptoria* existed in London before the fifteenth century, Loomis' theory, also known as the bookshop theory, initially found general acceptance among scholars. This hypothesis, which aims to provide a solution for the many intertextual connections found within Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1, also known as the Auchinleck MS, also implies that if this manuscript was produced in a bookshop, other manuscripts might have been, too. However, given the increased understanding of medieval book production over the last decades, more recent scholarship has found Loomis' proposition lacking.[24] In *Anglicising Romance*, Rhiannon Purdie points out:

> The bookshop theory (…) had developed out of a conviction that the many intertextual connections could be explained only by collaborative composition and copying in association with this one manuscript, but this is to confuse the great improbability of finding the precise physical exemplar lying behind a specific manuscript with the far greater likelihood of finding *some* version of a source for the text represented by that copy. (…) As for some of the other signs of borrowing and influence between Auchinleck texts, including those cases indicating multiple stages of borrowing, these too can be explained by a model in which texts are assumed to have been circulating severally and together, both before and long after the compilation of the Auchinleck manuscript. (124)

Interestingly, only in the cases of more trivial, popular romances have scholars considered the possibility of authors being "men of generally humble literary attainments" (Loomis, "The Auchinleck Manuscript" 607). Romances regarded as more accomplished, like *Sir Orfeo* or

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[23] In a more recent study (2014), Tricia Kelly George claimed to have found the identities of the master artist, the patron, and the scribes of the Auchinleck MS. According to her research "the master artist for the Auchinleck was the Subsidiary Queen Mary Artist (…) the wealthy patron commissioning the manuscript was tied to the Warwick title and most likely was Thomas de Beauchamp, (…) the scribes were Chancery clerks who created this manuscript in London c. 1331" (George iv).

[24] In fact, almost four decades later, A.I. Doyle and M.B. Parkes published a study that conclusively dismissed Loomis' findings; see Doyle and Parkes 163-210. For a more recent study on the production methods of the Auchinleck, see, for instance, Shonk 176-94.

SGGK, have generally thought to have been composed by clerics or more educated authors for oral performances to be delivered to a mixed audience.

The audience who read or heard ME popular romances being performed is difficult to identify. Although research on individual manuscripts can help cast light on those particular romances, the overall popularity of the stories makes it difficult to link a romance to a specific group. It is nevertheless clear that French Arthurian romance was particularly fostered by royal readers and the court in medieval England.[25] The lack of a significant development of Arthurian literature in Anglo-Norman and later in ME also suggests there was a division between the literary interests of the royal court and those of provincial audiences who seemed keener on Anglo-Norman and ME popular romances. Therefore, "the clear implication is that the baronial interests behind the Anglo-Norman romance were not concerned about promoting a[n Arthurian] legend identified with the validation of centralized monarchy" (Field, "Romance in England" 161). On the contrary, Anglo-Norman and ME popular romances display the anxieties of their most likely baronial patrons and audiences: they depict a world where marriage, family, patriarchal succession and inheritance often have greater importance than courtly love or tournaments. Perhaps for this reason it is argued that ME popular romances were composed for and enjoyed mostly by "a lower or lower-middle-class, a class of social aspirants who wish to be entertained with what they consider to be the same fare, but in English, as their social betters. It is a new class, an emergent bourgeoisie" (Pearsall, "Development" 12). Furthermore:

> Recent studies, broadly speaking, suggest that Middle English romance – when compared to earlier French models and to courtly products like *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – moved out of the courtly realm and thus descended down the social ladder, arguing that such a move is reflected in the more popular, less elite narrative forms that romance came to embody. (Johnson 434)

Although many researchers have accepted the view that ME popular romance was mostly read and appreciated by a non-aristocratic audience, others have also questioned these assumptions. In the "Conclusion" to *English Medieval Romance*, W.R.J. Barron claims that "no consistent picture has emerged of those for whom English romances were written in the years between, only isolated, fleeting glimpses liable to misinterpretation" (231). Decades later in "A Polemical Introduction" (2004), Nicola McDonald argues that the theory that links ME popular

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[25] A fact that may well have to do with the political, linguistic and cultural background of post-Conquest England. Further details will be given in the next subchapters.

romance to a less sophisticated audience is a factor which only comes to prove the enduring nature of academics' prejudice against these romances, deemed as "artless productions" of "unconscious grace" (Percy 5):

> Aberrantly 'crude' products of this later period are attributed to 'the lowest classes of society' because, according to this scheme of things, they can belong nowhere else. The composer-poets are similarly stigmatised: while low-class romances are 'knock[ed] together' (the association with manual labour is inescapable), superior ones are said to issue from those with intimate knowledge of 'upper-class life'. (McDonald 9)

McDonald goes on to associate what she calls the social prejudice of the "modern treatment of [ME] popular romance" (9) with these romances' immense popularity throughout the Middle Ages. Additionally, she argues it is these narratives' capability to delight and entertain their audience that hinders critical appreciation of the romance aesthetic[26] because "academic communities have long been resistant to popular art" (11). Although "by and large those manuscripts from the later Middle English period whose provenance can be traced were owned by the gentry and, on occasion, urban élites" (Johnson 434),[27] Geraldine Heng adds that the fact that scholarship in general "believes (...) medieval romances in English were read or listened to by a wide social spectrum, ranging from lower nobility and gentry to mercers and burgesses (...)[,] limitations of documentary evidence mean that arguments on the audience of Middle English romances remain necessarily circumstantial" ("Romances of England" 158-159).

Echoing the words found in the first epigraph of this chapter, we believe that even if ME popular romance may be viewed as "the pulp fiction of medieval England," that is no "reason to dismiss it" (McDonald 1). On the contrary, the popular nature of these texts can be key to our understanding of the English community in post-Conquest England and how it was imagined not only historically, ethnically, culturally and politically, but also linguistically.[28] Indeed, an important factor in how these romances were and are perceived seems to be related to the language they were written in and its place within medieval English society.

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[26] See 10-14.
[27] See also Barron's argumentation in favour of this possibility, 232-34.
[28] We will explore these points in greater detail in Chapter Five.

2.3. Language

According to the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, c. 731 AD), written by Venerable Bede (c. 677-735 AD), in the year 449 AD, the Angles, the Jutes and the Saxons arrived in Britain in three ships of war. They had been invited by the Briton king, Vortigern, to help with the northern enemies who ravaged the land after the Roman Empire's troops departed (410 AD); however, they decided to extend their stay beyond the battles' end. These newcomers were "of the three most powerful nations of Germany" (Bede Chap. XV), the *Angelcynn* as king Alfred would later refer to them, and soon began to settle down. The Angles, Bede informs us, took the lands to the north of the River Thames while the Saxons the lands to the south, and the Jutes settled in the southern areas of Kent, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Most significantly, these peoples brought with them Germanic dialects which would mix with languages already spoken in Britain and lead to the development of a new language: Englisc or OE, which became the most spoken language between 450-1150.[29]

Englisc was an Indo-European language that belonged to the Low West Germanic branch (Baugh and Cable 45) and was closely related to Frisian. Like other languages, OE was not uniform, although there were four dialects, which have traditionally been considered the most relevant: Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish and West Saxon (Baugh and Cable 47). However, these dialects have mostly been arranged according to historical, political and literary criteria. When the Anglo-Saxons began to establish more permanent bases, slowly driving out the native Celts, seven kingdoms, known as the Heptarchy, were formed; there were: Essex, Wessex, Sussex, Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia and Kent. In a later stage, of the seven, three became the most important: Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex, which would be unified in the tenth century, on July 12, 927, under Athelstan (r. 927-939) who then became known as *rex Anglorum*. The importance of these regions clearly influenced the development of the English language within Britain, although almost all OE literature preserved in manuscripts is in West Saxon, which seems to reflect the political importance Wessex had gained by the ninth

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[29] According to archaeological findings, before OE was established across the Briton territory, Celtic was most likely the first Indo-European language to be spoken. The other language was Vulgar Latin, which was spoken extensively for about four centuries during the Roman occupation (43-410 AD). However, the influence exerted by these two languages on OE is rather small since, on the one hand, Celtic slowly disappeared from the lands occupied by the Anglo-Saxons and, on the other, the use of Latin, although spoken by many, was not sufficiently widespread across the territory. See Baugh and Cable 67-97.

century.[30] At the end of the tenth century, West Saxon had become a literary standard (Azuaga 43) and was on its way to "becoming the standard speech of England" (Baugh and Cable 47) – an ascendency cut short when Harold II, the last Saxon monarch, was defeated by the Norman forces of William, the Conqueror, in the Battle of Hastings (1066). The Norman then became the new rulers of England.

The Norman Conquest was gradual: after William's coronation in London, the next four years were spent in an attempt to control the whole of the English territory. Norman forces were sent on military campaigns across the country resulting in the death of the majority of the surviving Anglo-Saxon nobility. In 1072, of the twelve Earls in England only one was actually an Englishman, that is, of Anglo-Saxon descent; the same happened with the religious elite: the two archbishops were Norman and Wulfstan was the only English bishop after the Norman Conquest. At the same time, English abbots were also slowly replaced by Normans. As a result, the foreign ruling nobility brought when William settled his court was sufficiently predominant to keep using their own native language, French, as they did not truly require English to communicate:

> This was natural enough at first, as they knew no English; but they continued to do so for a long time to come, picking up some knowledge of English gradually but making no effort to do so as a matter of policy. (…) French remained the language of ordinary intercourse among the upper classes in England. (Baugh and Cable 103)

The difference between those who spoke French and the ones who did not became largely social: speaking French was a mark of social distinction, which meant that all who were in close association with the governing class, even if they were not Norman, soon acquired command of the language. Unsurprisingly, the English language was greatly affected, it lost its prestige as a language fit for literature and former traditions of literary production in OE were interrupted. Although homilies, histories, saints' lives, and pastoral works had, before the Norman Conquest, been written both in OE and in Latin, by the twelfth century Latin had become the foremost medium for learned and religious composition (Scase 15). The reason for this is probably related to the fact that many authors were immigrants and settlers who brought the traditions of composition from monasteries in France. Even British-born authors, like John

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[30] When in the eighth century a new wave of invasions began, with the Danes plundering Portland and raiding Lindisfarne's monastery in 793, of the three main kingdoms only Wessex, under the rule of Alfred, the Great (r. 871-899), was able to withstand Viking incursions. It was also king Alfred's army that defeated the Viking king Guthrum in the battle of Edington (878). In 886, the Danish presence was limited to the Danelaw, a territory to the northern and eastern region of Anglo-Saxon England. As a result of the successful containment of the Viking forces that assaulted England, Wessex grew into a powerful realm.

of Salisbury or Gerald of Wales, were Latinists whose education had taken them to Continental Europe. Notwithstanding, English was still the mother tongue of most of the population, making it likely that:

> a knowledge of English was not uncommon at the end of the twelfth century among those who habitually used French; that among churchmen and men of education it was even to be expected; and that among those whose activities brought them into contact with both upper and lower classes the ability to speak both languages was quite general. (Baugh and Cable 112)

Up until the beginning of the thirteenth century, the higher ranks of society continued to use French mostly because of the close connection between England and the Continent. King Henry II (r. 1154–1189), for instance, was simultaneously king of England and Count of Anjou, Count of Maine, and Duke of Normandy; upon marrying Eleanor of Aquitaine, he also became Duke of Aquitaine and had control over about two-thirds of France. Bearing in mind this socio-cultural and linguistic framework, it becomes clear the English language was out of favour in the literary world, which is why, when summarising the state of the English literature in the twelfth century, Richard Mortimer claims:

> There is no doubt that the century after the Norman Conquest represents the lowest point in the whole history of English literature. The language lost its prestige, and writing in it was largely confined to a few old-fashioned monasteries. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ceased in 1154, the year of Henry II's ascension to the throne. (217)

Yet, the beginning of the Angevin dynasty also signalled a change given that "the Angevins did not attempt to integrate England so fully in their much more extensive provincial holdings" (Crane, *Insular Romance* 2). As a result, although Angevin courts favour the literature of the Continent, by the later twelfth century England already had different feudal institutions and laws, which in turn "inspired insular settlers with new visions of ideal achievement and right social order; and as literature written in Anglo-Norman dialect assessed and responded to those visions, it diverged from the norms of continental literature" (Crane, *Insular Romance* 2). The close connection between France and England seems to have come to a definite halt when king John (r. 1199-1216) lost the duchy of Normandy to king Philip II of France (r. 1180-1223) in 1202-1204, beginning a process of separation of interests of both nations. This event was

closely followed by a division between nobles who held lands on both territories and who were pressured to either keep their English properties or the ones held in France, but not both.[31]

Consequently, by 1250, the nobility of England was what one might consider fully English. French continued to be spoken, but it was now a cultivated tongue, mostly supported by social custom as well as commercial and administrative convention; it was the language used in Parliament, in the law courts, petitions, letters, legal records, and accounts.[32] In the private sphere, though, English was making steady advances and, at the close of the thirteenth century, evidence suggests some children of the nobility spoke English as their mother tongue and had to learn French through manuals like they would a foreign language (Baugh and Cable 123). More importantly, a change in attitude became noticeable since English was increasingly regarded as the proper language for Englishmen to know and use, in particular once the Hundred Years' War began in 1337.

The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) had a staggering effect on how France and its influence were perceived, further deepening feelings of rivalry and leading to a long period of hostility between the two nations. French turned into the language of the enemy country and slowly fell into disuse. Adding to this, in 1348, the south of England recorded the first cases of the bubonic plague that quickly spread throughout the country and led to high levels of mortality, especially among the lowest social estates that had no way of protecting themselves from the disease. Due to a serious shortage in labour ensued, among others, there was an increase in the wages paid to the labouring order, and with it grew the importance of the language they spoke: English. Seeing as the standing of a language is crucially determined by the social weight of those who speak it, the emergence of an English-speaking bourgeoisie towards the mid-fourteenth century meant an equal rise in the language's status. It is in this political and social context that ME, the term used to refer to the language spoken in Britain in all its varieties from c. 1100 to c. 1500, finally regains its place as the mother tongue of the English.

ME was a greatly diverse language not only in what concerns the forms of the spoken language, but also in the written format, a fact underscored by Chaucer in the poem *Troilus and Criseyde*:

And for ther is so greet diversitee

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[31] We will go back to this topic and further explore the importance this process of separation had in medieval England's sense of individuality and identity in subchapter 5.3.

[32] It was only in 1362, in the reign of Edward III, that *The Statute of the Pleading* determined all legal acts should be written in English.

In English and in wryting of our tonge,
So preye I god that noon miswryte thee,
Ne thee mismetre for defaute of tonge.
And red wher-so thou be, or elles songe,
That thou be understonde I god beseche! (Book V, lines 1793-98)

Roughly one might divide ME into two broad historical varieties: early ME and late ME, and five broad regional dialects or varieties: Northern, East Midland, West Midland, Southeastern and Southwestern.[33] The more noticeable differences are between Northern and Southern varieties with the Midlands' dialects often occupying an intermediate position (Baugh and Cable 177).[34] However, it is important to recall that these are broad categories of convenience since "language follows no precise geographical or regional boundaries" (Scase 12). In fact, what characterises ME is precisely its dialectal diversity, out of which "emerged toward the end of the fourteenth century a written language that in the course of the fifteenth won general recognition and has since become the recognized standard in both speech and writing" (Baugh and Cable 179).

The variety which seems to have more greatly contributed to the creation of a Standard English was the East Midland dialect, in particular the one spoken in the city of London. There are several reasons that might have led to its use. First, the East Midland dialect occupied a middle position between the Northern and the Southern varieties; it was less conservative than the dialects found in the South and less radical than the Northern, sharing some characteristics of both (Baugh and Cable 179). Second, the East Midland district was the most densely populated, the largest and fundamentally the most prosperous of all the major dialect areas. It also comprised Middlesex, Oxford, and Norfolk, all of which had a relevant role in English political affairs in the later Middle Ages. Third, we must take into account the importance of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge that by the fourteenth century had gained a significant role as intellectual centres, the latter in particular, due to its geographical location, would most likely promote the East Midland dialect. In this framework, and fourth, we should also consider the influence of Geoffrey Chaucer's works, namely *The Canterbury Tales*, which have sometimes been referred to as the greatest contribution to the popularisation of ME, that is, East Midland, in English literature. Fifth, potentially one of the most influential factors was

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[33] In *A History of the English Language* Baugh and Cable identify only four dialects, mentioning only Southern as opposed to separating Eastern and Western. However, more recent research as suggested a division can be made. See Burrow and Turville-Petre 3-9; Scase 11-24.

[34] The specific characteristics of these dialects are numerous and an extensive enumeration would be required to fully grasp the language's complex diversity, which is beyond the scope of this research. For a better understanding of the differences, check Baugh and Cable 176-78.

the prominence of London as the political capital city of England and a crucial mercantile centre, whose growth is also tied to the importance of the river Thames as a commercial route. Finally, while until the fifteenth century government documents were still being written in Latin or Anglo-Norman, in 1420, government offices began to use English in several documents. The texts produced by Chancery clerks reveal not only the influence of the dialect spoken in London (commonly found among them), but also an attempt to regularise spelling and grammar. Due to the wide distribution of these administrative documents, which would certainly have provided authoritative models to be followed, "this was the turning-point in the development of a system of writing that developed with a degree of independence from the spoken language" (Scase 21). With the introduction of printing in 1476, a new form of disseminating a standardised spelling and grammar came into play with London as the centre of book publishing in England (Baugh and Cable 182). Aiming to reach a wide variety of audiences, William Caxton used the East Midland dialect of London since "[h]e needed an English that would transcend regional differences because of the commercial pressures of printing. His is one of the projects of linguistic improvement which imagines and attempts to reach a supra-local or regional audience" (Scase 21).

The standardisation of English was by no means an easy or quick task and dialectal differences have persisted and can still be detected in Modern English today. However, the growing importance of English, its progressive written standardisation and a literary and cultural distancing from other vernacular languages, like French and Anglo-Norman, allowed the development of literature written in ME. Even though English romance was by all standards a latecomer to the medieval literary scene, in time it gained its own distinctive qualities, which can be found both in the variety of themes and motifs introduced and in its narrative's structures.

2.4. Verse and Form

The debate around issues of versification and stylistic and narrative structures is often regarded as technical. For this reason, such subjects are frequently deemed as of minor relevance to the understanding of romance. However, for ME popular romances, whose style is marked by redundant, formalised patterns of speech in which verse kept being used as the preferred form until nearly the sixteenth century, the discussion is pertinent. In fact, it is deeply

intertwined with issues of performance, theme, and style as well as with England's literary context.

Broadly speaking, ME popular romance is formed by self-contained episodes, marked by a narrative function and typically following a customary sequence of stereotyped scenes that end with marriage, recovery and/or the prospect of the main characters' eternal bliss after a pious death. Often the texts start with a prologue or *exordium* that, as a rule, introduces the romance and establishes a contract between the romancer/minstrel (if we consider live performances) and the audience. Most often the prologue has three main components: i) the poet prays for God's blessing, ii) the poet urges the audience to pay attention to the story, and iii) the poet provides a short summary of the events or offers a formulaic outline of the main character(s) (Wittig 57). In the prologue to *Sir Isumbras*, for instance, all these elements can be found, albeit in a different order: first the exhortation, then a prayer and finally the hero's outline:

> Hende in halle and ye wole her
> Off eldres that before us wer
>   That lyfede in are thede.
> Jhesu Cryst, hevene kynge,
> Geve hem alle hys blessyng
>   And hevene unto oure mede.
> I wold yow telle off a knyght
> That was bothe hardy and wyght
>   And doughty man of dede.
> Hys name was callyd Sere Ysumbras;
> So doughty a knyght as he was
>   There levyd non in lede. (lines 1-12)[35]

A similar example can be found in the romance *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, which follows the pattern 'prayer, exhortation, outline':

> Jhesu Crist, of heven Kyng,
> Graunt us all good endyng
>   And beld us in Hys bowre;
> And gef hem joye that love to here
> Of eldres that before us were
>   And lyved in grett antowre.
> I woll you tell of a knyght
> That was both hardy and wyght,

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[35] All the quotes from the ME romance *Sir Isumbras* are taken from Harriet Hudson's 1996 edition, which is based on the Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge MS 175 (c. 1425-1450).

And stronge in ylke a stowre;
Of dedys of armys that he myght here
He wan degré with jurnay clere,
    And in felde the floure. (lines 1-12)[36]

The emphasis on each component may shift from poem to poem and while some poets include all three elements, others omit or double one of them. In the romance *Octavian*, for instance, we find 'prayer, exhortation', but the synopsis or a formulaic outline are absent:

Mekyll and littill, olde and yynge,
Herkyns all to my talkynge
    Of whaym I will yow kythe.
Jhesu fadir of heven kynge,
Gyff us all thy dere blyssynge
    And make us glade and blythe.
For full sothe sawis I will yow synge,
Off whaym the worde full wyde gan sprynge,
    And ye will a stownde me lythe.
In the bukes of Rome als it es tolde
How byfelle amange oure eldyrs olde,
    Full ofte and fele sythe. (lines 1-12)[37]

The prologues also differ in how much information they supply about the story, but often provide useful hints about the character of the narrating voice, which may vary from romance to romance or even within the same text:

Narrators may be distanced, or engaged, or both (depending on the textual moment or level considered); they are, by turns, economic or generous in their commentary, sympathetic or judgmental, gently or broadly ironic, learned and clerical in their teaching role, or amorous and involved as lovers whose own stories compete with and sometimes even interact with those characters. (Bruckner 18)

Prologues often value the role of the narrator, offering a starting point that links the author, the story matter and the public. From the examples given above it is also clear that similar language, vocabulary and sentence structures tend to be employed and largely repeated.

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[36] All the quotes from the ME romance *Sir Eglamour of Artois* are from Harriet Hudson's 1996 edition, which uses the London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii (c. 1450) as a primary text.

[37] The base-text used here is from the Lincoln, Cathedral Library Manuscript 91 (also known as the Thornton MS; c. 1430-40), the northern *Octavian*, which is written in tail-rhyme and contains a rendition of the story that has been regarded as the most effective (see Hudson, "*Octavian* Introduction"). The quotes are from Hudson's edition.

Actually, it has long been acknowledged that ME popular romance is characterised by the use of nearly identical formulations and a stereotyped, redundant language.

Repetition of speech patterns can be found throughout the narratives like, for example, the ones in expressions of grief commonly signalled through conventionalised patterns of gestures that include fainting – "He fell down in sowenynge, / To the erthe was he dyght" (*Emaré*, lines 284-85) or "Thai kist hem in armes tuo / And bothe thai fel aswon tho" (*Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, lines 383-84) – but also sighing and weeping while crying 'alas' or 'wayleway' – "Alas, that y was made man, / Wrecched kaytyf that I hyt am!" (*Emaré*, lines 292-93); "Sore wep and sore sighte / And seide: 'Allas, that he was boren!'" (*Bevis of Hampton*, lines 1312-13); "'Allas,' he sayde, 'that I was born!'" (*Athelston*, line 387). There are also adverbial formulas of time, place and manner, which are among the most used phrases in all the poems. These formulaic patterns include expressions or whole-verse formulas that convey the passing of time, like "Upon the morn, when yt was day" (*Sir Eglamour of Artois*, line 359) or "Hit was upon a someres day" (*Havelok the Dane*, line 31); adverbial phrases of place, such as "in that lond" (*Amis and Amiloun*, repeated in lines 26 and 62) or "on yche a syde … on ylke a syde" (*Sir Eglamour of Artois*, lines 284 and 312); and adverbial phrases of manner: "wyth grete pryde … with mekill pryde" (*Octavian*, lines 740 and 1430). Even in some systematic acts, like kneeling, greeting, and the christening of a child or in actions, as leave-taking, riding, or arriving, the narratives display a repertoire of formulas.

In *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances*, a comprehensive study on the narrative structures of ME noncyclic verse romance, Susan Wittig identified the percentage of lines that contain formulas in twenty-five romances.[38] While in *Lai Le Freine* and *Sir Landeval* the number is fairly reduced (both have less than 15% of lines with formulas, though these are also the shortest poems analysed), in the remaining twenty-three texts the average amount of formulaic verses is 27%. On the whole, Wittig's distribution of formulas ranges from 10-42% with four poems in the 10-19% category, twelve in the 20-29%, and nine in the 30-42% (Wittig 18-19).[39] Even though Wittig does not address some relevant ME popular romances, like *Guy of Warwick* or *Athleston*, the statistical evidence collected supports

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[38] These are: *Lai Le Freine, Sir Landeval, Sir Launfal, King Horn, Sir Degare, Havelok, Sir Isumbras, Sir Amadece, Sir Perceval, Horn Child, Roswall and Lillian, Octavian* (Southern), *Sir Triamour, Earl of Toulous, Ywayn and Gawayn, Sir Eglamour, Squyr of Lowe Degre, Libeaus Desconus, Sir Torrent, Bevis of Hampton, Eger and Grime, Sir Degrevant, Octavian* (Northern), *Floris and Blancheflur,* and *Emaré*. Note that three of the poems analysed by Wittig belong to the Matter of Britain (*Sir Perceval, Ywayn and Gawayn* and *Libeaus Desconus*). In addition, the texts *Lai le freine, Sir Launfal, Sir Degaré, Earl of Toulous* and *Emaré* were classified by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury as Breton lays and not romances; see *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Medieval Institute Publications, 1995.

[39] See the complete analysis in Wittig 11-46.

that the style of ME romance is marked by the profuse employment of formalised speech patterns.

Furthermore, there are a number of scene patterns found in ME popular romance, which most often include at least one of the two: the battle pattern, consisting of the arming of the knight, a description of the spectators (who might be the knight's love interest or the whole audience), the tilt and the reward; and the love pattern, involving the lover's confession (of his/her love to a helper), a promise (the helper offers to assist) and the plan to gain the beloved's affection.

The continual use of the same plot-patterns, situations and phrases seems to justify why these works are thought to have been aimed at a lower, less educated audience that supposedly would be too inept to enjoy more sophisticated texts. In fact, some authors have seen in this persistent stereotyped language the reason for "their popular strength" (Pearsall, "Development" 12), arguing that "chivalric romances must often have achieved popularity by combining the narrative obviousness of a television sit-com with the ambiance of a professional wrestling match" (Hahn, "Gawain" 230). However, albeit the negative criticism, the highly formulaic nature of ME popular romances underscores their association with oral tradition since:

> In orally composed poems the phrases are chosen quickly and unreflectingly under the pressure of the oral performance; once they have been learned, they are retained as habitual patterns, both for the poet and (equally important) for the audience, who must, because of the requirements of the oral performance, share completely in the *langue*. In poems which grow out of the oral tradition and in transition texts, the phrases continue to be used because they belong to the genre itself. (Wittig 42)

Although ME romances are not thought to have originated solely in oral tradition, some intertwining between the written texts and the performances given by minstrels is likely to have occurred, which would account for the untiring use of similar phrases or expressions. Moreover, this can be understood not as a sign of the romances' low quality but as a characteristic that sets this group of texts apart from the continental tradition. Wittig further suggests that a conscious effort was made by English medieval authors to maintain the narratives untouched because these were deemed "a necessary part of community ritual and somehow important to the preservation of community beliefs and expectations. The poets, therefore, made a great effort to preserve the pattern whole and complete" (181). Perhaps this is why many ME romances "bear marks of originality and individual imagination, but they do so within a framework established by tradition and convention" (Barron 56).

The recognition and identification of the interplay between repetition, variation and analogies might also help us understand the romances themselves by focusing on what we can learn from these patterns, what they tell us about the literary tradition in medieval England and how intertextuality plays a role in such a diverse set of narratives. Bearing in mind that "[r]omance puts together multiple stories" and "these multiple segments echo each other," the "sans that will emerge from romance depends on our recognition and interpretation of such patterns, since romances do not make explicit what meaning(s) they offer, even though authors and narrators assure us that they do indeed produce meaning" (Bruckner 23).

In addition to issues of vocabulary use, structure and speech patterns, to better understand ME popular romances, it is important to consider their metrical forms and how these added to how the narratives were (are) read. However, when doing so, one is once again faced with a very diverse set: there are different kinds of couplets, alliterative lines and stanza-patterns. The main poetic form inherited by ME authors from OE is the alliterative verse, the "most impressionistic and powerful in impact" (Mills, "Introduction" viii), sometimes associated with heroic accounts.[40] The alliterative long line was composed in half lines, which were connected by alliteration with two beats in each. The growing use of rhyme has been assigned to foreign metres' influence, namely after the Norman Conquest, but evidence suggests it had already begun to intrude Late OE verse (Putter, "Metres and Stanza" 113). The foremost French meters used in narrative verse were: i) the octosyllabic rhyming couplet, which remained popular until the end of the fourteenth century, and ii) the meters written in ten or twelve syllables that were grouped in sections, known as *laisses*, depending on rhyme or assonance.

Besides the continental influences and in spite of the variety of verse forms in ME metrical romance, the most notable and unique is the tail-rhyme. In ME romance studies, the tail-rhyme usually refers to a twelve-line stanza, consisting of rhymed couplets or triplets followed by a short line or a tail that rhymes with the remaining ones. The scheme most often used is 'aabccbddbeeb' in which the couples have four stresses and the tail-lines, or b-lines, have three. An example of this scheme can be found in *Athelston*:

> Lord that is off myghtys most,
> Fadyr and Sone and Holy Gost,
>   Bryng us out of synne
> And lene us grace so for to wyrke

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[40] This is not always the case since Anglo-Saxon elegies were also written in alliterative verse but are not deemed heroic accounts.

> To love bothe God and Holy Kyrke
>> That we may hevene wynne.
> Lystnes, lordyngys, that ben hende,
> Of falsnesse, hou it wil ende
>> A man that ledes hym therin.
> Of foure weddyd bretheryn I wole yow tell
> That wolden yn Yngelond go dwel,
>> That sybbe were nought of kyn. (lines 1-12)

However, some poems show significant variations to the rhyme scheme, like *Amis and Amiloun* (late thirteenth- to early fourteenth-century):

> For Goddes love in Trinyté
> Al that ben hend herkenith to me,
> I pray yow, par amoure,
> What sumtyme fel beyond the see
> Of two Barons of grete bounté
> And men of grete honoure;
> Her faders were barons hende,
> Lordinges com of grete kynde
> And pris men in toun and toure;
> To here of these children two
> How they were in wele and woo,
> Ywys, it is grete doloure. (lines 1-12)[41]

The author of *Amis and Amiloun* clearly uses a twelve-line stanza, but follows a different rhyming scheme: 'aabaabccbddb' while in *Sir Degrevant* (c. 1385-1410), for instance, the poet employed the tail-rhyme but extended the stanzas, which are of sixteen lines, to comprise triplets plus tail-rhyme, rhyming: 'aaabcccbdddbeeeb':

> Lord Gode in Trynité,
> Geff home Hevene for to se
> That lovethe gamen and gle
>> And gestys to fede.
> Ther folke sitis in fere
> Shullde men herken and here
> Off gode that before hem were
>> That levede on arthede.
> And y schall karppe of a knyght
> That was both hardy and wyght;
> Sir Degrevaunt that hend hyght,
>> That dowghty was of dede.

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[41] All the quotes from the ME romance *Amis and Amiloun* are taken from Edward E. Foster's 2007 edition, which is based on the Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1.

Was never knyght that he fond,
In Fraunce ne in Englond,
Myght sette a schafft of hys hond
    On a stythe stede. (lines 1-16)[42]

Other variations could be found, but in all of them the tail-line (b) remains constant, holding the stanza together while the remainders are built up from lines rhyming 'aab' or 'aaab'. Consequently, "the unifying feature is the way in which rhyming couplets (or triplets) are stitched together by a repeated b-line, or tail-line, which is in most cases further emphasised by being shorter than the others" (Purdie 4).

The popularity of this verse form is made evident by the sheer number of ME romances written in tail-rhyme, which adds up to over a third of all known verse romances[43] and makes the identification of a geographic point of origin difficult.[44] The Auchinleck MS alone contains seven romances written wholly or partially in tail-rhyme stanzas,[45] an interesting fact considering none of the Anglo-Norman or French sources used are written this way. If we bear in mind that the form Laȝamon as well as the poets of *Havelok the Dane* and *Amis and Amiloun*, to name but a few, encountered in their (likely written) sources was the octosyllabic couplet or the twelve-syllable lines, what might have led ME romancers to choose the tail-rhyme stanza?

To answer this question, it might be useful to look at how the tail-rhyme came into being, for which there are broadly speaking two main theories. One hypothesis is that the stanza developed out of the liturgical sequence (initially a text set to the melody of the *Alleuia*); the other theory is that it arose from the septenary, a form that goes back to Medieval Latin song but, by the twelfth century, was also found in English (Putter, "Metres and Stanza" 121-22). Since both possible origins are equally credible, it is likely that the two can explain the rise of the tail-rhyme. Furthermore, it is clear that at least originally the tail-rhyme was a lyrical form, later adapted for narrative purposes. Its origin might help justify why the tail-rhyme remains relevant in subsequent narratives as one of the reasons for its popularity in ME romances may have to do with the fact that the form lends itself to public performance. Moreover, its early use in Anglo-Norman saints' lives seems to have encouraged its adoption by hagiographers, from there spreading to pious romances about secular heroes. Finally, there seems to be a

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[42] The base-text used here is from the Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6 (the Findern MS; c. 1385 and 1410). The quotes are from Erik Kooper's 2005 edition.

[43] Another third of ME romances are written in rhyming couplets and a final third in alliterative long lines and rhymed or rhymed-alliterative stanzas (Purdie 1).

[44] For further information on the geographical origins of the tail-rhyme, see Purdie 126-50.

[45] They are: *The King of Tars*, *Amis and Amiloun*, the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, *Reinbrun*, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Roland and Vernagu*, *Horne Childe and Maiden Rimnild*.

persistent association of the tail-rhyme with English heroes, a phenomenon that stands apart from its previously established correlation with pious material. This suggests the tail-rhyme might have been purposely used by ME romancers as a way of, using Purdie's terminology in *Anglicising Romance: Tail-rhyme and Genre in Medieval English Literature*, "anglicising" their translations:

> (…) the development of the Middle English tail-rhyme romance actually parallels, albeit on a limited scale, that of the slightly later Middle English tradition of alliterative poetry: both, in their different ways, seem to represent attempts on the part of fourteenth-century poets to establish a distinct poetic tradition in the English language. (9)

By the end of the fourteenth century, the tail-rhyme's popularity was declining as attested by Chaucer's parody "The Tale of Sir Thopas," in which the author resorts to the rhyme but uses it to ridicule romance. The tale as well as the rhyme is so horrible that The Host interrupts him, claiming:

> 'No more of this, for Godde's dignity!'
> Quoth oure Hoste; 'for thou makest me
> So weary of thy very lewedness,
> That, all so wisly God my soule bless,
> Mine eares ache for thy drafty speech.
> Now such a rhyme the devil I beteche:
> This may well be rhyme doggerel,' quoth he. (Chaucer 435)[46]

Albeit its composition dwindled, the continued popularity of ME romances throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to the tail-rhyme's preservation in manuscripts and early prints. At the same time, or soon afterwards, Geoffrey Chaucer introduced the rhyme royal into English literature.

The rhyme royal is believed to have been inspired by the Italian *Ottava lima*. It is a seven-line stanza with the rhyme scheme 'ababbcc', which can be constructed either as a tercet and two couplets (with the scheme 'aba, bb, cc') or as a quatrain and a tierce ('abab, bcc'), that first appeared in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Parlement of Foules* (c. 1381-1382). The title royal was probably taken from its later use by King James I of Scotland who wrote the poem

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[46] "'No more of this for God's dear dignity!' / Our Host said suddenly. 'You're wearying me / To death, I say, with your illiterate stuff. / God bless my soul! I've had about enough. / My ears are aching from your frowsty story! / The devil take such rhymes! They're purgatory! / That must be what's called doggerel-rhyme,' said he." All the quotes from Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in modern English are taken from Penguin Classics' 1977 edition translated by Nevill Coghill.

The Kingis Quair (c. 1424) in this form (Abrams 295). The rhyme was later widely used by Elizabethan poets, including William Shakespeare who employed it to write *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and "A Lover's Complaint" (1609). In the seventeenth century, much like the tail-rhyme, the rhyme royal started growing out of fashion and was only occasionally revived.[47]

2.5. Themes and Motifs

Much like their continental counterparts, ME popular romances focus on the undertakings of noble-born male protagonists and their struggles to gain either fame and status or, more commonly in the English tradition, recover that which was unjustly taken from them, such as their lands or kingdom. All in all, this set of narratives is essentially about the "adventures of some hero of chivalry" (Def. 1, *OED*), that is, they are chivalric romances and, therefore, are "characterized by conventions, motifs, archetypes, which have been created in order to express the experiences in their essential nature" (Stevens 16). Among the most identifiable motifs of medieval chivalric romance are "the knight errant, the beautiful endangered lady, the lost heir, the trial of prowess or virtue, the pact gone wrong, the monstrous, magical, and/or disguised challenger, the journey to the otherworld, the joyous return of the prodigal, and the reintegrative celebration" (Chism 57). At the centre of these texts are also some well-known themes like the development of the hero towards maturity, the contrast between Good and Evil, national or regional identity, the importance of family as well as class and the prominence of a courtly code of conduct, which is deeply intertwined with ideals of honour, courage and love. Furthermore:

> some of the major preoccupations of romance [are]: identity, subjectivity, and strangeness; adventure and risk; gender and sexuality; marriage, family, heritage, and lineage; social hierarchy and social performance; prowess and "trawthe" (trueness, loyalty); and love and friendship. (Chism 60)

Mostly all of these elements can be found in ME popular romances, which often follow a standard sequence of events: for a given reason, the hero is exiled as a child or during his youth to return as an adult, he redeems whatever wrong led to his initial withdrawal, and restoration follows. This type of narrative structure can be found in the romances: *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, and *Sir Tryamour* (c. late

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[47] Later uses of the rhyme royal can be seen, for instance, in William Wordsworth's lyric poem "Resolution and Independence" (1802), albeit modified, and W. B. Yeats' "A Bronze Head" (1939).

fourteenth century), among others. However, given the sheer variety of narratives included in this set of manuscripts, it is difficult to sum up (even in very general terms) the narrative structure of ME popular romances. Consequently, texts like *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and the ones about the knight Guy of Warwick (the 'Late Couplet' version as well as the *Stanzaic Guy* and *Guy and Colbrond*) do not follow the sequence mentioned above. Bearing this in mind, ME popular romances do all roughly share the following motifs: separation and reunion, sea voyages, and revenge and marriage. In addition, although:

> in submitting their heroes to supreme tests[,] they do not hesitate to deploy an occasional dragon, in general they prefer the mimetic to the mythic extreme of the romance mode, sketching a faint background of national history, acknowledging contemporary social conditions, evoking law in confirmation of the values they express. (Barron 217)

One of the most notable differences between these texts and other medieval chivalric romances, most notably those belonging to the Matter of Britain, lies in the attention given to the more mundane aspects of social life. While also combining the exotic,[48] the strange and the supernatural, ME popular romances are grounded in the reality of medieval English life, giving particular emphasis to religious themes like pilgrimages (as seen in the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* or *Sir Isumbras*) as well as political or social threats (like in *Bevis of Hampton*) (Charbonneau and Cromwell 96). A good example of this intertwining of subjects is the romance *Havelok the Dane*, which associates the supernatural with concerns about social mobility, justice, lineage, kingship and marriage. Besides moving easily from one "social class to another, mixing themes of social idealism with the realities of the everyday life" (Herzman, et al. 76), this late-thirteenth-century romance exemplifies a distinct feature of medieval popular literature, which "forges its meanings out of the clash between the marvellous and the mundane" (McDonald 15).

Engaging with what Rosalind Field called the "bases of human existence in society" ("Popular Romance" 29), ME popular romances also serve to emphasise the anxieties of the aristocratic elite and the English gentry while simultaneously reinforcing established social norms and introducing supernatural elements or characters. In the romance *Octavian*, for example, one of the main characters is Clement, a "burgesse of Pareche" (line 574), who

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[48] In ME popular romances there are very few references to otherworldly forests or enchanted castles, instead there are frequent allusions and descriptions of the exotic Middle East, a land populated by heathen sultans, beautiful and devoted princesses ready to convert to Christianism for the sake of love, troublesome giants and fantastic animals, like griffins.

unwittingly raises Florent to be his heir without realising the child is the kidnapped son of the Emperor of Rome. Even though Clement treats Florent as his own – "He sall be myn awen childe" (line 614) –, the boy continuously fails to understand the class values of his adopted family. *Octavian*, albeit in a humorous tone, voices conflicting class values so while Florent shows a complete disregard for money, Clement values it extremely. Humour arises from the inappropriateness of behaviour and context: first, through Florent's courtly behaviour in a bourgeois surrounding and then Clement's conduct at the court where he volunteers to pay for his share of the feast. Unsurprisingly, by the end of the narrative all is well: after battles are fought, Florent finds his way back to his birth family and marries the baptised Saracen princess, Marsabelle, whereas Clement is richly rewarded by the Emperor. Granting that both *Havelok the Dane* and *Octavian* address potentially more controversial themes, like the social and cultural clash between upper and lower estates, they also underline traditional ones, such as the importance of family, strengthening prevailing social norms. This is because:

> The stirring portrayals of triumphant courtesy and justice vindicated that mark the conclusions of romances (…) work to hold their diverse audiences together, to reproduce in them the feeling of integration that the narrated transformations dramatize, and to effect a *sense* of social cohesion (not at all dependent on social reality) that enables the established order to prevail. (Hahn, "Gawain" 225)

However, the marvellous also frequently finds its way into ME popular romance in the form of divine intervention that seeks to ensure Good overcomes Evil and justice prevails. In *Octavian*, defeating a giant brought by the Saracen army allows Florent to meet his birth father, the Emperor. In the romance *Athleston*, when the Earl of Stone and his sons walk barefoot on a path of fire blessed nine times by the Archbishop of Canterbury, they are unscathed – "(…) the chyldryn stood and lowgh: / 'Sere, the fyr is cold inowgh" (lines 609-10) – because they are innocent and are thus suitably protected by the divine. Likewise, it is also God's will that Havelok becomes king, since he bears a cross-shaped mark on his shoulder and a bright light comes from his mouth when he sleeps – two unmistakeable signs that he is the rightful king of England and Denmark. In *Sir Isumbras* too it is God who tests the hero, stripping him from all worldly goods and comforts (including his family) to then reward Isumbras for his endurance with richness in his old age and a place in heaven after death. Alternatively, in *Bevis of Hampton* divine intervention is subdued, although there is a magic ring, an uncanny warhorse called Arondel, a dragon and a giant. Other examples could be provided but it is clear that, on

the one hand, ME popular romances have a strong homiletic strain and, on the other, social concerns and family relationships take centre stage in these texts. What is more:

> Critics agree that Middle English popular romances in particular favour family values confirmed by authority – whether in the form of the customs of lay society, the Church or the law. The intervention of divine providence is common in romances, so that the values of the couple can triumph (…). (Radulescu, "Genre" 44)

As in other medieval romances, in ME texts marriage is deemed crucial: it is through matrimonial ceremonies that legitimate procreation, lineage, and inheritance are ensured. By contrast to French romances, which are more focused on courtly love and adultery, the English versions tend to explore the effects of conflict or aggression in the couple or in parent-child(ren) relationships. False accusations of betrayal are a common motif in ME popular romance as are unwanted sexual advances from fathers to daughters. Genuinely illegal births, though, are rare and pre-marital sex means precisely that, as formal, Christian unions between the lovers soon follow. As a result, for these English heroes, love is neither extramarital nor illegitimate or furtive; it does not imply an unequal relationship between the lovers, like courtly love, and does not represent a potential threat to the pursuit of arms.[49] The protagonists must often prove themselves worthy of winning the lady's hand, but "love supports and rewards their [the heroes'] manhood; the pressures of life leave no time for the internal conflicts of chivalry and courtly love" (Barron 217). In ME popular romance, the union between partners is extremely important, because it is only through lawful unions that lineage can be assured,[50] which "points to anxieties over social climbing, the debate about nobility by birth or virtue, and the desirability of having female heiresses choose their partner without outside intervention or constraint" (Radulescu, "Genre" 44).

In addition, the reason this set of texts value lawful unions, and ergo a lawful lineage, may have to do with the political upheaval caused by succession problems in England, especially after the year 1000. It was the death of Edward, the Confessor (r. 1042-1066), who perished without any direct heir, that spurred on William's claim to the English throne and the

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[49] Courtly love generally implies "the idealization of the lady, often already married to someone other than her lover, and the consequent valorisation of either adultery or self-denial" (Fuchs 44), sitting uneasily with the Christian strictures of medieval society. It also represents a threat to social order since, on the one hand, it seemingly gives women a higher status and, on the other hand, this kind of passionate love might distract the male protagonist from achieving knightly feats, like in Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Érec et Énide*.

[50] Note that in Arthurian romances lineage is also extremely important. However, it is also possible for great heroes to be born out of wedlock. In Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, for instance, Sir Galahad is fathered by Sir Lancelot and Lady Elaine, though they are not married.

subsequent Norman Invasion. In the twelfth century, the Norman kings would also have to face concerns regarding succession, since both of Henry I's male heirs – William Atheling and Richard – died, thus making his daughter Matilda, married to Geoffrey Plantagenet, count of Anjou, his sole legitimate successor. In spite of that, Matilda never ruled over England. Instead, Stephen of Blois (r. 1135-1154), Henry I's favourite nephew, was crowned and a dispute over the kingship of England, which lasted for most of Stephen's reign, began. This political instability eventually led to the signing of the Treaty of Winchester (1153), also known as the Treaty of Wallingford, and a year later, upon Stephen's death, Matilda's son was crowned Henry II (r. 1154-1189), thus establishing the Angevin Empire.[51] We could continue listing the lineage issues faced by the English monarchy, but these brief examples suffice to prove why heredity was so important: to have a direct, legitimate (preferably) male heir was crucial to ensure peace in the realm as we can tell by simply looking at the consequences of the political instability of Stephen of Blois' rule.[52] Even though Matilda's right to the English throne had been supported by her own father, we presume that her female condition made her authority more likely to be questioned and forgone by the noblemen who favoured Stephen. In addition, many of the barons strongly opposed Matilda on account of her marriage to a member of the House of Anjou. Yet, her tenacity, her refusal to accept Stephen's crowning, crucially influenced English political life while her ancestry bestowed upon her eldest son a rightful claim to the throne.

Somewhat like Matilda herself, the female protagonist of ME popular romance, generally the heroes' love interest, shows remarkable independence and surprising levels of power in the narrative structure. Although her authority remains limited by medieval society's social constrictions of gender, she can be seen actively taking risks to forge her own destiny. In *King Horn*, the king's daughter Rymenhild purposely declares her love for Horn and offers herself as his wife:

> Rymenhild up gan stonde
> And tok him bi the honde:
> Heo sette him on pelle

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[51] More political disruptions followed, as Henry II's eldest son (and heir to the English throne) Henry, the Young King, died prematurely in 1183, making Richard, the Lionheart, Henry II's successor. Though often depicted as a more popular ruler, Richard only travelled to England twice and when he died without any legal heirs, his younger brother, John, bynamed Lackland, who had already been mostly in charge of overseeing the English kingdom, was crowned. The relationship between the two brothers was notoriously strained and John's rule became known for the widespread discontent caused by his ruthless financial administration, the loss of the French territories and quarrels with the church.

[52] For more details on the Norman and Angevin rule, check Garnett 61-101; Bartlett 4-67 and 121-201.

Of wyn to drinke his fulle:
Heo makede him faire chere
And tok him abute the swere.
Ofte heo him custe,
So wel so hire luste.
'Horn,' heo sede, 'withute strif,
Thu schalt have me to thi wif. (lines 403-12)

It is Horn who rejects her advances, refusing to marry her until he is knighted, which Rymenhild promotes, effectively enabling the hero to keep his promise. *The King of Tars* (c. 1330-1340)[53] is another example of female intervention in the narrative. Despite its title, the romance actually focuses on the daughter of a Christian king who is forced to marry the heathen Sultan of Damas. The romance opens and closes with scenes of the battlefield, but the princess is the one responsible for beginning the narrative, as her beauty draws the Sultan's attention and war ensues between both kingdoms. It is also she who, after giving birth to a monstrous child, is able to establish peace between her father and her husband by converting the latter to Christianity. Even though in medieval romance in general women are seldom merely cast as sex objects,[54] in ME popular romance in particular:

> They are frequently given their own thoughts and responses, expressed in soliloquies of self-analysis as they awaken to love, which endow them with the kind of subjective, interior, life that has often been claimed to be exclusively both a male and a modern phenomenon. (Cooper, *English Romance* 19)

Besides *King Horn* and *The King of Tars*, this is visible in the romances *Bevis of Hampton*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Ipomadon*, *Amis and Amiloun*, which feature rather independent female characters whose role is sometimes as relevant as that of the male heroes. ME romance offers a:

> wildly diverse range of female behaviour and types (…) from the pious and innocent to the stereotypes from the misogynistic tradition. In between these extremes are the supernatural healers, absent mothers (*Emaré* and *Le Bone Florence of Rome*), (…) too-dutiful daughters and wives (the patient Griselda who endures considerable hardship before she finds stability and happiness), wicked mothers-in-law and evil temptresses. Romances thus destabilize what is known or comfortable regarding a woman's station in life. (Charbonneau and Cromwell 101)

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[53] The earliest manuscript in which this text is found is the Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1 so we have decided to match the romance's date of production with that of the manuscript. However, there is some discussion about whether an earlier version might have been developed. On this topic see Chandler's "*The King of Tars*: Introduction."

[54] Take, for instance, the sorceress Morgan le Fay in *SGGK* who at the end of the narrative is revealed to be the one behind the Green Knight's appearance and challenge to Arthur's court.

A usual narrative strategy in ME popular romance is to juxtapose the good wife versus a) the evil wife (*Bevis of Hampton*), b) the jealous mother-in-law (*Octavian*) or c) the temptress (*Generides*, late fourteenth century). Similarly, the introduction of Saracen women (*Bevis of Hampton*; *Octavian*) who are christened and become devoted wives to western knights serves to put into question cultural ideas around gender and non-Christians. On the other hand, Christian women, like Bevis' mother in *Bevis of Hampton*, for instance, are at times the ones whose wickedness disrupts social cohesion through their betrayals of their husbands and/or children. Therefore, the Saracen princesses may also serve as narrative mechanisms to highlight the failures of Christian women, poignantly representing the virtues expected of women in medieval society: honesty, loyalty and devotion to their lords as well as chastity before marriage, all features which Josian, Bevis of Hampton's love interest, shares.

To conclude, ME popular romances not only offer new approaches to familiar themes and motifs, but they also introduce fresh ones, voicing concerns and depicting the values and experiences of those outside the English court. Within the space of the narrative and because the action is always set in a distant past, authors and audiences alike:

> (…) are freed from the exigencies of daily life not just so that they can escape the world they know (magic operates only in a minority of the Middle English popular romances and likewise forests are not obligatory), but so that they can explore – to test, to defy, to confirm – the principles by which it operates. (McDonald 15)

Moreover, as much as it is vital to readdress these romances, it is equally important to acknowledge that the first romances produced in England were written in Latin, French or Anglo-Norman. When British authors, whether "literary hacks" (Loomis, "The Auchinleck Manuscript" 608) or clerics, effectively started to use English again in the thirteenth century, they were often translating older texts. Writers drew on stories already in circulation to i) bring these romances to a wider audience that may have included less educated readers and spectators, and ii) retain an aristocratic audience, which was losing its mastery of the French language. As a result, nearly all ME romances have a previous Anglo-Norman version, which does not mean these new renderings were mere copies of previous narratives:

> (…) these were not simple translations but rather free reimaginings of their sources turned to the needs of new situations and audiences. Middle English writers seized upon, redirected, parodied, and criticized the conventions of their sources in an

astonishing variety of registers, from the blunt utility of *King Horn* to the intricacy of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. (Chism 59)

Yet, the enduring translations, adaptations and re-writings form a set of complex literary borrowings that sometimes make discerning ME popular romances from their original sources difficult, highlighting the heavy dependence of English texts on French and Anglo-Norman literary traditions. In the book chapter "Romance in England, 1066-1400," published in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, Rosalind Field provided a short description of Anglo-Norman romances, which is as follows:

> The Anglo-Norman romances (…) depict a world in which patriarchal succession and inheritance are paramount, in which a hero loses and regains his patrimony. The hero challenges kingship in confrontations which distinguish good from bad rule. Love leads to profitable alliances, promotes rather than undermines the hero's prowess and introduces a heroine who may well be active, even forward, but who contributes to, rather than distracts from, the hero's best interests. There is a concern for law and administration, and for the relationships between different levels of society and the processes that make a country safe – as the Old English writers had it, in a trope that resounds through insular literature – for the vulnerable to travel the length of the country without coming to harm. And always there is the corner of England that is familiar, possessed, even as the heroes blend into local history; the theme of place is even more a defining feature than that of ancestry. It is partly this stress on the hero's lands that gives these romances their powerful feeling of locality; all these romances share this interest in their own corner of Britain – Grimsby, Warwick, Southampton, Galloway, Whittington, Thetford, and, no doubt, if the disguise could be penetrated, Horn's Suddene. (162)

The similarities to ME popular romances, in themes and motifs at least, are apparent. What is more, Field's explanation could (with ease) be applied to these ME texts. Nevertheless, two broad distinctions can be made between the English and the continental tradition. On the one hand, French romance displays a tendency to focus on issues of literary authority, a theme that is frequently absent in the English romances, which instead often makes use of the hardships of literary transmission and the demands of copying, compiling and performance; the latter are more audience-centred. On the other hand, ME romances pay closer attention to subjectivity and how it is presented through public performance whereas French texts are more centred on love-induced adventures (Chism 59). A story is about someone, the 'who' is predominantly at stake, meaning that, "ideas of identity and subjectivity – the performance of gender, class, and lineage – are at the heart of [ME] romance" (Chism 59). Another point that can help distinguish ME romances from the French and Anglo-Norman ones concerns its form, especially as we have seen the use of the tail-rhyme as well as specific speech and scene patterns and formulas.

CHAPTER THREE

'ISN'T THERE A WHITE KNIGHT UPON A FIERY STEED?': THE KNIGHT IN THE EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES

The knight is an elusive, chameleon-like figure; the moment we try to define him, he appears in a different guise.

<div align="right">Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* 21</div>

A especialização no combate a cavalo (...) traduz-se na afirmação de uma poderosa elite guerreira, heterógena quanto à estratificação social, mas profundamente reconhecida nas aspirações e no estilo de vida. É assim que nasce a cavalaria, uma classe guerreira específica que constrói com o tempo, através de formas rituais específicas, um universo ético e existencial próprio e que se posiciona como a referência, do ponto de vista sociocultural, de toda a sociedade feudal.

<div align="right">Storti, "A Cavalaria" 162</div>

3.1. Warriors to Knights: Evolution and Place in Medieval Society

Romance shares a special connection with medieval Western Europe, wherein it began to be developed, flourished and eventually became one of the most read and enjoyed literary genres of the period. At the heart of romance lie characters typically connected to royal or noble courts, like the monarch, his queen, noblemen and women, those who live with them and the knight. Indeed, the knight was placed at the centre of the narratives since the very construction of romance in the Middle Ages. The knight is often the axis around which plots revolve: his adventures, the feelings of admiration and awe at his techniques in battle along with the courteous values embodied by him remained a source of interest well until the sixteenth century. As already mentioned, "romance is inseparable from ideas of chivalry, and from the primary exponent of chivalry, the knight," which is why if "the protagonist is not already a knight when his story opens, it will be concerned with his education in prowess, love, and just action that constitute his winning of his spurs" (Cooper, *English Romance* 41). While ME romance is somewhat of a latecomer to the European literary and cultural scene, it attests to the popularity and prevalence of the knight in medieval society in addition to the moral values that were correlated with this fairly new order. Therefore, the knight can surely be considered one of the weightiest figures of the European Middle Ages, whose legacy has not only endured in our collective imagination but has also played a significant role in nurturing and developing a new sense of individual identity. Furthermore, the concept of chivalry, which may be briefly defined as "an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together" (Keen 16), profoundly influenced medieval culture as well as modern scholars and general audiences' perception of the medieval period. However, much like Richard Barber notes, the knight is an elusive figure that embodied many, and sometimes opposing, traditions and values (21). In order to understand the place of the knight, it is crucial to bear in mind the evolution of knighthood and chivalry, the ceremonies associated with it as well as the importance of concepts like courtesy and courtly love. Given that this research's main focus is ME romance, special attention will be paid to how these ideals developed and were recorded in England. For

the same reason, this chapter will be centred on representations that fall outside the scope of the Matter of Britain; instead, emphasis will be given to medieval popular romances and how this set of texts cast (or not) knights and the qualities they, as an order, were meant to embody: prowess, loyalty, largesse, and courtesy.

In his seminal work, *Chivalry*, Maurice Keen argues that the knight:

> denotes a man of aristocratic standing and probably of noble ancestry, who is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of a heavy cavalryman, and who has been through certain rituals that make him what he is – who has been 'dubbed' to knighthood. (1-2)

Yet, throughout the 1,000 years that make the period now called 'the Middle Ages', this was not always so. The first references to cavalry warfare in Europe can be found in the sixth and seventh centuries in the lands of the Franks who seem to have mastered the techniques of fighting on horseback, deploying mounted units on campaign as early as 507 AD.[1] Although the legions of the Roman Empire (27 B.C.-476 AD) had their own cavalry, their strength lay mostly on their infantry and they did not use horses to fight on the battlefield. Likewise, Anglo-Saxons rode horses but, in Britain, in the period before the Norman invasion, there is no evidence that there were warriors who fought on horseback. Despite being used for swift movements on campaigns, horses were not employed by Anglo-Saxon combatants, who fought only on foot. For this reason, the arrival of chivalry in Britain can be dated quite precisely to 1066 and the Battle of Hastings.[2] Nomad tribes from northern Europe, like the Goths, also rode horses, which allowed them to move faster and carry goods with ease and in greater quantity, but substantial proof as to whether they went into battle with their horses is scarce. This is a key element, as one of the most distinguishable characteristics of the medieval knight is that he fought on horseback. The development of this new way of combat is, however, rather slow.

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[1] Evidence of this can be found, for instance, in an edict published by the Merovingian ruler Clovis (466-511) regulating the taking of fodder and water for the use of his men's horses (Saul 14).

[2] The mobility granted by the use of mounts allowed the Norman army to use shock tactics against the Anglo-Saxons, which may in part help us understand their victory over Harold II's armed force. Nevertheless, it remains unclear why the latter did not fight on horseback since, due to the close connections between Anglo-Saxon nobility and Normandy, many of those who belonged to the Saxon elite had most likely witnessed Norman knights in action. Nigel Saul suggests one of the reasons for this might have to do with the Saxons' weapon of choice in battle: the axe, which is best wielded on foot (8). Another possible reason might have to do with the fact that, before the Norman Conquest, the adversaries most often encountered by the Anglo-Saxons were the Danes (or Vikings), who also fought on foot.

The stirrup, which allows greater stability in the saddle and control over the horse, appears in Europe in the eighth century.[3] Its emergence is decisive because, before the stirrup was used, riding and fighting on horseback required significant expertise and even more years of practice. In addition, although the spear and the saddle were important, without the stirrup, the shock charge with couched lance would not have been possible (Keen 23).[4] Further progress in horse riding occurs later in the eleventh century, namely concerning the use of horseshoes and a type of harness.[5] As more and more techniques develop, to arm these new warriors on horseback and take care of their mounts becomes increasingly expensive (and it remains so throughout the medieval period). The fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD triggers considerable social and financial instability and it is only at the end of the sixth century that civil society improves sufficiently to allow a class of semi-professional soldiers to appear. They were most likely warriors whose superiority lay not only in their ability to ride, but also in their efficiency in the battlefield. Celebrated for their talent in using weapons, they were taken into service by noblemen or monarchs to defend a land or fight against an opposing army. In the eighth century, for example, mounted units were already common in the forces of Pippin III and of his son, the Emperor Charlemagne. Nevertheless, these warriors or *miles*, a term that substituted *equites* (used in contrast to *pedites*, that is, foot soldiers), could hardly be called knights for, on the one hand, the formal ceremony of admission into knighthood only developed later on and, on the other, there was no feudal bond. Actually, "[u]ntil the seventh century, the bond between the leader and follower consisted of nothing more than an oath of personal loyalty" – a contract Barber refers to as "commendation" (10).

Seen as the very concept that distinguished knighthood from the mounted warrior (Barber 27), little is known about early knighting ceremonies. Different scholars[6] have identified the Germanic *comitatus* – the bond established between a warrior and his chief described by Tacitus in *Germania* (98 AD) – as a precursor of the feudal pledge and knighting ceremonies of later centuries. However, others have questioned the soundness of such claims,

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[3] The stirrup appears for the first time in China in the fifth century AD and about two centuries later in Iran and Hungary from where it spread to Western Europe throughout the eighth century. Its evolution is not quite clear, though, and there is still some debate about how or what factors allowed the use of the stirrup by the French Carolingian Empire.

[4] Shock cavalry was a distinct unit within an army that would charge as a group usually riding mighty stallions. These warriors were fully equipped with swords, lances and/or axes and their main purpose was to go into direct battle against enemy armies. According to Peter Coss, "[t]he introduction of this shock combat from compact squadrons has been described as the medieval equivalent of the modern tank" (8).

[5] For more details, see Eco 16-17.

[6] See Cardini 57-58; Albertoni 194; Ackerman 288.

stressing the fact that Tacitus never observed the Germans directly.[7] Two points are, nonetheless, clear: a) the mounted warriors that appeared against the backdrop of anarchy of the early Middle Ages were little more than fighting men[8] skilled in horsemanship and the use of arms, whose role remains enigmatic and purpose determined by the circumstances they found themselves in (Barber 21); and b) the emergence of the cavalry encouraged the development of a social elite, especially because it increased the costs of warfare. The needs of mounted warriors, which included specially bred and trained horses (usually at least two), servants, stable boys and squires, as well as time to devote to training and exercise, mean that only a wealthy lord could fund such service. In the tenth century, the need for expensive and constant training had become so pressing that these men started to be supported solely by either a piece of land or by provision of residence in their lord's household. By the eleventh century:

> In return for their services, the lords belonging to the older nobility had much to offer: rewards, whether in the form of arms, money or lands, a hand towards a good marriage; security in the enjoyment of their estates; protection of their privilege and fortunes. (Keen 29)

The practice of rewards can be linked to the development of the feudal system in medieval Europe, which both influenced and shaped the warrior class' growth and reinforced its social standing. Initially, the feudal oath exchanged between a lord and his vassal ensured there would be mutual obligations: whereas a noble lord (*senior*) would ensure protection and dispense gifts,[9] the vassal was obliged to obey and assist the first when called upon. According to Giuseppe Albertoni:

> o termo 'feudalismo' designa um conjunto de instituições que tem origem na alta Idade Média, quando a partir da vassalagem franca se desenvolve uma forma de 'serviço' que em breve assume características de tipo militar e que conjuga tradições jurídicas e militares romanas, germânicas e célticas. O feudalismo ganha

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[7] In "Tacitus, *Beowulf* and the *Comitatus*" Steve Fanning claims that "we should see the view of the *comitatus* as it has been presented in Anglo-Saxon England as one of the sources for feudalism as a series of fictions" (35). See also Benario 112-20.

[8] Taking this into account, even at an earlier stage it was possible for a mounted warrior to be of noble birth as well.

[9] It should be noted that the practice of gift giving was already in place before feudalism took shape. According to Walter Wadiak's study, *Savage Economy: The Returns of Middle English Romance*, the gift was a more efficient way of establishing dominion over those lower down the social ladder than overt violence (13), since it placed the recipient in a dependent relationship to the giver, thus creating a bond of subservience that was based on an obligation. In addition, Wadiak argues that the noble gift can be interpreted as symbolic violence seeing as it "does violence by refusing a certain and predictable return, throwing the received into uncertainty, placing [them] under an indeterminate obligation, even (in the case of potlatch) seeking to enslave" (12).

corpo quando o serviço de vassalagem é reforçado com a concessão de um bem temporal (benefício/feudo). (192)

Feudalism[10] began in the early sixth century where we can find the first use of the words *vassus/vassalus* to refer to the employment of semi-free warriors by the Franks (Albertoni 194). Marc Bloch describes the earliest feudal rituals as secular homages that brought together a man who wished to serve and a man (of greater power and social standing) who accepted to be the leader (178). The first joined hands together and placed them on the second's hands, symbolising his submission, some words would then be exchanged and a kiss was shared between the two – a sign of friendship and agreement. However, records of this exchange only appear in the eighth century, which does not mean it could not have taken place before that. By the second half of the eighth century, bestowing land ownership, or presenting a *beneficium*, a term later substituted by the expression *feudum*, was becoming more usual. In fact, it is believed that by the time Charlemagne became emperor (800-814) the custom of ascribing a benefit to a vassal was already common practice, which is why several scholars suggest that from this point onwards it is possible to discuss the institution of feudalism (Albertoni 192). The consequences of this benefit were crucial for the advancement of those engaged in the art of war, whose role was not only to fight but also to ensure peace in the territory. Indeed, after the fall of the Carolingian Empire (888), the cavalrymen who gathered in castles became crucial instruments in maintaining the peace in the lord's land and ensuring its protection. What is more, by conceding land to the mounted warriors, the great feudal lords of the older nobility found the means to secure their fealty and bind them to an estate, later designated a fee or fief, from which they could also earn their livelihood.

Simultaneously, earlier improvements in combat tactics led to the growth of a culture that would in due course envelop knights in mystique. The use of the lance as an attack weapon was particularly significant since it allowed the charge of heavy cavalrymen holding their lances in the so-called 'couched position'.[11] While there has been some debate as to when this technique was introduced, up until the 1000s, the lance or spear was only used in three different ways: 1) gripped at the point of balance with the right arm extended (to deliver an underarm blow, as seen for instance in details of the Bayeux Tapestry); 2) carried high (to deliver an overarm thrust); and 3) used as a projectile (that is, the lance or spear could be thrown from

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[10] While the term feudalism dates from the seventeenth century (Bloch 9), the use of this expression has become accepted to denote the elaborate relationship established between a lord and his vassals. For more on feudalism in Europe, see Bloch and Ganshof, especially Parts One and Three.

[11] In the 'couched position' a knight would carry a lance tucked firmly under the armpit, levelling it at the enemy.

close quarters). Keen argues that the 'couched position' was a fourth method that let horse, rider and lance be gathered into a "human projectile", which in turn allowed the knight to deliver a hammer blow (24). To ensure the success of this manoeuvre a heavier lance was needed as well as a more solid saddlebow. These elements – weapon, saddlery and tactics – seem to have come together in the second half of the eleventh century and greatly contributed to the level of destructiveness likely to be caused by a body of horsemen. At this point, unequal skill and expertise was demanded of practitioners. Therefore, it is not surprising that references to tournaments began to appear in the late eleventh- and early twelfth-century.

The tournament began as an informal affair, martial exercises or mock warfare, offering a new training ground for knights and squires. Although they suffered a number of transformations, tournaments became a central institution of medieval chivalry and "the quintessential knightly sport" (Kauper, *Holy Warriors* 66).[12] The first tournaments seem to have been held in the area of Valenciennes and Tournai, on the borders of France and the Holy Roman Empire, while the earliest reference to these events might be dated to 1095 when Count Henry III of Brabant was supposedly killed in a joust while on a visit to the castellan of Tournai (Saul 16). These organised fights provided knights an opportunity to refine their skills and, at the same time, served to curb the violent ethos of the warriors, which the Church attempted to limit through the Peace and Truce of God (*Pax et Treuga Dei*).[13] Much like chivalry itself tournaments were brought to England by the Anglo-Normans and around the 1120s-1130s they were already being held at different locations around England as well as continental Europe. Records show that young bachelors, like the renowned Anglo-Norman knight William Marshal (1147-1219), made a yearly round of the tourneying circuit where they could show their prowess and perfect their skills.

Early tournaments were very different from the later more staged and formal events of the beginning of the sixteenth century.[14] Initially there seem to have been few rules, no foul stokes or prohibited techniques. The knights engaged in a crowded melee, using their swords to unhorse and then capture those belonging to the opposing team – a tradition that preluded

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[12] An uncertain tradition ascribes the invention of tournaments to an Angevin knight, Geoffrey of Preuilly, who was killed in 1066. However, there are relatively few records of tournaments taking place until 1100 and these remained largely ignored in the earliest *chansons de geste* (Keen 83).

[13] The Peace and Truce of God temporarily forbade private wars and included the time of Advent and Lent as well as some days of the week. While at first the Truce of God (1020-1040 onwards) banned combats from Saturdays to Mondays, it was later extended to include Thursdays and Fridays. The Peace and Truce of God helped create a period of time and space during which a community's gathering could take place and promoted the reconstitution of the public space as well as the growth of villages within zones where violence between opposing mounted armies was outlawed.

[14] For more information on early tournaments see Barker 4-16; Barker and Barber 13-28.

the principle that those imprisoned in war should be treated with compassion.[15] In time, tournaments achieved even greater repute, as they took on a central role in medieval chivalric romance, wherein the heroes would prove their prowess, strength, and courage, winning their lady's favour through participation in these events. Like Cooper refers, "[a]uthors found mass tournaments useful since they provided a *locus* where their protagonists, even if engaged on a solitary quest, could meet and compete with other knights, demonstrating the superiority appropriate to the story's hero in the process" (*English Romance* 42).

One of the earliest literary allusions to a tournament can be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* where, once returned to Britain following his conquest of Gaul, Arthur held great banquets and sports competitions:

> The military men composed a kind of diversion in imitation of a fight on horseback; and the ladies, placed on top of the walls as spectators, in a sportive manner darted their amorous glances at the courtiers, the more to encourage them. (…) Whoever gained the victory in any of these sports was rewarded with a rich prize by Arthur. (164-65)

Chivalric romances undoubtedly helped construct the view of the knight as an ideological figure, but they likewise added a degree of respectability to the tournament and "a kind of symbiosis developed between tournaments and courtly literature, each feeding the other and thereby methods encouraging their mutual development" (Barber 160). Although there were other significant developments – in castle building and in techniques of siege warfare, which enhanced the art of war – tournaments' vast impact lies in the development of the chivalric ethos they promoted, since such occasions provided a social arena where fighters could engage and bond with one another. By contributing to the growth of distinctive modes of thought and conduct, tournaments: 1) helped establish "a brotherhood in arms which transcended the ties of lordship, family and ethnic identity" (Saul 17); 2) anticipated the conventions that generally

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[15] Because of widespread war, significant developments in the treatment of warriors of noble birth had begun to be developed in continental Europe from the eleventh century onwards. Albeit informal at first, a body of conventions that attempted to limit the barbarism of war was established. At its simplest level, it consisted in exchanging property, strategic assets or political favour against granting a noble prisoner's life – a method that implied fewer casualties were suffered by the defeated noblemen and ensured something of value was given in return. However, these conventions remained circumscribed and only began to be incorporated by the English armies after the Norman Conquest, which introduced a new code of honour. In fact, until 1066, English leaders were ruthless in the treatment of their opponents, whether they were Danes or fellow nationals, killing any survivors in the aftermath of a battle and sacking the lands. The Normans, on the other hand, did not usually resort to violence against noble opponents and viewed the English practices as barbaric. By the twelfth century, though, while the Normanised English had renounced past methods, in Wales, Scotland and Ireland the new ethic code did not develop as quickly or steadily, which began the process of subordination of the neighbouring Celtic peoples (Saul 12-14).

came to be applied in the conduct of war; and 3) fostered a sense of identity – a crucial component for medieval chivalry. On this point, we would like to note that mounted cavalrymen did not form a cohesive social group bound by oaths and a set of principles, as they would from the 1100s onwards. In fact, an awareness of what might be called a specific group identity was slow to emerge and, to understand it, one must consider a number of linguistic, social, and literary transformations.

To begin with, the first mounted warriors could have different social backgrounds, they belonged to what in the eleventh century would be called the *bellatores*, those who fight. A specific awareness of status and function is unknown, which is attested by the use of the word *miles*. Originally, the Latin word was employed to refer to a soldier and only by the eleventh century did it begin to be used in a more limited military sense: to identify mounted warriors (Keen 27; Cooper, *English Romance* 42). By the end of the 1000s and early 1100s, the term *miles* had acquired honorific associations and those belonging to this group distinguished themselves from other sections of society through their martial prowess. The reasons that might have led to this transformation or social uplift are hard to fathom, but it could be connected to the spread of seigniorial castles where mounted warriors took on garrison duty. Living in the same household as wealthier and more reputable, noble families gave them the opportunity to live in close proximity with members of the older nobility and was likely to ensure the combatants a degree of parity with the first. It should be further noted that, at the same time, the term that was used to identify members of the elite, *dominus*, began to have less and less social significance. In the eleventh century, the latter was being employed to describe first barons and castellans, but at the end of the same century even humble knights were called *dominus* (Saul 17-18). Consequently, in the twelfth century, the older nobility had stopped using the term *dominus* and began to identify themselves as *milites*. By looking at the evolution of the social meaning of these words, it is clear there were two significant developments at play: 1) the two groups (lesser knighthood and greater nobility) had begun to draw together, meaning the distinction between the mounted warrior (as men with a specific status and function) and the older nobility (whose standing as free lords of ancient lineage was at first superior) was steadily eroding,[16] though the warriors' prestige was still primarily achieved through their feats in battle; and 2) a sense of group identity or exclusiveness was underway; these men were no longer merely soldiers in new guises but constituted a new social order.

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[16] However, in *The Chivalrous Society*, George Duby argues that only in the first years of the fourteenth century did matrimonial alliances and the use of the title 'noble man', which was extended to all knights, completely merged the two groups.

Seeing that knighthood became increasingly viewed as a special estate, a sense of pride in ascent and descent started to develop within this group and the idea that any knight could make a knight of whomever he pleased was replaced by a sense of hierarchy. Hereafter, to dub men of low rank was ill advised and, from the twelfth century onwards, there were legal restrictions in Germany and Sicily that prevented the knighting of men who were not of noble birth.[17] In the thirteenth century, when Ramon Llull wrote *Libre qui es de l'ordre de Cavalleria* (*The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, c.1274-76), he stated:

> Nobility and Chivalry are joined and belong together, for nobility is nothing less than a continuance of ancient honour, and Chivalry is the Order and Rule that has been upheld from the beginning of the time that it was begun (...). Therefore, since nobility and Chivalry belong together, if you make a man who is not noble a knight, you are making nobility and Chivalry opposites by what you are doing (...). (58)

It is clear lineage became exceptionally important and helped shape the knights' own sense of identity as well. The most perfect and ideal lineage was naturally that of Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospel of Matthew, but all earthly lineages were perceived as a part of the Christian universal history. As a result, in the eleventh century, there was a reorganisation of aristocratic families that, having at its root an idealised perception of the earthly lineage, led to an alteration and redefinition of the very notion of family in political and ideological terms (Varandas, "Herói Medieval" 40). The significance of asserting a family's lineage is connected to the desire to strengthen political power and authority, which in turn is associated with the changes triggered by the institution of the feudal system since the allocation of land to the mounted warriors guaranteed they could gather more fortune. Once the fief became hereditary, especially from the moment the principle of primogeniture was introduced, these families came to be increasingly rich and powerful by right of inheritance. Nobility quickly turned into a gift granted by birth and cavalry, filled with knights who had gained their lands and titles from generation to generation, became even more exclusive. In England, the principle of primogeniture was legally established by Henry II (r. 1133-1189). It secured property rights, reinforced the importance of blood ties and led to a growing urgency to prove one's noble ancestry. At this point, the writing of genealogies flourished but because of its exceptional nature – English aristocracy was essentially composed of Norman families and, therefore, at least originally not-English – "the concern with *noblesse*, with nobility of blood and lineage,

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[17] This does not mean all knights were wealthy. Instead, the poor knight was a common figure throughout the Middle Ages, ranging from the younger son making his fortune in tournaments to mercenaries and men of the great companies fighting and plundering for a living.

which is a feature of the continental genealogies (…), was not very relevant to circumstances in England and rapidly became out of place as the older families disappeared" (Holt 208). This does not mean that narratives regarding a nobleman's family did not become concerned with establishing his bloodline as far into the past as possible while, simultaneously, linking it to great warriors of former times. This is especially visible through the attempts made by the new Norman sovereigns to seek out a distinguished ancestor rooted to the land they presided over. An example can be found in Britain's once and future king, Arthur, whose genealogical history was specifically created by Geoffrey of Monmouth in *Historia Regum Britanniae* to please the Norman patrons who had commissioned the book. In fact, Monmouth:

> creates (…) a genealogical history for Arthur, turning him into a king, in order to glorify the British past from which Normans supposedly descended through King Arthur. Geoffrey is also legitimizing the Norman government by placing Arthur at the level of Roland, thus giving the Normans a hero that would rival and supersede the symbol of French monarchy. (Varandas, "Ambrosius" 184)

Cavalry's new status was cemented by yet another adjustment surrounding the aristocratic warrior: the use of the term 'order'. Around the twelfth century, a mounted warrior was not simply armed into knighthood, he was ordained into a group that in itself formed an order with its own set of norms and ideals – it was a clearly outlined division conformable to the divine plan, an institution, not merely a plain fact (Bloch 371). For that reason, orders of knights began to appear, like the Order of the Garter founded by Edward III in 1348 whose motto "Honi soit qui mal y pense" is invoked at the end of *SGGK*.

The fact that a work like *SGGK*, long held as one of the best medieval romances produced in Great Britain, quotes from a well-established order of chivalry, shows how romance was bonded to the knightly class. Unsurprisingly, it further highlights the sense that knights stood as a separate group, united by their expertise in armed combat, but also by values like prowess, courage, loyalty, largesse and friendship – all qualities established by Europe's warrior elite for centuries. The latter is especially visible in the popular motif of the sworn brotherhood, as envisaged for instance in *Athelston*. Ideals of friendship and comradeship, which were encouraged both in tournaments and in the education of those aspiring to knighthood, attracted medieval audiences concerned with the claims of familial ties, sworn oaths of allegiance and the nature of friendship, which was invariably tested. Because medieval romances involve the manifestation of identity (Furrow 57), they played a part in the construction of the chivalric identity both mirroring the cultural developments of contemporary

society and actively constructing or refashioning the role of the knight and courtly ideals. Yet, when exactly chivalry emerged as a separate concept is still hard to pinpoint, since, as already mentioned, the distinction may be connected to the emergence of the first knighting ceremonies.

The word *adouber*, to dub,[18] was used to describe a warrior's acceptance into knighthood (a squire was dubbed a knight) and at first simply meant to equip a man with arms. Some of the earliest registers in England describe how, around 1065, Robert of Rhuddlan was girded with a sword by King Edward the Confessor. Around the same time, Count Fulk of Anjou was being girded in a similar fashion by his uncle, Count Geoffrey of Anjou, an event recalled by the first in 1100. Thus, dubbing ceremonies were simple exchanges that grew considerably more elaborate. In the twelfth century, a knighting ceremony could comprise four parts: the confession and vigil, which took place on the night before the ceremony; the ecclesial communion (on the following morning); the handing down of weapons and *colée*, or blow; and the feast, which could last for days. By the thirteenth century, these became even more extravagant. In *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, Ramon Llull explains that, before being knighted, a squire should fast, go to church and pray on the day before the ceremony. The ceremony itself, according to the knight turned monk, began with a mass in a church, after which the squire ought to kneel before the altar, raise his eyes and hands to God until a knight would hand him a sword, kiss him (as a sign of charity) and slap him (performing the *colée*). The ceremony then ended with the newly knighted parading in front of the people so that all could see them and know who they were and the oaths they had taken. Finally, a feast was held wherein gifts were offered. Interestingly, about a century later, in *Le Livre de Chevalerie* (*A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, c. 1350), by the acclaimed French knight Geoffroi de Charny, a total of fifteen steps (nine of which to be performed on the eve of the ceremony) are given to describe how a knighting ceremony is completed (91-92). Granting that these descriptions do not imply all knighting ceremonies actually followed the ideal instructions given in treatises on chivalry like Llull's and Charny's, they provide some relevant insights, especially Charny's work,[19] and can help us understand the impact of this ritual on a warrior's career.

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[18] The word 'dub' in ME could have four distinct meanings: 1) to make a knight; 2) to give the *colée* with the sword; 3) to give the *colée* with a hand or fist; and, though less clear, 4) to initiate with the sword, although there is less certainty about this last meaning. For more information, see Ackerman 109-114.

[19] Even though Ramon Llull's work was quite successful in the Middle Ages and remains one of the most studied treatises on chivalry today, we must keep in mind that the author had already retired from knighthood when he wrote it. As a result, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry* is more ecclesiastically-oriented than Charny's later work. One of the most notable differences between the authors is their conception of the order of knighthood in terms of its place in society: whereas Llull positioned priesthood above all other orders, for Charny knighthood was the most rigorous order of all (95). The latter even goes on to state that "of the good knights and good men-at-arms

Despite the fact that knighthood could also be conferred upon the field of battle or on its eve, formal knighting ceremonies quickly became the most important moment in a knight's life. They not only marked the coming of age of the warrior but also signalled the completion of his military apprenticeship and separated those who were knighted from those who were not – to be a knight now unmistakably meant to be a part of an exclusive elite. Furthermore, they implied a long learning process a young man would have to go through. Although it had also been common earlier, from the eleventh- to the twelfth-century it became customary to send boys of noble blood to an aristocratic or royal household where they would receive their martial training. They learnt how to ride, use a sword, shoot a bow and use a lance as well as serve as pages. E. K. Milliken argues that:

> For (…) seven years or more, the stripling was set to master the military skills of horsemanship and the use of weapons. In the former he learnt to guide a horse with grace and dexterity, to jump it over wall and ditches (…). In the latter, he was taught how to use the sword and bow, while particular attention was paid to the difficult art of managing a lance (…). (19)

Not many authors refer to how long a page's training should last, given that the condition for his promotion to squire seemed to depend less on the years of instruction than on his progress in knowledge and performance. A squire's duty was to accompany a knight with whom he would continue his training. Once he came of age, a squire was eligible for admission into the order of knighthood. For Milliken, this would happen around the age of twenty-one, but it is not clear whether this was a requirement or not. In ME romance in particular the most commonly given age of the candidates is around fifteen (Ackerman 296), as indicated, for example, in *Amis and Amiloun*:

> The douke was blithe and glad of chere,
> Thai were him bothe leve and dere,
> Semly to fare bi his side.
> Tho thai were fifteen winter old,
> He dubbed bothe tho bernes bold
> To knightes in that tide,
> And fond hem al that hem was nede,
> Hors and wepen and worthly wede,
> As princes prout in pride. (lines 160-68)

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who (…) desire often to take up arms, it might well be considered that they should be of as great or even greater integrity than might be required of a priest (…)" (98).

All the same, literary references can be vague. In *Sir Isumbras*, when the knight's three sons reappear at the end of the poem, "Ther come rydynge knyghtes three" (line 730), an attentive reader can deduce they must be about sixteen years old, although it is unclear when and by whom they were dubbed. In *Octavian*, Florent is only twelve when his adoptive father, Clement, first sends him on business errands, which indicates he is already old enough to take on adult responsibilities; when his twin, Octavian, "was of elde / (...) The kyng dubbede hym to knyghte" (lines 517-19). Though Octavian's age at the time of his knighting is not mentioned, the parallelism established throughout the narrative between the siblings' early lives suggests they entered the adult world at about the same time, that is, at twelve.[20] However, no details are provided concerning Octavian's training at the court of the King of Jerusalem. In *King Horn*, on the other hand, the hero's training at King Aylmar's court is specifically described, but his age is not stated:

> Stiward, tak nu here
> My fundlyng for to lere
> Of thine mestere,
> Of wude and of rivere,
> And tech him to harpe
> With his nayles scharpe,
> Bivore me to kerve,
> And of the cupe serve.
> Thu tech him of alle the liste
> That thu evre of wiste,
> And his feiren thou wise
> In to othere servise.
> Horn thu undervonge
> And tech him of harpe and songe. (lines 231-44)

Horn must learn how to hunt, to play the harp (a rather unusual requirement in ME popular romance), to carve and to serve the king. While at first the latter activities might strike the reader as odd, after all Horn is the son of a monarch, serving at the table was a customary practice for young boys at noble courts, since this practice was believed to teach them courtesy and discipline. From these brief examples, it is clear that, when mentioned, the details concerning a knight's youth and training often differ from one ME narrative to another greatly, suggesting their authors and audience might not share the same interest in the particulars of

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[20] For a greater understanding of what was regarded as coming of age in medieval Britain, see Bailey 41-60.

knighthood as their continental counterparts.[21] Furthermore, whereas medieval romance attempts to emulate the specific rites after which the warrior would become a knight, according to Robert Ackerman, few ME romances include detailed accountings of knighting ceremonies and many of the references found are little more than abrupt statements (286). Nonetheless, being a knight and being dubbed into knighthood is important in romance, which is why in:

> virtually all the romance heroes are dubbed, not in the mass battlefield knightings, as were a number of important historical personages, but in the more elaborate and stately court ceremonies. Possibly (…) the romance writers departed somewhat from actual usage in this respect in their effort to stress the importance of their heroes. (Ackerman 310)

Even so, by the later twelfth century references to mass knightings were more common in literary sources (Keen 71). Mass promotions took on a meaningful role for they signified a ritual development and most notably "offered a means of solidifying, through the impact of ample and striking ceremony, ties based in fosterage in the same household, and of laying the foundations at the same time for the future war band of a lord's heir" (Keen 69). Taking *King Horn*'s text once more, the knighting ceremony of the main character happens on the same day as that of his twelve companions:

> Horn com bivore the kinge,
> Mid his twelf yfere,
> Sume hi were luthere.
> Horn he dubbede to knighte
> With swerd and spures brighte.
> (…)
> Horn adun lighte
> And makede hem alle knightes.
> Murie was the feste (lines 500-25)

The fact that Horn is knighted first is an indication of his superior nature, social standing and prowess, an idea which is reinstated when his first request as a knight is to dub his companions. In addition, the ceremony depicted is unusual for it is king Aylmar who puts Horn's boots and spurs on, a task most often performed by other knights, and it takes place in the king's court, not inside a church, as customary in the thirteenth century. In *Le Morte Darthur*, the knighting of Arthur happens in a church on the day of Pentecost: "Arthur foryaf

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[21] ME romances are nevertheless a particularly fertile field in which to look at representations of childhood due to the attention given to more mundane aspects of social life. For a broader study on childhood in the Middle Ages, see Nicholas Orme's book *Medieval Children.*

hem, and took the swerd bitwene both his handes and offred it upon the aulter where the Archebisshop was; and so was he made knyghte of the best man that was there" (Malory 11). However, in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (c. 1430-40) there are also references to battlefield ceremonies:

> Even into Almaine, that Arthur had wonnen,
> Rides in by the river   and riotes himselve,
> And ayeres with a huge will   all those high landes;
> All Westfale by war   he winnes as him likes,
> Drawes in by Danuby   and dubbes his knightes. (lines 618-22)[22]

Hence, it seems that the age of the candidate is not paid much attention and dubbing ceremonies could take place at three possible locations: at court, in church or on the battlefield, which, echoing historical records, suggests there were two traditions associated with knighting ceremonies: one secular and another ecclesiastical. The secular tradition appears to date back to the ceremonial delivery of arms to young warriors and was already in place when Christian sacraments were ascribed to it. However, it was precisely in these ancient rites that the Church found an entry point through which it would become increasingly involved with the order of chivalry, most notoriously through the ritual of the consecration of the sword.

The rites of the blessing of the sword appear to have contributed to the later developments in knighting ceremonies, although how they became associated with these ceremonies has been a matter of some discussion. Maurice Keen suggests connections can be found between the earliest coronation rites and the liturgy for making a knight, arguing that the same words used to invoke God's blessing on the king were used in later texts on knighthood (72-73). In addition, the author claims that more elaborate girding rituals – a central element of knighting ceremonies – were first performed amongst monarchs[23] and they too are linked to the sacraments of coronation. Be that as it may, this does not mean there is a straightforward correlation between the conventions involved in crowning a monarch and dubbing a warrior, especially because early references to knighting ceremonies that mention girding with the sword concern only great men and/or their sons, not all knights. Still, this is a key point to keep in mind since:

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[22] The quotes from *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* are from Larry D. Benson's 1994 edition, which resorts to the Lincoln, Cathedral Library Manuscript 91 wherein the sole copy of the poem can be found.
[23] In 791, for instance, when Charlemagne knighted Louis, the Pious King, of Aquitaine, he girded him with a sword – an action Louis would later repeat with Charles, the Bald (838).

the moment at which the old ceremony of delivering arms becomes identifiable with a rite of initiation into knighthood is that at which a ritual girding becomes associated with it: as a result of which such girding, hitherto associated with the commission of authority (a significance retained in the coronation rite), becomes a sign of admission into an elevated status-group, that of the knight. (Keen 73)

Marc Bloch, on the other hand, claims that much like peasants who would have lands, flocks and wells blessed to prevent the interference of the Devil, a young warrior – more than any other member of society – and the sword he was to use for the first time needed to be consecrated (372). Since knights, whose feats often entailed manslaughter, could more easily be swayed into engaging in violent, peace disturbing activities, it seems only reasonable for them to call for, or be persuaded into requiring, divine guidance. Following Bloch's reasoning, the blessing of a newly-made knight's sword was part of the medieval custom of consecrating all objects in the service of humankind, which would then be protected against Evil thought and intent. Nevertheless, the author also admits that these rituals and their performance influenced European courts from where they could have spread onto the general audience. One conclusion seems to be clear: the blessing of the sword implied that the Christian Church had a role to play in knighting ceremonies. The old delivery of arms was transformed into a sacrament and cemented the feeling that the order of chivalry was a society of initiates (Bloch 374).

Interestingly, while the Church succeeded in establishing a monopoly over coronation rites, thus incorporating the girding ritual into its own liturgical sacraments, it never achieved such control over the process of making a knight. Indeed, "[a]lthough (…) the Church attempted to claim the power to make a knight, it never established its jurisdiction in this sphere (…) the status of knight depended on the handing on of the tradition from knight to knight: only a knight could make a knight" (Barber 30).[24] Of course, this does not imply that the Church did not play a vital role in the development of dubbing ceremonies and of chivalry itself. On the contrary, the mere fact that knights were frequently dubbed in a church suggests knighthood was increasingly regarded as a Christian calling with its own set of Christian obligations and morality.

Perhaps one of the greatest effects of the interest of the clergy in the knightly order was precisely the powerful hold it established over the moral values of the group. Although the

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[24] Notwithstanding, there are records of knights who were welcomed into the order by men of the clergy. In 1213 in England, for example, in a grand ceremony, Simon de Montfort's son was invested a knight at the service of Christ by two bishops. For a list of historical instances of the dubbing of knights by churchmen, see Meller 47-48.

warrior class and the wagging of war were strongly disapproved of by the Christian Church, one can find Christ depicted as a warrior preparing for battle as early as the eighth century. In the OE poem "Dream of the Rood" (c. eighth century), Jesus is described as following:

Ongyrede hine þa geong hæleð,   (þæt wæs god ælmihtig),
strang ond stiðmod.   Gestah he on gealgan heanne,
modig on manigra gesyhðe,   þa he wolde mancyn lysan.
Bifode ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte.   Ne dorste ic hwæðre bugan to eorðan,
feallan to foldan sceatum,   ac ic sceolde fæste standan.
Rod wæs ic aræred.   Ahof ic ricne cyning (lines 39-44)[25]

By using expressions such as "young hero" ("geong hæleð"), "strong and resolute" ("strang ond stiðmod"), "warrior" ("beorn", which may also be translated as "man") and "king" ("cyning"), the poet reconciles seemingly antithetical values, that is, the heroic and the Christian. Christ's combination of warrior heroism and penitent atonement would eventually become crucial to the development of the chivalric ideology, given that "a chivalric career meant following a savior imaginatively transformed into one of their own, a magnificent warrior who triumphed over his dread enemies but who also suffered grievously and meritoriously in achieving his crucial victory" (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 116). In the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, the clergy would also come to acknowledge that warfare might be necessary at times. The reasons for this shift in position are complex, but there is at least one factor that can be clearly distinguished.

The Church needed the support of the knightly order to face the wave of heathen assaults, in particular after the fall of the Carolingian Empire. It fell upon knights to defend the Holy Church, uphold justice against those who would rob and desecrate holy places as well as suppress and punish heretics – all very pragmatic reasons that helped justify (and even sanctify) knightly violence. Furthermore:

as great lords themselves, clerics were inextricably involved in the world of armies and knighthood. They held estates owing knight service to some superior lord or to the lord king. They knew knightly force was needed in a violent and dangerous

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[25] "(…) young hero - that was God almighty - / strong and resolute; he ascended on the high gallows, / brave in the sight of many, when he wanted to ransom mankind. / I trembled when the warrior embraced me; even then I did not dare to bow to earth, / fall to the corners of the earth, but I had to stand fast. / I was reared a cross. I raised up the powerful King" (lines 39-44). The Modern English translation is by Elaine Treharne, in *Old and Middle English Anthology*, and is based on the sole surviving copy of the poem found in the tenth-century Biblioteca Capitolare di Vercelli, MS CXVII, also known as the Vercelli Book.

world and willingly held lands that supported it. Even those without landed endowment necessarily drew on warrior force. (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 10)

As a result, it became increasingly acknowledged that though the only truly valid life was the one led in the *imitatio Christi*, in real life a battle for Christendom was inevitable (Huppé 9). As princely rule weakened, leading to a breakdown of public authority, the mounted warriors became an efficient defence against growing violence, which is in itself a paradox. Knights might have been a force for peace but it is undeniable they also posed a threat to it. The Church's concern with the ethics of knighthood increased and there was an attempt to adopt it as an order of quasi-religious nature. Through careful Christian teachings, knights could be turned into instruments to help achieve the *Pax Dei*. The idea of a Christian knighthood was thus formulated along with the doctrine of the just war, which reached its zenith with the Crusades (1096-1291).

The First Crusade (1096-1099) presented a vision of secular militia engaged in the service of the Church, giving "shape and force to the notion of Christian knighthood" (Ashe, "The Hero" 134). It helped integrate emerging ideas of knighthood with piety, contributed to the development of the concept of chivalry[26] and provided the warrior aristocracy with a solution to the contradictions of being a part of a culture wherein their survival depended upon committing acts, such as killing, that were denounced by the Christian church as sinful. Since "[t]he crusading knight fought, and gave his life, for God and Christendom," he "could be Christlike in his death" (Ashe, "The Hero" 134), which allowed the Crusades to become recognised as the highest mode of expression of chivalric virtues, like courage and endurance (Keen 76). Therefore, on the one hand, one may assume that violence was accepted or even encouraged depending on who its target was; indeed, fighting against those who were non-Christian was deemed legitimate in the eyes of God. On the other hand, the inherently sinful life of a knight could be redeemed through acts of heroism, in penitential battles against heathens or pagans for if "piety is present in a knight's life at different intervals, (…) a good knight's life should always end with pious service to God" (Radulescu, "Christian" 83).

By the twelfth century, the institution of religious orders of knighthood and the Crusading ideal lent colour to the argument that knighthood was intended as the secular arm of the Church: "[i]t is the office of the knight to uphold and defend the Holy Catholic Faith," wrote Ramon Llull (44). Principles such as "the support [of] widows, orphans and the helpless" (Llull 50) and the persecution of evildoers or unruly knights were largely an outcome of the

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[26] The concept of chivalry will be addressed in the following subchapter.

hold of the Church's moral authority. Other ideals were subsequently added to the knights' code of conduct: violence should only be used in legitimate cases, which further contributed to a more restrained attitude towards fighting, especially against other Christians; harmless adversaries ought not to be killed; a knight should not give false testimony or ill-advice to a lady; if he can, a knight is obliged to help his peers (Bloch 376). Nevertheless, to a certain extent, knights appropriated religion and fashioned it to their own needs and longstanding values, they:

> did not simply and obediently bow before clerical authority and, bereft of any ideas of their own, absorb the lessons and patterns for their lives urged on them by their brothers, sisters, and cousins wearing tonsures and veils. They absorbed such ideas as were broadly compatible with the virtual worship of prowess and with the high sense of their own divinely approved status and mission; they (…) downplayed or simply ignored most strictures that were simply not compatible with their sense of honor and entitlement. (Kaeuper, "Societal Role" 105)

The changes in moral values and in attitude mark the watershed between the old warrior ideals and the arrival of chivalry, but it is plain the relationship between Christian teachings and knights' activities was not straightforward, since war, even a just one, still implied raiding and ravaging. Likewise, the worship of prowess, which was always linked to feats of battle, remained the essential chivalric trait, an issue Charny emphasizes throughout *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*. Consequently, the ideals of pious behaviour can be at times hard to make sense of in real-life terms and calling knighthood a Christian occupation remains rather problematic, especially because "chivalry does not always mean strict adherence to Christian morality" (Radulescu, "Christian" 83). These innate contradictions and paradoxes, though, proved to be fertile ground for medieval writers who tackled them in their narratives, delving into the inner conflicts that arose from ostensibly opposing values.

Despite the fact that, in medieval romance, fighting was compatible with the highest religious devotion and in many popular insular texts Christian and chivalric elements featured side by side, authors were increasingly aware of the inconsistencies of the chivalric code. As romance evolved into a set of texts with identifiable literary characteristics, set apart from the *chansons de geste* and the epic, its authors grew critical of the chivalric code it so often celebrated. Also, given that its development is somewhat related to the period of the Crusades, romance helped promote the archetype knight who had to discipline the body and his actions, only deploying violence in a controlled and directed manner (Rouse, "Crusaders" 177). In Arthurian tradition, Galahad became the most perfect example of the *miles Christi* and in

Malory's seminal work, *Le Morte Darthur*, he is both a fierce warrior and a devoted Christian; he is a descendant of the holiest of lineages, that of Christ, and follows the true knightly code, God's. Hence, it should come as no surprise that by the end of the medieval period he is the only one of Arthur's knights to obtain the Holy Grail, replacing Percival as the Grail-knight[27] *par excellence*. On the other hand, medieval insular romance, which was less fertile in Arthurian narratives, became a vehicle for the narration and glorification of crusading heroes, whether they were real or imaginary. Examples of this can be found in the ME *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton* and the insular versions of the Charlemagne Cycle, among others. *Guy of Warwick* along with the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, in particular, stand as evidence of the frenzied production of Crusade fantasies in post-Crusade medieval England. The knight Guy is presented as a model of chivalric behaviour, combining traits of the exceptional knighthood of earlier romance with the Christian discipline expected of a crusading knight. However, these narratives keenly express concerns with the practice of Western chivalry (in Guy's epiphany regarding the true motivations behind his chivalric deeds) as well as the legitimate use of violence (in episodes like the defence of Constantinople) and comment on the potentially malicious aims of the crusading activity. The themes explored in medieval England can be understood to have a separate nature, which nevertheless remains interested in dealing with the inner conflicts of the chivalric ideals. In order to grasp how these were represented, questioned and examined, we must understand what chivalry was, how it stood(stands) as a different concept from knighthood and how the introduction of a courtly code of conduct, especially courtly love, deeply altered the role of knights both on a social and on a literary level.

3.2. Courtesy and Chivalry

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a time of great ideological transformations so much so that the latter tends to be considered a period of renaissance in the Middle Ages. While attempts to control the warrior ethos became more pervasive, a new system of values and ideal behaviours called courtesy began to mature within the social sphere associated with the court. As a rich and privileged space, the court became the inherent *locus* wherein ideals, which included chivalry, benevolence and love, were nurtured and allowed to expand. It was in royal

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[27] Percival takes on the role of the Grail-knight in well-known Arthurian romances, such as *Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*, by Chrétien de Troyes (1190), *Parzival* (early thirteenth century) by Wolfram Von Eschenbach and the anonymous *Perlesvaus* (also known as *Li Hauz Livres du Graal*, early thirteenth century). In addition, Gawain also appears as a successful candidate in *Diu Crône* (*The Crown*, c. 1224), attributed to Heinrich von dem Türlin.

or noble courts that courtly love[28] emerged as a new code of behaviour that dictated how men and women should relate and love each other. Notwithstanding, it is interesting to note that, at least initially, courtesy was not associated with love. Instead, it was a term used to describe the relationship between two people, who could be of the same sex or not, and implied a top-down relationship, that is, one of the individuals was in a higher social position. Courtesy implied an unequal relationship where one party always had power, whether political, financial or military, over another. It is, therefore, thought-provoking to consider how a similar logic began to be applied to romantic relationships where women, in principle, held power over their male counterparts.

At the beginning of the twelfth century, at the royal court of Louis VII of France (r. 1137-1180) and his Queen consort, Eleanor of Aquitaine, a new model of relationship was developed. At its core was courtesy, which became intrinsically linked to the very notion of love. Regarded by modern scholars as "one of the great legacies of the Middle Ages" and "an elaborate social mythos of idealized heterosexual relationships" (Burlin 4), courtly love conferred upon the lady a superior status: she was the source of inspiration for the knight and her love ought to encourage him to grander feats of arms. In his chivalric manual, Charny argues that:

> one [a knight] should indeed honor, serve, and truly love these noble ladies and others whom I hold to be ladies who inspire men to great achievement, and it is thanks to such ladies that men become good knights and men-at-arms. (53)

Courtly love "involve[d] the idealization of the lady, often already married to someone other than her lover, and the consequent valorisation of either adultery or self-denial" (Fuchs 44). One of the greatest promoters of this novel code was Eleanor of Aquitaine, a well-known patron of the arts in the twelfth century, also believed to have been one of the most influential women of the period. At Poitiers, Eleanor, then married to Henry II of England,[29] used her wealth, prestige and influence to support artists, especially *troubadors* and writers on the art of courtly love and romance. *De Arte Honeste Amandi* (*The Art of Courtly Love*, c. 1185), by Andreas Capellanus, was written at the request of Marie de Champagne, Eleonor's eldest daughter, and became one of the most important and popular medieval works on the art of love.[30] According to Capellanus, love:

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[28] See footnote 8 in Chapter One for the origins of the term courtly love.
[29] Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine were married on 18 May 1152, about eight weeks after her marriage to Louis VII was annulled.
[30] For more information, see Parry 3-24.

is a certain inborn suffering derived from the site of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace. (28)[31]

Having divided his work into three books – "Introduction to the Treatise on Love," "How Love May Be Retained" and "The Rejection of Love" – the author describes love as an art with its own set of rules, which must be followed by true lovers, and argues that all ladies ought to have a lover, whether they are married or not for "[m]arriage is no real excuse for not loving" (184). Furthermore, Capellanus claims a lover should: be chaste, "Thou shall keep thyself chaste for the sake of her whom thou lovest" (81); maintain the love affair a secret, "Thou shall not have many who know of thy love affair" (81); and "be in all things polite and courteous" (82)[32] but also show restraint as well as loyalty, "No one can be bound by a double love" (184), devotion and obedience, "Love can deny nothing to love" (185). Courtly love was intended to be virtuous, surreptitious, forbidden, and extramarital, since love in marriage was for the most part deemed implausible,[33] which helps explain why courtly love sat uneasily with religious strictures against adultery. What is more, although it formulated erotic love in an amorous, idealised language, enfolded in mysticism and Christian suffering (Fuchs 44), by equating love with a sacred pursuit, courtly love was fundamentally sacrilegious in nature. Finally, while courtly love could serve to empower a warrior, as the thought of his loved one was believed to lend strength to the knight's arm, skill to his riding and accuracy to his aim, hence helping him become nobler through love, it might have the opposite effect, too. One of the greatest threats posed by love was the possibility that it could well divert a knight from the pursuit of arms, a theme Chrétien de Troyes explores in his first romance, *Érec et Énide*.

As one of the most important literary genres of the medieval period, romance played a key role in popularising the art of love.[34] Chrétien de Troyes, possibly one of the most

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[31] The Modern English version is by John Jay Parry in his 1960 translation.

[32] Curiously, Geoffroi de Charny makes a similar recommendation stating that "men should love secretly, protect, serve, and honor all those ladies and damsels who inspire knights, men-at-arms, and squires to undertake worthy deeds that bring them honor and increase their renown" (67).

[33] Throughout the Middle Ages marriage served mostly the financial and political interests of noble families and even though the Church attempted to instil the view that husband and wife ought to feel some affection (in Latin *dilectio* or *caritas*) for each other, it was not regarded an essential condition for a good matrimony (Opitz 374-75).

[34] Lyric poetry also greatly contributed to making love the central topic of literary discussion, since it is associated with a new erotic feeling that celebrated the cult of love, of spring, and of ladies. Composed and sung in Occitan, lyric poetry sought to "express the overwhelming force of adulatory passion, inspired by a beloved woman, which force it interpreted as the source of all excellence and endeavour in him whom it bound to her service" (Keen 30).

influential French writers of the twelfth century, developed a knight whose very name would stand as a synonym of courtesy and courtly love in Arthurian romance, Lancelot.[35] In *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charrette*,[36] the chivalric ideal promoted by courtly love is taken to an extreme, which is represented in the knight's service and obedience to the Queen. Guinevere's many punitive requests even lead Lancelot to play the coward at a tournament solely for her pleasure:

> The queen summoned a clever, pretty girl to her and whispered: 'Damsel, you must take a message, quickly and without wasting words. Hurry down from these stands and go at once to that knight bearing the red shield; tell him in secret that I bid him 'do his worst.'
> The girl swiftly and discreetly did as the queen asked. (…) The moment he heard her, Lancelot said that he would gladly do so, as one who wishes to please the queen. (276-77)

Chrétien's text exposes the conflicting nature of the rules of the art of love and the feudal bonds established between a knight and his lord. If, on the one hand, Lancelot owed his lord, Arthur, loyalty and truthfulness, among others, on the other, as Guinevere's lover, he was obliged to do as she commanded. Furthermore, Lancelot and Guinevere's erotic encounter underlines the idealised character of courtly love, slyly revealing that, ultimately, it was not that virtuous and/or platonic. According to Georges Duby:

> o amor cortês, ao contrário do que muitos crêem, não era inteiramente platónico. Era um jogo. Como em todos os jogos, o jogador estava animado pela esperança de ganhar. Neste caso, como na caça, ganhar era apanhar a presa. (332)

On the same subject, John Huizinga claims:

> Sucedeu pois que as noções do amor cortês nunca foram corrigidas pelo contacto com a vida real. Podiam desenvolver-se livremente na conversação aristocrática, podiam oferecer um divertimento literário ou um jogo encantador, mas nada mais. O ideal do amor, tal como ele era, não podia ter sobrevivido excepto numa moda intrinsecamente falsa. (*Declínio* 130)

Troubadours were indeed the first to redefine models, artistic patterns, and a new literary language that integrated courtesy and love themes.

[35] Although Gawain is still depicted by Chrétien de Troyes as an example of courtesy and good manners, a role he would maintain in the insular Arthurian tradition, Lancelot is already clearly identified as the epitome of chivalric values.

[36] Much like *De Arte Honeste Amandi*, *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charrette* was written at the request of Marie de Champagne.

Like any game, the scope of courtly love's influence was limited. As a result, even though it helped lift women's place in society, namely among the higher strata, by encouraging them to be prudent, brave, have greater control over their emotions, behave honourably and correct their flaws (Duby 346), courtly love did not help expand their authority. The social role played by women remained limited and their influence mostly reduced to the regulated field of courtly love. Romance reflects the constraints and paradoxes of courtly love as much as it helps convey it. In Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, several examples can be found of knights who rape damsels,[37] although in theory the Pentecostal Oath sworn at Arthur's court forbids it:

> the Kynge stablysshed all the knyghtes ad gaff them rychesse and londys – and changed them (…) allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes [socour], strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. (Malory 77)

Though the abuse of ladies and damsels is often enough depicted as the standard behaviour of rogue or black knights, it is not unusual to find cases of violence against women. In ME popular romance, which is known for being "overwhelmingly popular and non-courtly" (Pearsall 12), female characters are frequently set adrift at sea (like Emaré in the eponymous poem), exiled in the wild (such as the Empress in *Octavian*), forced into marriage (Josian in *Bevis of Hampton* and the hero's wicked mother) or even simply a target of their husband or male tutor's wrath (in *Athelston* the king's wife has a miscarriage after he kicks her). For that reason:

> If knights are the self-appointed protectors of women and if they often decide women's fate, only a select few are simultaneously powerful, honorable, and beloved. Violence between knights, jealousy between men over women, and verbal and physical abuse of women run as strong currents throughout romance. These destructive forces suggest that the physical superiority, sexual prowess, and moral perfection of the "ideal" romance knights were impossible to sustain in reality – and that women often bore the brunt of men's resentment. (Krueger, "Questions of Gender" 144)

Notwithstanding, courtly love did serve to limit the warrior ethos. The knight represented the fighting man and that was his purpose in the medieval Christian community. Aggression, though, is intrinsically anti-social and the violence that might have resulted from an attack of a group of knights on a castle or village and its population was something to be feared and avoided. Chivalry as well as the ethic promoted by courtly love and chivalric romance were,

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[37] Sir Torre, son of King Pellinor, for instance, is the result of his mother's rape by the king.

therefore, undeniably aimed at channelling such military power into socially useful roles, promoting harmony, social security, and consolidating order. As Geraldine Heng notes:

> The function of love (…) is the displacement of a purely masculine and primarily martial discourse with another of greater civilising value: a sophisticated, feminine-presided discourse of emotion and relation. (…) For the distilling of an actual civilisation in the wake of victory, however, martial energies, always potentially disruptive and dangerous in peace time, must be sublimated and re-assumed: and an ideology of war is therefore translated into an ideology of arms, or feats of prowess for love. ("Enchanted" 839)

This is especially relevant since, once the principle of primogeniture was instated, the marriage of the eldest son became the family's greatest concern for only he would inherit title(s), land(s) and wealth. The youngest sons could be sent to monasteries, where they would pursue a religious career, or to other courts, wherein they might be made knights but were left to make their own fortune. As a result, in the twelfth century, the knightly class was mostly composed of single men whose violent compulsions had to be kept in check. At the same time, it was important to ensure that the uncontrolled pursuit of highborn women, who lived in the same courts as knights, was limited. The literature of courts and the ideals it expressed therefore served to issue a code of behaviour that regulated and confined the potential damages caused by the irrepressible sexual audacity of the military aristocracy (Duby 343). Chivalry, which can be seen both as a code of violence in defence of honour and a code of restraint, would naturally become associated with the ideals of the art of love.

Nurtured in France, chivalry "was the value system and behavioural code of the secular aristocratic elite of the Middle Ages" (Saul viii). In addition, it "gained currency as the sustaining ethos of warrior groups" which meant that "somewhere around the mid twelfth century, shifting social and cultural forces – new military techniques, a new vocabulary of status, new literary themes – had given definition to a new kind of figure, called the knight, and to a new way of life" (Keen 42). Associated with the estate of knighthood, chivalry was more than a movement or an institution, it was an outlook on life or a lifestyle rather than solely an ethical code. The very concept of chivalry, though, can be hard to define accurately, as it meant different ideas, values and experiences to different people(s) in the Middle Ages, as it still does now. However, it is clear that as an aristocratic system of values, chivalry had a wide influence across medieval society and a substantial impact on its culture (Saul 4). It was central to the identity of the medieval elite and greatly contributed to the aura of heroism that enveloped knights. Moreover:

Once established in the course of the thirteenth century as a social identity, the knight became available – like the cowboy in our own day – for myth. As myth, he is a ubiquitous signifier of male autonomy and power, a focus for the fantasies of people who are not themselves members of the knightly class (…). The knight, like the cowboy, is instantly recognizable by his accoutrements: his sword and shield, his armor and his great horse. (Riddy 238-39)

So much so that in many medieval romances the expected main character, around whom the entire narrative gravitated, was the knight. In a sense, through this figure, authors found a means to explore contemporary issues concerning society, human relationships, religion, culture, national and individual identity, among others. In addition, because he brought together unexpected elements like courtesy, prowess, bravery, honour and nobility, but also strength, brutality, aggression and military authority, the knight could be transformed into an idealised figure, a hero, which is another reason why the evolution of knighthood into chivalry is remarkable.

CHAPTER FOUR

'HE STOOD ABOVE ALL': CHAMPIONS, HEROES AND KINGS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH ROMANCE

The story begins, as any good romance should, with the hero.

<div align="right">Keyes, "The Hero" 50</div>

Guerreiro, nobre ou cavaleiro, o herói medieval assume-se como personagem central de narrativas épicas ou romances e destaca-se pela coragem, temeridade e intrepidez, pela obediência a um código de valores que exalta um carácter justo e leal, bem como um comportamento altruísta na defesa de um senhor, comunidade ou território e na manutenção e demanda de paz e de justiça.

<div align="right">Varandas, "O Rosto do Herói Medieval: Beowulf e Gawain" 29</div>

4.1. War Leaders and Peace Bringers: Perceiving Heroism in Medieval English Romance

Typically a warrior, nobleman or knight, the hero of chivalric romances in the Middle Ages is often described as standing out for his courage, rashness, prowess and selfless behaviour as well as his obedience to a code of conduct, which elevates his just and faithful character (Varandas, "Rosto" 29). He – for the knightly hero is indubitably and inescapably a man – plays a key role in maintaining peace in the land since he "is a man whose attitudes and ideas are well defined and constant. Whatever the circumstance, he behaves in accordance with a set of values which is both clearly established at the onset and continually reiterated and defined through many trials and adventures" (Richmond 17). Yet, as already established, "[t]he knight is an elusive, chameleon-like figure" (Barber, *The Knight* 21). What is more, to be a member of the *bellatores* meant being a member of a paradoxical social estate: both necessary and dangerous; pious, but undeniably martial; courteous, but fiercely proud and vengeful – its presence simultaneously reassuring and threatening. Further, much as Neil Cartlidge points out, in a medieval context, heroism is complicit with values like chivalry, aristocracy, loyalty, masculinity and militarism ("Introduction" *Heroes* 1). Therefore, when thinking about the medieval hero, it is important to consider that there was a rather intricate 'dialogue' between actual knightly life, with its own warrior ethos as well as its inconsistencies, and the ideals which were interlaced with this *ordo* that would eventually become "a focus for the fantasies" (Riddy 238-39) of the medieval imagination. How were these contradictory ideas incorporated into the figure of the hero-knight of medieval romance? Did authors and/or readers/audience think about knights' incongruous behaviour? What makes a hero in medieval romance? These are some of the questions this chapter will seek to tackle, though always keeping in mind that they are hard to address, especially because for some of them there is a lack of direct sources to help provide an answer. Notwithstanding, what seems clear is that chivalric literature in particular held a privileged position in shaping the medieval hero by selectively absorbing heroic, religious and courtly influences from elite society and channelling them (Kaeuper, *Holy*

Warriors 94) to create an idealised figure: the hero-knight. It is precisely the combination of these two elements – actual knightly life and the ideals cast upon this restricted group of warriors – that have led to the establishment, imagining(s) and reimagining(s) of the hero-knight in romance throughout the late Middle Ages. In this sense, the shaping of heroism and the development of chivalric romance go hand-in-hand as the latter consistently, though not solely, outlined the nature of the first, serving to promote qualities – like prowess, loyalty, courage and largesse – that became intrinsically linked to the knightly order and, hence, to heroism.

Taking this into account, it should come as no surprise that the connection between heroism and literature lies dormant in the very usage of the term in common literary parlance: the hero is the protagonist of a narrative. While it is noteworthy to recall that a word which originally meant a semi-divine creature (Bloomfield 29) has come to be used to indicate the main character(s) of a literary work, it does not necessarily mean all protagonists must be heroic, especially in contemporary literature. However, restricting this analysis to the medieval period and to romance in particular, it is plain that the hero, "the principal character in an action," is the one that "arouses admiration or approval" (Bolgar 120), whose actions set him apart from other members of his community. A hero may be described as:

> essentially a man who desires to accomplish some good deed, a man who conceives of himself as having a specific role to play in this world. Whatever qualifying traits apply to a hero, he must reveal some degree of activity, some degree of conscious commitment, in his attempt to accomplish his aspiration. (Staines 607)

Recalling Northrop Frye's theory in *Anatomy of Criticism*, the heroes of romance are human but have characteristics that distinguish and elevate them from others and their environment (33), which means that although inescapably influenced by the semi-divine heroes of Classical Antiquity, they belong to a different breed.[1] Moreover, the medieval hero embodies the values of his people, so his feats become worthy of being sung or recited (Varandas,

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[1] The heroic figures presented in oral and literary tradition throughout the Middle Ages were, without a doubt, influenced by previous conceptions of what it meant to be a hero. There are two key cultural influences that should be kept in mind when considering the medieval hero. The first is the weight played by the heroes of Classical Antiquity whose semi-divine genealogy seems to serve to identify them as heroes, setting them apart from ordinary human beings; these are heroes like Heracles/Hercules, Achilles or Odysseus/Ulysses, warriors who excel on the battlefield and whose glory endures on in narratives, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which remain at the core of the European literary tradition. The second lies in the significance of pre-Christian heroes who, despite featuring in Christian sources, stem from different cultural backgrounds including the Celtic, the Germanic and the Nordic traditions. Heroes, like Cú Chulainn, Sigurd/Siegfried, Ragnar Lodbrok and Beowulf, who were warriors that sought fame and glory but also protected their lands and peoples while always aware of their own mortality.

"Rosto" 33). This is a fundamental point when trying to understand heroism: the hero's action(s) not only represent the moral principles and ideals of the community he belongs to but must also be sufficiently *extra*-ordinary so that they are worthy of being recorded for posterity. Furthermore, and according to R. R. Bolgar, "[h]eroes have their importance for the history of culture because they serve to show us what traits and types of behavior have enjoyed public favor. Enshrined in the popular fictions, the popularized biographies of an age, they provide a useful index of its values" (120). So, fictional heroes, here in the sense of characters, can help us perceive what behaviour was deemed suitable for knights, what principles were most prized and ultimately what it meant to be heroic. Of course this is also because romance, or literature in general, actively participate in the making of culture creating meaning both consciously and unconsciously by providing the means to understand what was valued by those who wrote, commissioned, read and listened to these productions (Ashe, *Fiction* 2).

However, since literary texts, and the heroes that feature in them, modify and adapt to the spirit of the age, the term hero cannot be strictly defined. The actions that were viewed as heroic and, most crucially, *who* was believed to be a hero changed throughout the ten centuries that make up what is now called the Middle Ages and we can safely assume these concepts varied depending on geographical location as well. This is to say that what might have been deemed heroic by some was most likely not so by others or, in other words, our heroes may not be the heroes of others.[2] At first, this might seem to contradict Joseph Campbell's theory in his renowned work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) wherein the author upholds that heroic narratives, especially the mythical ones, convey the same story repeatedly throughout time. Campbell suggests the hero is in fact the same, a sort of timeless figure who merely takes on different names and faces, though his conception and function remain unchanged.[3] Yet, what we would like to propose here is that we must consider diachronic and geographic factors along with cultural, historical and political backgrounds and, by doing so, we can, like Campbell ultimately proposes, outline some key features. The hero of romance is a knight (or will eventually become one), is of noble, royal or even holy blood, is a skillful fighter (often

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[2] See for example medieval romances depicting the Crusades wherein Christian knights are described as virtuous and honourable, the heroes of the narratives, fighting against hordes of infidels in the name of Christ while Muslims are time and again depicted as foul, dark-skinned men, some of nearly gigantic structure (like Ascopart in *Bevis of Hampton*) and often cannibals. It seems plain that while for a medieval Christian audience the Christian knights were the heroes, it is doubtful the same applied to a Muslim public.

[3] Campbell was not the first scholar to provide an analysis of the structure of heroic narratives. The first academic piece dedicated to this subject matter was Otto Rank's *The Myth and Birth of the Hero* (1909) in which the author resorts to Sigmund Freud's Theory of Dreams to compare myths to dreams. In addition, there is also Vladimir Propp who, in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), attempts to prove the heroes of Russian folktales follow an identical path from birth to death.

both on foot and on horseback) and embodies all, or nearly all, the desired traits of the culture within which he is conceived. The latter point is particularly relevant for, as a result, the medieval hero-knight is, and indeed had to be, a Christian. Though, as already commented on, the "ideals of every culture were shaped by the social conditions of the time and therefore different attributes became valued" (Lowrey 1), in medieval Europe, Christian religion became the most significant founding principle that served both as a lens through which to see and understand the world and an 'adhesive paste' that held everything together:

> (…) se a base a partir da qual se originaram os imaginários medievais, e a forma das sucessivas elaborações, variaram com o tempo e com o espaço, tiveram uma pasta agregadora que as moldou: o Cristianismo. E se digo «pasta» e não «cimento» é porque, apesar da sua textura uniforme, o Cristianismo (e depois o Catolicismo, no Ocidente) nunca espartilhou ou tornou monolítica a abordagem das gentes no mundo do Imaginário. (Barbosa 343)

Consequently, and given the hold the Christian Church had over nearly all aspects of medieval society, it became inconceivable for the hero of knightly romance to be anything other than a devoted Christian or, if not, he would soon to become one.[4] Such conceptualisation is unmistakably connected to the authority the clergy had been able to secure over the chivalric order, which is both reflected on and magnified by medieval romance. In fact, one may claim that the ultimate true hero of the medieval period is Christ who is "fully human and therefore subject to the Devil's temptations and the death of the body, yet fully God, therefore able to resist the Devil and rise from the dead" (Keyes 52). For Christian theologians like Saint Augustine, it was through His act of martyrdom that Christ saved Humanity, and, accordingly, that is what makes Him – as well as other martyrs who died for the faith – heroic. Indeed, if in the OE poem "Dream of the Rood" Christ is already a warrior-like figure, from the thirteenth century onwards he starts being envisioned as a knight, that is, the warrior's new incarnation. In later texts, such as William Langland's *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (c.1360-1380) or the anonymous *SGGK*, for instance, Christ's knightly identity is already an established motif. Yet, Christ embodies an impossible model for knights to follow, on the one hand, because of His divine origin, and, on the other, because His behaviour implies an unresisting suffering along with the act of passively and voluntarily going to one's death. This emulation of Christ is a

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[4] See, for instance, *Sir Gowther* found in two late-fifteenth-century English manuscripts (British Library Royal MS 17.B.43; National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1.), which was possibly inspired by a late-twelfth-century French poem entitled *Robert le Diable*.

difficult ideal for secular society in general to uphold, but particularly for the warrior aristocracy.

In the face of this exemplary but unattainable model, chivalric literature attempted to build a framework that would value knightly conduct and help fit it within Christian heroism. According to Richard W. Kaeuper, there are three broad concepts through which this was done:

> (1) A first emphasis falls on the sheer corporal suffering knights undergo in the exercise of arms throughout a lifetime in their tough profession. (2) A second clearly establishes the spiritually meritorious nature of that labor and suffering. Hard knightly labor is the licit work of their *ordo*, blessed by God who endows knightly prowess. As closely as earthly labor can, these tough and virtuous labors actually parallel the meritorious suffering and heroic labor of Christ. (3) Finally, this hard work and religious merit sanctifies all virtuous warriors, not solely crusaders. (*Holy Warriors* 95)

From this perspective, even doing battle against another (most likely imprudent) Christian knight brings merit upon those involved since in principle it still implies suffering and labour. In the wake of this line of reasoning, the acts that might damn a knight to a life of sin – and hence an afterlife in Hell – are the very same ones that may save his soul. Licit fighting, which included other forms of military enterprises besides crusading, was the means through which the aristocratic warrior might imitate Christ, given that hardships could lead a knight to obtain spiritual renewal. However, we must keep in mind that there is at least one important character in medieval romance that can be clearly identified as having been shaped to emulate Christ more closely; that is, of course, Sir Galahad.

As touched upon in the last section, Galahad is the perfect example of the *miles Christi*. The son of Sir Lancelot and Elaine of Corbenic, daughter of King Pelles, Galahad is the holy knight *par excellence*, representing the absolute "symbiosis of the warrior hero with the saint, but a subordination of the former to the latter" (Bolgar 124-25). In the Vulgate *Quest del Saint Graal*, Galahad is identified as a descendant of both Joseph of Arimathea and of the biblical David, who is an ancestor of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. In Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, he is called "the beste knyght of the worlde" (498) for only he can sit on the Siege Perilous where letters magically appear claiming, "Thys is the syege of Sir Galahad, the hawte prynce" (500). In addition, in Malory's text, though Galahad belongs to a triad of extraordinary heroes,[5] only he is given the honour of ascending to Heaven along with the Holy Vessel and a multitude of angels:

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[5] The other two are Percival and Bors (or Bohort).

suddeynly departed hyssoule to Jesu Cryste, and a grete multitude of angels bare hit [Galahad] up to hevynevyn in the sight of hys two felowis. Also thes two [felawes] saw com fromehevyn an hande, but they synat the body; and so hit cam ryght to the vessell and toke hit, and the speare, and so bare hit up into hevyn – and sythen was there never man so hardy to sey that he hade seyn the Sankgreal. (586)

Despite being portrayed as a skilled fighter, unlike other knights, Galahad does not become involved in senseless battles, fighting no more than the absolutely necessary and always in the name of God. He also remains a virgin, rejecting the earthly pleasures his father finds impossible to resist, and does not become involved in courtly affairs. He is, therefore, a new kind of hero: saintly and knightly, all at once. In the end, though, this means that much like his alleged ancestor, Jesus Christ, Galahad's example is a difficult one to follow.[6] Concerning the impossibility of abiding by the code of conduct set by the hero-knights of romance, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims that:

> The chivalric hero represents a kind of hypermasculinity, an exaggerated and idealized version of maleness that is promulgated with a social intention: ordinary men of the middle and upper classes are to measure themselves against the impossible standard that the hero embodies and from this conditioned inadequacy strive to fight harder and control themselves better. (83)

It is undeniable that Galahad embodies "an exaggerated and idealized version" of martial prowess and Christian devotion, thereby fitting nicely into Cohen's hyper-masculine model. Granting that Galahad stands as a truly exceptional hero-knight, or perhaps the term Grail-hero would be more appropriate here, his father seems to fit well into Cohen's hypothesis too. Sharing some of his son's finest traits, Lancelot is described by Chrétien de Troyes in *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charrette* as the bravest, most perfect knight. Even though his lustful relationship with Queen Guinevere stops him from reaching Galahad's physical and spiritual perfection, amongst Arthur's knights Lancelot still embodies the characteristics identified by Cohen. It is Lancelot who sets "the impossible standard" against which all others are measured, especially in the Continental tradition.[7] Naturally, when thinking about insular romance all eyes turn to Arthur's nephew, Gawain, the greatest of the knights of the Round Table and possibly the character that stands closer to the core of the English Arthurian romance. In the words of Thomas Hahn:

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[6] A study that includes a section on Galahad's role in the quest for the Holy Grail, from which these paragraphs were drawn, has already been published; see Martins 15-28.

[7] For a comprehensive study on the character's development in medieval continental Europe in particular, see Chora 39-122.

> All the glamour, mystery, and moral authority that chivalry might command were invested for late medieval audiences in the charismatic figure of Sir Gawain. Perhaps the most delightful and memorable testimonial to his celebrity is offered by Lady Bertilak the first morning she visits the knight in his bedroom, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. He alone, she says, possesses "The prys and the prowes that plesez al other". ("General Introduction" 1)

As a result, it is safe to say that the hero-knights of Arthurian romance, whether continental or insular, represent idealised versions of the members of the warrior aristocracy whose traits distinguished and elevated them from others and their environment. As Cohen argues, their behaviour served for "ordinary men of the middle and upper classes (…) to measure themselves against" and thus "strive to fight harder and control themselves better" (83). Therefore, while serving as a model for audiences who enjoyed their stories, these heroes set an "impossible standard," which we would like to suggest was perhaps the ultimate goal. In fact, the point of the heroes of medieval romance does not seem to be to establish a straightforward, uncomplicated and easy model to follow but an unparalleled one. Abiding by Frye's hypothesis, the protagonists of romance are human, that is, they are one of us, yet they cannot be average men. These heroes (here in the broader sense, men or women) are among us precisely to show that it is possible to rise above, or indeed that we should aim for greatness. They serve to provide a remarkable model which – precisely *because* it is exceptional – is often unattainable, an idea implied by Cohen too. For this reason, the hero of romance is a character that:

> presents the reader with a series of paradoxes. He is endowed with special abilities that allow him to transcend his world to some degree. Yet, at the same time, he is a man like any other man. His 'gifts' may set him apart from birth and put him on the hero's path (…), or they may remain latent in his character until some need calls them forth. He is a unique individual, and he is Everyman. (Keyes 62)

So, the hero of romance is incomparable but also displays flaws, makes decisions likely to be made by ordinary men and faces both mundane and extraordinary setbacks. Taking these issues into account and thinking about ME romance in particular, it is clear that examples of heroes who are outstanding but also "Everyman" can be found in separate traditions: the Arthurian, in *SGGK*'s protagonist, Gawain, as well as in Malory's Lancelot for instance, and the popular, such as Havelok in the eponymous romance, *Havelok the Dane*.

From the very beginning of *SGGK*, Gawain is acknowledged as one of Arthur's finest, he is the King's (and Morgan le Fay's, we might add) nephew and, given that he alone accepts

the Green Knight's challenge, he is the one who sets the standard to be followed by all others. Consequently, it is also through him that "all that he stands for [is] to be assayed" (Tolkien, "*Sir Gawain*" 78). Gawain is "subject to constant measurement against the standard of – and his own reputation for – courteous and chivalric behaviour" (Crane, "Knights in Disguise" 72). However, Gawain's journey[8] in this particular romance has been repeatedly stressed as one in which the knight's excessive concern about obeying courtly rules ends up putting him in a delicate situation. On the one hand, because hospitality rules lead Gawain to accept Sir Bertilak's game, he must remain truthful to his male host and give him all he obtained throughout the three days of his stay at Hautdesert. On the other hand, Gawain is also obliged to follow the social and courtly rules that entail he must not overtly refuse the Lady of Hautdesert's advances. When Gawain fails to give Bertilak the green belt, which is meant to protect him from any threat to his life, his concerns are those of "Everyman", that is, he does not want to literally lose his head at the hands of the Green Knight. While the author's goal may be to lay bare the inherent contradictions of the ideals set out by the Arthurian court, with authors like Charles Moorman claiming that *SGGK*'s great moral theme is the failure of chivalric morality (61), the text also stresses Gawain's ultimate human nature. If Gawain had been true to the Arthurian courtly values, he would have given the green belt to Bertilak, but that would (seemingly) involve certain death. By choosing to keep the belt, Gawain betrayed the exchange game he had agreed with, he broke his word and, as a result, brought shame upon his name and his lord's, King Arthur. Nonetheless, for all he knew, keeping it implied keeping his head. In the face of such threat, Gawain chooses self-preservation over the chivalric values he is meant to live by. Plainly the Gawain-Poet's goal is to question the latter but at the same time he is inevitably implying the hero is also a man like any other. J.R.R. Tolkien also highlights Gawain is a hero at a human scale:

> 'Perfection' Gawain may have been given as a standard to strive for (for with no less ideal could he achieve a near-perfection), but he himself is not presented as a mathematical allegory, but as a man, an individual human being. His very 'courtesy' proceeds not solely from the ideals, or the fashions, of his imagined time, but from his own character. ("*Sir Gawain*" 79)

Subliminally, it is implied that, when faced with certain death, chivalry and courtesy offer no true solace, meaning knights faced circumstances that made the code of honour they theoretical

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[8] By journey we mean not only the physical movement from one place – Camelot – to another – Hautdesert – and back again, but most importantly the hero's mental and emotional journey, which will lead to his personal growth. For a reading of Gawain's journey, see Varandas, "Mobilidade" 231-41.

had to follow unsuitable. In this sense, the Gawain-Poet inherits the Arthurian literary tradition which, though undeveloped, even in its early stages, like in Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, contained the seeds of the courtly dilemma. Therefore, we can argue that, in *SSGK*, Gawain embodies characteristics expected from a chivalric hero, but also shares concerns common to "any other man". A similar idea seems to be presented in Malory's Lancelot, a character through which the fifteenth-century author reflects upon the nature of chivalry.[9]

Adopting the French prose *Lancelot* (c. first half of the thirteenth century)[10] as a primary source to write his "A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake" (Shepherd 702), one of the many tales included in *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory begins by describing Lancelot as the best knight, "for in all turnementes, justys, and dedys of armys, both for lyff and deth, he passed all other knyghthes – and at no tyme was he ovircom but yf hit were by treson other inchauntement" (151). However, when we reach "The Tale of Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere," Lancelot's great love for Guinevere prevents him from achieving physical and spiritual perfection, effectively barring him from attaining the Holy Grail:

> (…) Sir Launcelot began to resorte unto Quene Gwenivere agayne, and forgate the promyse and the perfection that he made in the Queste; for, as the booke seyth, had nat Sir Launcelot bene in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the Quene as he semynge outwarde to God, there had no knyght passed hym in the Queste of the Sankgreall. But ever his thoughtis prevyly were on the Quene, and so they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde, and had many such prevy draughtis togydir that many in the courte spake of hit (…). (588)

Again, we are faced with an author who understood that the idealised rules set out by courtly love were likely to contradict the models established by the chivalric code. Malory admits Lancelot and Guinevere's love is not platonic and not only acknowledges that many in Camelot's court know about their sexual encounters, but also that Lancelot cannot be faithful to Arthur and simultaneously be Guinevere's paramour. In other words, Lancelot cannot sincerely claim to be honest and trustworthy to his lord while sleeping with his wife, an idea which is echoed by Huizinga when he states that courtly love survives *because* it is an intrinsically fabricated trend (*Declínio* 130). By the end of the narrative, Lancelot must – or is in fact forced to – make a decision, which sets into motion a series of events that will lead to

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[9] This is not to say Gawain and Lancelot are the same, they are not, as Lancelot is clearly presented as a model courtly lover while, in *SGGK*, Gawain is not.

[10] Malory also seems to have used the French *Perlesvaus* as a source for the "Chapel Perilous" episode (Shepherd 702).

the great downfall of Arthur's kingdom which, in Malory, culminates with the King's passing to Avalon.[11] As Lancelot is one of the knights Malory most clearly makes use of to measure others, his failure to renounce worldly passions correlates with the breakdown of the Round Table, which represents the values promoted by chivalry. Because both – the Round Table and the chivalric ideal – are anchored on paradoxical principles, on vows that cannot actually be upheld, they are doomed to fail.

On the other hand, *Havelok the Dane*, an anonymous romance like *SGGK*, embarks on a very different journey, following the protagonist's growth from childhood to manhood and giving the audience some insight into the hero's physical and mental maturity process. This is an important detail, as according to Joseph Campbell in his influential work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

> the child of destiny [the hero] has to face a long period of obscurity. This is a time of extreme danger, impediment, or disgrace. And this is the zone of unsuspected presences, benign as well as malignant: an angel appears, a helpful animal, a fisherman, a hunter, crone, or peasant. (326)

Childhood is a key period in the development of the hero and especially so in *Havelok the Dane* because "[w]ith its attention on Havelok as a vulnerable child, the poem postulates the hero's subjectedness, elaborating the concept of childhood as a plight that lies dangerously outside one's proper identity" (Couch, "Vulnerable Hero" 335). Childhood can, thus, be understood as a threatening, susceptible period for the hero of romance who is after all also "Everyman," or 'Everychild'. In this sense, *Havelok the Dane* is a particularly interesting text for the author seems to go to pains to describe the hero's 'vulnerable childhood', to use Julie Nelson Couch's terminology in "The Vulnerable Hero: *Havelok* and the Revision of Romance." Having been left an orphan by the premature death of his father, King Birkabeyn, Havelok's early years are described in starkly cruel terms as, along with his sisters Swanborow and Helfled, he is kept prisoner by Godard. On the hero's living conditions since the tender age of three, the narrator states:

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[11] Of course, Lancelot and Guinevere's responsibility in the downfall of Camelot is merely one aspect that serves to justify the fall of Camelot and indeed we believe it is not the main reason behind the great final battle between Lancelot and Arthur's armies. Instead, the King's hand seems to be somewhat forced by the hatred Gawain feels towards Lancelot who, when trying to rescue Guinevere from her imprisonment, accidentally kills Gareth and Gaheris, Gawain's brothers. As Gawain and Mordred refuse to forgive Lancelot's acts, Arthur is led to fight against the one who is described as his greatest knight, apart from Galahad, of course. The conflict prompts the split of the Round Table, Gawain's death and Arthur and Mordred's final battle, which ends with father and son fatally wounding each other.

Hwan Birkabeyn was leyd in grave,
The erl dede sone take the knave,
Havelok, that was the eir,
Swanborow, his sister, Helfled, the tother,
And in the castel dede he hem do,
Ther non ne micte hem comen to
Of here kyn, ther thei sperd were.
Ther he greten ofte sore
Bothe for hunger and for kold,
Or he weren thre winter hold.
Feblelike he gaf hem clothes;
He ne yaf a note of hise othes –
He hem clothede rith ne fedde,
Ne hem ne dede richelike bebedde. (lines 408-21)

Once Godard gains wardship of King Birkabeyn's underage children and, ergo, his kingdom, they have to endure extremely harsh circumstances. Although the study of childhood in the Middle Ages has frequently been either dismissed or highly partial to Philippe Ariès' study *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, in which the author (in)famously claimed that:

> In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society. (128)

Such views have been widely contested by medieval scholars (Shahar; Hanawalt; Oliveira; Kline), with Daniel Kline taking a step further and advocating that, in the late Middle Ages, childhood and youth were actually divided into seven-year segments: *infantia* (birth to the age of 7); *pueritia* (7-14); and *adolescentia* (14-older) (22). Whether we agree with the so-called Ariès Theory or not, in medieval romance the hero's upbriging is a crucial period of his journey, an idea stressed by Campbell[12] and often explored by the authors of ME popular romance. In *Havelok the Dane*, the vulnerability in which the royal siblings are placed after the death of the father is poignant, as their young bodies become a site of neglect. They are starved, abused, disregarded and unloved. Their dependent and fragile nature is also highlighted: because they are so young, they are unable to defend themselves from the threat represented by the wicked

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[12] See "Childhood of the Human Hero" in Campbell 295-308.

Godard, who is described as "a felony" (line 444); "Judas" (line 482); and "fule fend" (line 506), among others. In addition, through the description of Havelok's sisters' murder, the narrator further underscores the extent of his cruelty:

> And Godard seyde, "Wat is yw?
> Hwi grete ye and goulen now?"
> "For us hungreth swithe sore" -
> Seyden he, "we wolden more:
> We ne have to hete, ne we ne have
> Her inne neyther knith ne knave
> That yeveth us drinke ne no mete,
> Halvendel that we moun ete -
> Wo is us that we weren born!
> Weilawei! nis it no korn
> That men micte maken of bred?
> Us hungreth - we aren ney ded!"
> Godard herde here wa,
> Ther-offe yaf he nouth a stra,
> But tok the maydnes bothe samen,
> Al so it were up on hiis gamen,
> Al so he wolde with hem leyke
> That weren for hunger grene and bleike.
> Of bothen he karf on two here throtes,
> And sithen hem al to grotes. (lines 453-72)

The sisters, and presumably Havelok, are white or pale and green due to the lack of adequate care, poor hygiene, inappropriate clothing and proper nourishment. In a scene of great violence, Godard cuts both sisters' throats while Havelok watches in horror. At this point, the hero has neither the physical strength to fight Godard nor the ability to summon his people to defend him and is unable to prevent their murder. Godard's actions are depraved, we might even say monstrous, since he shows a complete disregard for the children's lives: they become a plaything to him, something to amuse himself with, "Al so it were up on hiis gamen" (line 468). The use of the term *gamen* here is noteworthy since, according to the MED, it may mean "joy, happiness; pleasure, delight" (Def. 1a) or "[g]ame animals, birds, or fish; also, game killed or caught, the kill, the catch" (Def. 6a), among others. Given that this scene happens immediately after Havelok asks for food, it seems that, in a twisted turn of events, Godard offers the girls' bodies as nourishment. As a matter of fact, he does not simply kill them but proceeds to cut them into pieces. This description not only underscores his evil nature but also

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his authority as Godard "attains power by withholding from the children['s] necessities for survival, thus maintaining total control over their bodies" (Lim 36).[13]

Child-Havelok witnesses the cruelty brought upon his sisters and knows he is next, "For at hise herte he saw a knif" (line 479). Yet, rather surprisingly, the young heir is spared by Godard, which may possibly reflect the importance given to a male child in the Middle Ages. In "Medievalists and the Study of Childhood," Barbara Hanawalt states that social class, economic prosperity as well as sex made a considerable difference in children's survival and the ones with the best chances were legitimate male infants (451), like Havelok. The reasons why Goddard decides to spare Havelok are vague, as the first appears to have a moment of fleeting compassion, a "miracle fair and god" (line 500) takes place, claims the narrator. According to Daniel Murtaugh, Godard's reaction is "[p]artly, (…) a response to something irresistibly good (and (…) royal) about the boy that comes out in his speech and that disarms Godard's pure evil. [And p]artly, it is an aversion to the idea of shedding the royal blood" (480). Nevertheless, this does not prevent him from ordering the fisherman Grim, his "thral" (line 527), to drown the child at sea. Though subjected to further violence at the hands of Grim and his wife, who quickly mend their ways and become his foster parents, Havelok is able to save himself because of the "exceptional gifts" (Campbell 37) that set him apart from others. Havelok's body bares the marks of his unique nature, from his mouth shines a flame when he sleeps and he has a "a kynmerk" (line 605), that protect him from Grim's initial murderous intents.

Furthermore, Havelok's childhood is a central part of the romance, despite only corresponding to the first 600-700 lines out of a total of 3001, because "vulnerable childhood is presented as the essential shape of Havelok's heroic subjectivity, possessing aesthetic value and existential power" (Couch, "Vulnerable Hero" 346). The protagonist's (mis)adventures at an early age effectively shape his character as an adult hero; he can relate to his fellow subjects, whether they are noble or peasant due to the harsh experiences he presumably shares with "Everym[e]n". What is more:

> English popular romance writers (…) manipulate their received genre in order to raise serious issues about male identity formation by depicting failures in the system including betrayal of one's lord or mistress. The dangers of treachery and usurpation carry over to romances that provide *exampla* of good and bad kingship – the highest male authority. (Charbonneau & Cromwell 108)

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[13] The body of the hero is a particularly relevant site in *Havelok the Dane* and will, for that reason, be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

ME popular romance pays special attention to issues of legitimacy, an idea conveyed by the vital importance marriage and lineage have in this set of texts, which reflect the social concerns of that period. As a result, those who betray the rightful order, in this case the lawful monarch(s), are depicted as usurpers and tyrants, whose own illegitimate rule is doomed to fail. Besides the obvious goal of aiming to confirm authority, the theme of good and bad kingship mentioned by Charbonneau and Cromwell is central to our understanding of the hero of ME popular romance. In fact, it should be further noted that *Havelok the Dane* provides the reader with a very different hero from Gawain, Lancelot or any other of the remaining hero-knights of Arthurian romance given that Havelok is a hero-king.

As already argued, the worlds of ME popular romances distinguish themselves from the ones imagined in the thriving continental Arthurian romance tradition. In fact, within the scope of this study, what readers and audiences from at least the late twelfth century onwards find are two concurrent but distinct (chivalric) romance traditions. On the one hand, there is the continental, which includes the Arthurian romance and is characterised by a free fictionality and extensive development of courtly psychology; on the other, there is the insular, which features a historical and geographical specificity, mostly drawing its material from the (pseudo-)history of pre-Conquest England (Ashe, "Hero" 135). In the latter set of texts, the main male characters are generally monarchs or their sons who, wrongly exiled, must win back their land(s) and their social position, and in doing so regain their rightful place in society. Born great, these men (and sometimes women)[14] are actively engaged in warfare, fighting to (re)establish justice, and thereby providing a very different model for medieval readers. Unlike the romances pertaining to the Matter of Britain that over time depict King Arthur as a passive ruler, whose battles are fought and won by his Knights of the Round Table, in texts like *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, *Octavian*, among others, we find not the lone knight figure seeking glory, but instead the war leaders. According to Susan Crane:

> The English hero is an adopted ancestor whose exploits and nobility establish and enhance the status of the insular aristocracy. His story typically traces the loss and recovery of his inherited lands and titles, not through historically mimetic fines, inheritance duties, and petitions to the king, but through a glorious exile, a righteous and sometimes bloody return (…). (*Insular Romance* 23)

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[14] Although the typical hero-king of ME popular romance is, as the term indicates, male, there are texts in which female characters are given greater agency, even being allowed to have a place in the battlefield, like Isumbras' wife in *Sir Isumbras*, for example. Amy N. Vines argues that "medieval romances are a central and under-explored site of evidence about representations of women's cultural and social authority – if not always historically enacted, then certainly culturally central (…)" adding that, as a narrative space, romance is a "site of female agency" where women can enact "a range of influential possibilities" (2).

Rulers in their own right, their strength allows them to gather the people under one banner, ensure peace, prosperity, safety, social and economic stability as well as rightful government. For these reasons, and in keeping with Thomas Carlyle, kingship can be seen as a form of heroism and the king himself the most important of great men and "the highest male authority" (Charbonneau & Cromwell 108); he is:

> practically the summary for us of *all* the various figures of Heroism; Priest, Teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual dignity we can fancy to reside in a man, embodies itself here, to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to *do*. He is called *Rex*, Regulator, *Roi*: our own name is still better; King, *Konning*, which means *Can-ning, Able-man*. (Carlyle 165)

As "Can-ning" – or 'can-do' – men, the hero-kings of insular popular romance are often dynamic characters who serve exterior goals: to secure the kingdom, re-establish order and bring justice. Arthurian knights may also do battle in the pursuit of a selfless purpose, but fame, reputation and love are at the core of their adventures. Even for Gawain in *SGGK* what is at stake is Arthur's honour and the endurance of the values embodied by the court he presides over, not the survival of Camelot or its people. In *Havelok the Dane*, on the other hand, more pressing matters are at issue: the lawful government of not only one but two kingdoms, England and Denmark. Because their aims largely differ, the codes the heroes of ME popular romance actively pursue and aspire to can be quite distinct from those of courtly Arthurian romance; on the contrary:

> like Bevis and Guy[, they] may know the conventions of chivalric deportment but share with their English compatriots an ideal of personal fulfilment and social service. The struggles in which they are caught up spring not from the internal contradictions of courtly codes but the oppressive forces of a wicked world. (Barron 85)

We might then conclude that the king of ME popular romance steams from a different tradition, one that comes from pre-Conquest England and which attempts to be quasi-historical. In fact, this may be why geographical location is often mentioned, that is, there is a conscious attempt to locate the hero in pseudo-historical time and space, so "the world in which he moves is as 'real' as he is, a place of historical and geographical specificity, a country populated (albeit dimly) by a people who must be governed" (Ashe, "The Hero" 144). To provide but a few,

quick examples:[15] *Havelok the Dane* is for the most part set in Grimsby and Lincoln; *King Horn*'s Westernesse has been identified with the Wirral peninsula, near the city of Liverpool; the narrative of *Bevis of Hampton* is clearly associated with Hampton, modern-day Southampton, as well as other locations, like the city of Damascus; in addition, though featuring a main male character of humble beginnings, the romances of *Guy of Warwick* – wherein Guy is the son of a provincial steward – have clear regional associations and have been analysed by contemporary researchers as texts that are involved in the project of English identity formation and proto-nationalism (Wiggins and Field xix).[16] This appears to be a trait shared by insular romances, whether ME or Anglo-Norman, since both present a world:

> in which heroes blended into local history and in which the heroes' lives were structured around ancestry and a sense of place. It is partly the emphasis on the hero's lands which gives the romance literature its powerful sense of locality. All the romances show a strong affinity with a particular corner of England, be it Southampton or Warwick, Shropshire or East Anglia. (Saul 49)

An intentional strategy seems to be in place, as the authors' goal is for their narratives to be read as historically accurate. In *Fiction and History*, Laura Ashe argues that, from 1066 to the twelfth century, England went through dramatic changes, witnessing "sweeping developments in literary culture" and the reinvention of 'fiction and history' (1), which in turn would be crucial to the "production of historical illusion" (2). As a result, the unidentified Arthurian Forest, the unknown, supernatural kingdom or court and the overall once-upon-a-time fairy tale atmosphere that serve to place the hero of Arthurian romances in an obscure past and place become largely avoided by ME popular romance authors. The latter sought to anchor their narratives in recognisable terms by using: a specific geography, such as locating the king's capital at Winchester (*Havelok the Dane*); Anglo-Saxon names such as Athelwold (*Havelok the Dane*) or Æthlestan (*Athleston*), which help set the narrative in time; particular motifs like the peace of the roads as well as "rhetorical strategies of appropriating language and motifs of chronicle in an attempt to provide the romances with a veneer of historical authenticity" (Rouse, "Peace" 123).[17] Their intention is clear even in much less localised romances like *King*

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[15] It should not be inferred that a precise geographical location can be found in all ME popular romances since given the sheer number of texts that can be encompassed under this heading such assumption is out of the question.
[16] The fact that, in a clear attempt to promote themselves as the descendants of Guy of Warwick, in the late fourteenth century the Beauchamp earls added Guy's Tower to Warwick Castle proves the connection between this hero and the land as well as the people who inhabit it was successfully established. See Mason 25-40.
[17] See also Robert Rouse's *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, especially pages 54-60.

Horn, which "is not just an entertaining story of love and adventure, but (…) the biography of a famous ancestor, a vivid portrayal of the past" (Mehl 51).

What is more, the hero of this insular set of texts fights against historically real enemies, Saracens, pagan invaders, tyrants, and so on, and is far less problematic than the Arthurian one. There are seldom any doubts about his origin or lineage and his birth (as well as that of his children) is firmly set within wedlock. His behaviour is for the most part irreproachable[18] and as bringer of peace and justice:

> The king of English romance (…) is God's instrument of rule on earth: in other words, he is the representative of God the father, rather than an emulator of God the son. Instead of being Christlike in his death, this hero-king is Godlike in his life. Peace and justice, those gifts of God, are now delivered by the powerful English king. (Ashe, "The Hero" 145)

As noted, knights could aim to emulate Christ through suffering and martyrdom in battle for Christendom, thereby becoming "Christlike in death" (Ashe, "The Hero" 134). However, the purpose of the king of ME popular romance, who is often a knighted man as well, is different for the fate of the land and the people literally depend upon him. He embodies the higher cause other knights fight for and, though not perfect, he personifies the *rex pacificus*, the peaceful king.[19] Fashioned after King Solomon whose God-bestowed wisdom allowed him to father an era of unprecedented prosperity, the *rex pacificus* model of post-Conquest England was associated with important Anglo-Saxon kings, like Alfred the Great, and features prominently in ME romance. Our concern here is why? In fact, at this point, several considerations should be taken into account: why does the idea of the king become interchangeable with that of the hero, especially given that, in an increasingly more developed society, it becomes impractical for kings to lead armies? Why do Anglo-Norman and ME authors seek to locate their stories within English territory? Moreover, and equally important, what does this tell us about ME popular romance?

To begin with there are some issues that must be addressed when using the term hero to describe the main male characters of ME romance since for ME authors there was no available word that unambiguously denoted the concept. Thus, at no point in any romance written in ME are these characters identified as heroes, a lexical void that can be seen as an obstacle to the term's very usage. According to Morton W. Bloomfield, in "The Problem of the

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[18] A notable exception is King Athleston in the eponymous romance.

[19] In "The Peace of the Roads" Robert Rouse identifies the *rex pacificus* as one of the two most commonly-used typological biblical kingships types; the other type is the "warrior Davidic figure" (118).

Hero in the Later Medieval Period," the word hero in Indo-European meant "protector" or "helper" whereas in Greek (ἥρως) it was used to identify a superhuman or semi-divine being (27-28). The term passed into most native European tongues and, at first, was generally applied to denote a man of outstanding military prowess. However, as indicated in the etymological tree in Figure 1, in the English language there seems to be a gap in the term's usage.

In OE the term *hæleð* had a range of meanings that "could be translated with greater or lesser intensity, from 'hero' to simply 'man', by way of 'warrior'" (Ashe, "The Hero" 130) while in early ME *hæleð* or *hēleth* (also *haleth*, *hæleth*) retained a similar meaning, that is, "warrior" or "retainer". However, in late ME texts there does not seem to be a word in place that equals the ones previously used.[20] Instead, the main male characters of the narratives (viz. the hero) are called: "gome" or "man" (*Havelok; Amis and Amiloun*); "knight/knyght" (*King Horn*; *Bevis of Hampton*; *Amis and Amiloun*; *Sir Amadace*; *Sir Isumbras*; *Sir Eglamour of Artois*); "kyng" (*King Horn*; *Athleston, Robert of Cisyle*); or even "child"[21] (*King Horn*).[22] The word hero would only reappear and become widely used in English in the sixteenth century when it came to mean a notable man of great strength or bravery while simultaneously keeping the more restricted Greek sense, a distinguished warrior or demigod.[23] Therefore, the fact that the hero of ME popular romance is called a king may, in part, have something to do with a linguistic gap.

Additionally, there is some concern regarding the word hero in terms of its meaning in Christian theology since if conceived as a successor of the classical hero, who was traditionally a demigod, there are clear associations between being a hero and being a pagan. This conception is most notably addressed by Saint Augustine in the *City of God* (early fifth century) wherein the theologian draws attention to the following:

> 'Hero' is said to derive from the name of Juno. The Greek name for Juno is Hera,
> and that is why one or other of her sons was called Heros, according to Greek

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[20] Generally speaking, ME is divided into early ME (c. 1100-1250/1300) and late ME (c. 1300-1500).

[21] In *King Horn* in particular the main character (and his companions) is frequently called "child" ("children") not only due to his young age, but especially because of his forthcoming social, political and military obligations. In this sense, "child" might also translate as "squire" or "young knight."

[22] Given the absence of the word hero, a comprehensive list of the terms used in ME popular romance would greatly benefit our understanding of what words are effectively used by medieval authors to identify the main male characters. However, given the scope of this study (and the lack of such research at the time this thesis was written), it is not possible to provide a thorough list, which may nevertheless be a line of future research.

[23] The word hero does come up once in ME in John Trevisa's translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (1387). Nevertheless, Trevisa uses the term to describe the hexameter, the heroic meter. Furthermore, "in an explicit discussion of classical heroes, the fourteenth century-translator regards the name *Hercules* as containing the lexical field of the superlative 'hero'; but the word *hero* itself is thought to be just a component of that name, meaning only 'man'" (Ashe, "Hero" 131).

legend. This myth evidently signifies, though in cryptic fashion, that Juno is assigned power over the air; and the meaning is that heroes dwell with the demons, the name 'heroes' denoting the souls of the departed who have rendered some exceptional service. Our martyrs, in contrast, would be called 'heroes' if, as I said, the usage of the Church allowed it, not because of any association with the demons in the air, but as the conquerors of those demons, that is, the 'powers of the air' (…). (401)

As so eloquently put by St. Augustine, possibly one of the most influential Christian theologians of the medieval period, the origin of the word hero stands too close to pagan religion, ergo its use is to be avoided. This does not mean the reason why ME writers did not have or employ the term hero is necessarily linked to Christian theology, but it seems liable that such interpretation of the word might have held sway over Christian authors and audiences alike. Bearing in mind such linguistic, cultural and religious background, it would make sense for writers to seek out alternative terms with which to fill this lexical lacuna and so the hero became the just ruler. This is an interesting choice, especially because the term champion (*champiŏun*)[24] was available for authors writing in ME and does occur in different texts. In *Havelok the Dane* it appears five times (lines: 1008; 1016; 1032; 1039; 1056) but never to describe the main male character while in the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* it turns up three times (lines: 755; 1243; 2815) and is used to describe Guy as well as Amoraunt on line 1243, "Hard foughten tho champiouns." According to Monette Connell in *The Medieval Hero. Christian and Muslim Traditions*, a champion usually represents a monarch, fighting on his behalf when needed and for that reason is rewarded with land, gold, weapons, honour and fame (17). In *SGGK*, Gawain can be understood as the champion of Arthur's court because he takes the King's place in the beheading game. As a result, a champion can be a hero but in principle he is not the sovereign himself, standing in his place instead. This is a key point to be taken into consideration throughout our following argument for a knight, like Gawain, Lancelot, or Galahad, can be a champion and a hero, but the term champion is only applied to a character who is king under specific circumstances.[25] Thus, the word champion does not seem entirely suitable to describe the idealised heroic figure the authors of ME popular romance (and their Anglo-Norman predecessors) sought to depict. Audiences were facing a "newly constructed hero" through whom medieval romances of England "developed a self-consciously localized

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[24] Also, *chaumpiŏun*, *shaumpiŏun*, *chanbioun* according to the online Middle English Compendium of the University of Michigan.

[25] In Guy's abovementioned judicial fight against Amoraunt, King Triamour's giant champion, he is actually in disguise standing in for himself, thereby acting as a champion would. In addition, we must keep in mind that Guy belongs to a somewhat different strain for, unlike Horn or Havelok, he does not descend from royal blood.

ethos of lordship and kindship" (Ashe, "The Hero" 146). Looking at the literary and cultural background of the British Isles, though, allows us to realise that these writers were not the first to foster the construction of an idealised king. Indeed, the one who is perhaps the best-known monarch of medieval European literature is, at least at its earliest beginning, a product of insular imagination; that is, of course, King Arthur.

We have already established that the hero-kings of ME romance and the hero-knights of Arthurian tradition belong to a somewhat different strain. Yet, when analysing the tales surrounding Arthur and how these were multiplied and magnified by medieval authors in continental Europe, it is easy to forget there is another Arthur, one who is not the passive ruler or the cuckold husband, but the active warrior. In the earliest written record to mention Arthur, *Historia Brittonum* (*History of the British*) authored by the Welsh monk Nennius, in the ninth century, he is said to be the *dux bellorum* of the Celts, that is, 'the leader of battles', and in a second episode he is called *Arthuri militis*, an expression that identifies him as a soldier. It was only in the twelfth century, in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, that Arthur was identified as a ruler and while to track the history of King Arthur is out of the scope of this study, for our current purpose it might be worth recalling why it was important to transform him into a monarch.

The reasons for this change have already been outlined by other researchers and, as we have pointed out, Monmouth turns Arthur into a king for three main reasons: 1) to please the new Norman royal family; 2) to glorify the British past from which the Normans claimed to descend; and 3) to legitimise the latter's government by supplying them with a hero that rivalled the French Roland (Varandas, "Ambrosius" 184). This is a helpful point as it shows twelfth-century Anglo-Norman authors were actively trying to connect England's new ruling class, the Normans, to the territory they governed and were doing so by availing themselves of a quasi-historical past of that same territory. The fact that Monmouth chose to write his *Historia Regum Britanniae* in prose, when verse was the norm in England at the time, also signals the author aspired his text to be read as historically true. He was not the first one to use Arthur for such goal since before him:

> [in *Historia Brittonum*] Nennius is forging a true national hero who not only stands as a symbol of British resistance against the English, but who also nurtures the feeling of union among the British. Moreover, by introducing the figure of Arthur in a work that claims to be historical, Nennius is also shaping, or reshaping, British history. (Varandas, "Ambrosius" 183)

Much like Monmouth centuries later, Nennius constructed a hero-warrior with very specific political, ideological and, we believe, nationalistic aims in mind. Although Arthur's figure would in time be refashioned by continental authors, such as Chrétien de Troyes who redefined his role and decisively influenced how he became perceived during the Middle Ages and even today, an older insular tradition clearly preceded it. Traces of this tradition can be found in medieval Welsh literature too. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan and Erich Poppe recall that:

> In the early Welsh poetry, he [Arthur] cuts a mainly heroic figure, a peripatetic warrior leader, mowing down his enemies and rewarding his men with booty, before developing into a more settled ruler, establishing courts at fixed locations (…). His active participation in battles and adventures is perpetuated in the *Brut* tradition, and is echoed, though to a lesser extent, in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (…). (6-7)

In stories like *Culhwch and Olwen* included in *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (the *White Book of Rhydderch*; now Peniarth MS 4; fragmented version) and in *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (the *Red Book of Hergest*; now MS Jesus College 111), but also in the *Annales Cambriae* (*The Annals of Wales*), Arthur is "a model of good governance, [and] a proven military leader" (Lloyd-Morgan and Poppe 7). Although the former texts are only found in later manuscripts,[26] the stories they contain are believed to be dated from much earlier. In them, Arthur's role as a great warrior and leader endures, which also points to a Celtic tradition surrounding the character wherein he is described as a fighter of great courage and physical strength. Both Nennius and Monmouth's works echo this portrayal of Arthur with the latter depicting the monarch as a giant slayer (Book X, Chapter 3). This is a particularly relevant detail for fighting giants is something a hero must do (Cohen 73) and it is through these encounters that "male identity or chivalric subjectivity is constructed" (Cohen xviii). Therefore, we propose that in these very diverse manuscripts and serving very different goals, for Arthur is "not a single, immutable figure, but a shape-shifter appearing in countless different guises" (Lloyd-Morgan and Poppe 6), the British monarch may also be understood as an embodiment of the hero-king, the "*Canning*, Able-man" (Carlyle 165).

Anglo-Norman and ME authors' creation of fearless kings who embody the rightful qualities of a hero and a monarch is, ergo, we believe, not an accidental one, but seems to draw on a tradition that, when it comes to insular romance, can be traced to King Arthur. Further, in his role as the war leader and peace-bringer he stands closer to characters like Horn and

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[26] The *White Book of Rhydderch* was copied in the mid-fourteenth century while the *Red Book of Hergest* was most likely copied at some point between 1382 and 1400. On the other hand, the oldest manuscript to contain the *Annales Cambriae* (British Library, Harleian MS 3859) dates to the early twelfth century.

Havelok and while King Arthur's connection to a specific region has often been ill-defined,[27] he is intrinsically tied to a very definite geographical location: the British Isles. As a matter of fact, "[t]he knowledge that Arthurian material was English, and that Arthurian literature was English national literature, irrespective of the language in which it was composed, survived [from the Middle Ages] until the beginning of the modern age" (Schmolke-Hasselmann 277-78). The 'once and future king', Arthur remains a true national hero throughout the medieval period be it of the British, the Anglo-Saxons or the Anglo-Normans. However, the latter particularly sought in Arthur a missing link to the land because:

> Ninety years after the invasion, the acute crisis of the postcolonial moment had become the chronic anxiety of a regime that now felt itself intimately connected to the land it ruled, but still somehow alien, not quite at home, because it lacked a long history. Conveniently, the same king whom Geoffrey [of Monmouth] exalted as British could be admired by the reigning Anglo-Norman monarchy, who likewise claimed Trojan descent. (Cohen 40)

It is clear the Anglo-Norman elites aspired to establish themselves as the rightful rulers of England and the territories around it, actively shaping a new vision of the English past to which they intertwined themselves throughout the twelfth century in particular. Our goal here is not to prove how this was (at least partially) done through the character of King Arthur, though it is certain that Geoffrey of Monmouth's narration ultimately helped solidify Anglo-Norman sovereignty by providing it with a pseudo-historical foundation, but to highlight how the literary worlds created by many authors have contributed to the construction of an imagined (national) community, which in turn has manifested itself diachronically and synchronically through literary sources and beyond.[28]

Romance, we argue, is a vital component of the new vision the English community began to shape of and to themselves from the late twelfth century to the early thirteenth century, when feelings of separation from the continent started to surface (Ashe, *Fiction and History* 95). Through the use of distinct strategies by which to represent the protagonists' unparalleled qualities, a new set of heroes, here in the sense of main characters, is fashioned. These newly constructed heroes are both linked to the territory but also connected to an Anglo-Saxon past or heritage, often embodying characteristics associated with the new warrior class and the

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[27] Notwithstanding, in the section entitled "Wonders of Britain", Nennius, for example, mentions the footprint of Arthur's dog Cafal (Cabal) on a stone at the top of a heap of stones at a hill near Rhaeadr in Wales (Chapter 73), which is quite explicit. Centuries later, in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Monmouth claims Arthur holds a magnificent court at the City of Legion, that is, Caerleon-upon-Usk, Wales.

[28] This idea will be developed in the following chapter.

figure of the ideal, legitimate ruler. This focus on legitimacy, as previously stated, is one of the main concerns of this set of texts, which is not surprising in light of the political background against which ME authors were writing. At the same time, it is equally clear that these writers could not ignore the development and growing economic, cultural and political power of the chivalric *ordo*, which had been effectively introduced by the Norman Conquest. Despite the usual disregard for the fine sentiments of the courtly love code, the heroes of ME popular romance have the qualities expected of a member of the knightly order. Time and again they display prowess, truthfulness, loyalty, courage and largesse, but also militarism and a strong sense of justice.

As a result, when reading these heroes we are actually faced with different identities or group affinities, including the hero's association with a city or region, and, ergo, with the English territory, and his knightly duty to the Lord God, which is his principal one, standing sometimes above the claim of the nation. Yet, it should be noted that, "[t]hese identities are in no way contradictory, and represent a complex understanding of the multiple allegiances demanded of a knight in medieval society" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 75). What is more, through these heroes, ME authors were able to reflect upon knighthood and its seemingly incongrous behaviour, a view noticeable in the romances of Guy and especially so in the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* where after marrying his beloved Felice, the knight begins to wonder about his life:

> He thought with dreri mode,
> Hou he hadde ever ben strong werrour,
> For Jhesu love, our Saveour,
> Never no dede he gode.
> Mani man he hadde slayn with wrong;
> "Allas, allas!" it was his song,
> For sorwe he yede ner wode. (lines 246-52)

Ashamed of his lifestyle of fighting and fame-seeking, Guy decides to leave all he has conquered behind and embark on a pilgrimage to Bethlehem and Jerusalem in order to atone for his past sins. The knight's defence of Constantinople against a Saracen army set on invading it shows that "(…) Guy's actions turn from his earlier individual tournaments and the squabblings of European princes to the defence of a larger religiously delineated geo-political entity: he seeks to defend 'christendom' from its heathen enemies" (Rouse, "Exemplary

Life" 98).[29] By altruistically seeking to serve God, Guy acknowledges he previously engaged in battle for the wrong reasons: to gain reputation in order to win Felice's love and her hand in marriage. The hero's epiphany leads the audience and/or readers to ponder upon what the legitimate reasons to wage war are and how Christian chivalry was, should or even could be. In addition, it also suggests that authors *did* think about knights' incongruous behaviour and positively helped build contemporary concepts of heroism, which varied across Europe and throughout the whole medieval period. It should also be noted that given Guy's status as "the model of the knight of England" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 116), his fights against the Saracen Other help provide a contrast between East and West, Christians and non-Christians, civilised and barbaric. As the "Inglis knight" (*Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, line 976), he can be understood to represent the idea of Englishness and all that "[t]he English are (…): Christian, honourable, trustworthy, moderate, and human" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 83).

To sum up, when thinking about heroism in medieval romance, it is clear that ME popular romance developed different strategies by which to represent their protagonists. Despite sharing traits with the heroes of chivalric romance, namely the Arthurian ones, this set of romances are shaped around an unproblematic hero who embodies all the qualities of a great warrior and is a fair and legitimate ruler, one who brings peace and prosperity to a land often identified as England or a specific part of that territory. Despite not always being perfect, the insular hero-king's fight is for a higher cause: justice and the people he rules over. Moreover, it is clear that a number of these heroes belong to what Diane Speed called "the discourse of the nation" (145) as by drawing from history or pseudo-history they explicitly contribute to the construction of a(n imagined) national identity.

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[29] It is important to keep in mind that crusading might be seen as a problematic knightly activity for it was also a means to gain wealth. Consequently, knights might well have ulterior reasons for journeying to the Holy Land, though this is not the case of Guy.
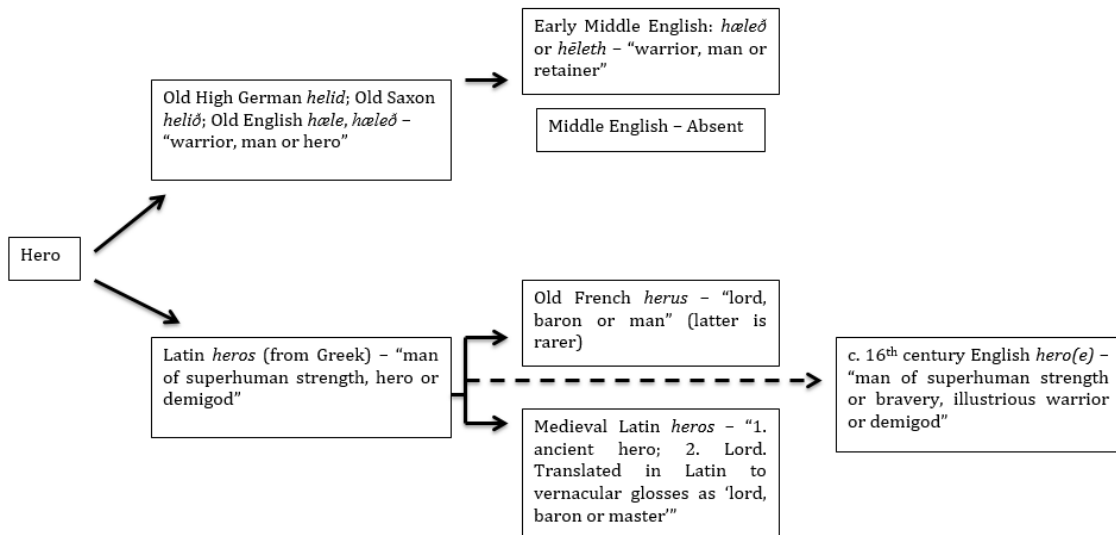
Old High German *helid*; Old Saxon *heliđ*; Old English *hæle, hæleð* – "warrior, man or hero"

Early Middle English: *hæleð* or *hēleth* – "warrior, man or retainer"

Middle English – Absent

Hero

Latin *heros* (from Greek) – "man of superhuman strength, hero or demigod"

Old French *herus* – "lord, baron or man" (latter is rarer)

Medieval Latin *heros* – "1. ancient hero; 2. Lord. Translated in Latin to vernacular glosses as 'lord, baron or master'"

c. 16th century English *hero(e)* – "man of superhuman strength or bravery, illustrious warrior or demigod"

Figure 1 | Etymological Tree: Hero[30]

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[30] This etymological tree is partially based on the one featured in Ashe, "The Hero" 129.

CHAPTER FIVE

(RE)SHAPING HEROISM, KINGSHIP AND IDENTITY IN *HAVELOK THE DANE*

(…) the poem (…) stands as a guide for the proper behavior of the wise monarch, as a lesson for the king who is willing to heed it. Havelok stands as a servant of God and as a servant of his people. He is stern to the traitors who disturb the peace of his country; he is generous to all the members of the lower classes who support his kingship. Not isolated but a part of his people, not selfish and aloof, but compassionate and understanding, Havelok is the monarch as he should be.

Staines, "*Havelok the Dane*:

A Thirteenth-Century Handbook for Princes" 623

Havelok the Dane is one of a very small number of Middle English romances that still retain their charm. It is no monument of medieval literature, to be sure, but it endures; it is incomparably more readable than other popular romances (…).

Halverson, "*Havelok the Dane* and Society" 142

5.1. 'Happily Recovered': On the MS Laud Misc. 108

Havelok the Dane is one of the earliest romances written in the vernacular in England. Dated to circa 1280-90, the poem focuses on the life of two royal protagonists: Havelok, the male heir to the Danish throne, and Goldeboru, the only heir to the English crown, their unfortunate childhoods and (mis)adventures to regain their lawful position as king of Denmark and queen of England, respectively. Focusing initially on the struggles both heirs face in their infancy, the ME version of the Havelok tale engages primarily with the male hero's maturation process from a royal heir to a neglected orphan to a fisherman's beloved son, a porter, a husband and a warrior and finally a monarch. Like many individual romances, *Havelok the Dane* "follow[s] a typical narrative trajectory: exile leading to return, loss redeemed by restoration, complacency goaded by instructive ordeal, innocence riven by experience, the construction of careers and the fall [and rise] of kingdoms" (Chism 57). In this narrative we can find several of the motifs traditionally associated with ME popular romance, namely separation and reunion, sea voyages, and revenge and marriage as well as a unique attention to mundane aspects of social life, which is notoriously seen in the description made of the type of fish caught by Grim.[1] Yet:

> *Havelok the Dane* is not primarily an adventure nor a series of adventures; it is first and foremost an idealized biography cast in the form of a tale of action. The biography concentrates, not on the most exciting moments of Havelok's life, but rather on those episodes which delineate most clearly the poet's conception of the ideal king. (Murtaugh 613)

Often referred to as a "male Cinderella" story (Barron 69; Peck; Herzman, et al. 74; Eckert 139), "the poem (…) stands as a guide for the proper behavior of the wise monarch, as a lesson for the king who is willing to heed it" (Staines 623). These are, as we will see, key points that help us understand how the text engages with the hero-king's identity and by extension with the identity not only of the nations and peoples he rules over *in* the narrative,

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[1] See lines 750 to 785. On the significance of Grim's success as a fisherman, see Murtaugh 481-82.

but also with the identity of the poem's medieval audience. The romance's importance as a "handbook for princes" (Staines 263) and participation in the "discourse of the nation" (Speed 145) might be why it has been regarded as "one of a very small number of Middle English romances that still retain their charm" (Halverson 142)[2] and therefore also "one of the few poems that have been happily recovered, after long been given up as lost" (Skeat i). Although Halverson's comment clearly voices the opinion of several earlier studies that deemed the ME romances that fall outside the Matter of Britain as inferior in quality, it is worth noting that *Havelok the Dane* was/is regarded as one of best amongst supposedly poorly accomplished productions.

The complete romance survives in one manuscript solely written in ME: the MS Laud Misc. 108, which started being assembled in the late thirteenth century. However, little is known about the provenance of the MS Laud Misc. 108 before 1633 when it entered Archbishop Laud's collection. Two years later, he donated it to the Bodleian Library where it remains today. The manuscript's exact place of production is also hard to pinpoint since the only clues are offered by its dialect which:

> for the *SEL*[3] has been tentatively localized dialectally to 'W. Oxon'. Western England was a primary site of production for early major Middle English manuscripts, but generally further west than Oxfordshire. However the later texts in the manuscript, which include *Havelok* and *Horn* and a selection of *SEL* narratives, seem, again on dialectal grounds, to be localizable to Norfolk, another region that developed early traditions of vernacular copying. (Edwards 27)

Although dialect can be used as an indicator of likely scribal associations, it does not identify the manuscript's origins, so a definite answer as to where the MS Laud Misc. 108 was produced is hard to achieve. Furthermore, there are hardly any clues as to why this manuscript was created, so a potential patron is, at this time, impossible to establish. There is only one indication of early ownership on the final leaf of the manuscript whereon a verse indicates that: "iste liber constat Henrico Perneys testantibus Iohanni Rede presbiteri William Rotheley et alijs" (folio 238ᵛ). Nevertheless, without further information about Henry Perneys (or Perveys), it is hard to fathom why and by what means he came upon the possession of the codex.[4] What

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[2] John Halverson's deprecating comments on *Havelok the Dane* stand as clear indication of scholarly bias when addressing ME popular romance, which were(are) often regarded as inferior in quality to contemporary continental productions. It is, notwithstanding, relevant to bear in mind such studies since they show that despite the dismissive tone used to address this romance in particular, some of its qualities have been consistently acknowledged.

[3] The *SEL* begins the MS. Laud Misc. 108 and is the first collection of saints' lives written in ME.

[4] For more information on origin and circulation, see Edwards 29-30.

is more, there is evidence that a previous declaration of ownership was erased after the Perneys had acquired the manuscript (Bell 29), but no attempts to recover those names have been successful so far. Thus, it is clear that "much about the L[aud Misc. 108] resists full clarification" since the "circumstances of its genesis and assemblage can only be glimpsed shadowily through the physical details of the manuscript" (Edwards 30). Bearing this in mind, there are some plausible elations that can be made given the manuscript's state of preservation today.

At present the manuscript comprises 243 leaves and is composed of five or six individual 'booklets'[5] that, considering the manuscript's current construction, can be divided into two parts marked by quire boundaries and particular scribal changes. Part A (fols. 1-203) includes the *SEL*, the first collection of saints' lives composed in ME, *The Sayings of St. Bernard* and *The Vision of St. Paul* (Scribe A, fols. 1-200), which are followed by the *Dispute Between the Body and the Soul* (Scribe B, fols. 200ᵛ-203ᵛ). Part B comprises the only two romances in the manuscript, *Havelok the Dane* (fols. 204ʳ-219ʳ) and *King Horn* (fols. 219ᵛ-228ʳ), written by Scribe C, and three more saints' lives as well as *Somer Soneday* (fols. 228ᵛ-237ᵛ), which were written on the remaining leaves of the romance booklet in the late fourteenth century by Scribe D. Given more recent studies in codicology, it has been possible to establish that both Scribe A and B copied Part A of the manuscript in Textura hand in the late thirteenth century. The main scribe of Part B, Scribe C, probably copied the romances at some point in the early fourteenth century also in Textura hand. Finally, Scribe D's texts are clearly recognisable by a change to Anglicana hand. Despite the many hands that seem to have lent a contribute to the writing of this codex, it is interesting to note that the booklets which comprise it were probably collated early in its history since all the texts are numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals.[6] The same anonymous compiler may also be the one responsible for the abbreviated Latin running titles found in almost all the saints' lives in red crayon. However, a separate rubricator also added *incipits* and *explicits* not only to several of the saints' lives, but also to *Havelok the Dane* in red ink, as can be seen on top of folio 204ʳ in Figure 2.[7] Therefore, by the end of the fourteenth century, MS Laud Misc. 108 would have contained the following:[8]

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[5] In "'The 'Booklet': A Self-Contained Unit in Composite Manuscripts," Pamela Robinson notes that a booklet is a "self-contained unit" which is a "small but structurally independent production containing a single work or a number of short works" (46).

[6] Scribe D renumbered the texts in the entire manuscript and may also have been the one who erased most of the numbers written in crayon (Bell 31), which can be seen on most folios, including on the top margin of fol. 204ʳ (Figure 2). On fol. 88ʳ, for instance, the numbering is much more clearly perceived.

[7] The significance of *Havelok the Dane's incipit* will be explored later on in this chapter.

[8] In addition, on the last folios of the manuscript, fols. 238ʳ⁻ᵛ, there are four more items, including biblical sentences and moral precepts added in three different fifteenth-century hands, as well as the inscription of

Part A	Part B
Fols. 1–198ʳ	**Fols. 204ʳ–228ʳ**
South English Legendary (missing seven items at the beginning)	*Havelok the Dane, King Horn*
Fols. 198ʳ–203ᵛ	**Fols. 228ᵛ–237ʳ**
The Sayings of St. Bernard	Lives of:
The Vision of St. Paul	St Blaise, from the South English Legendary,
Dispute Between the Body and the Soul	St Cecilia, from the South English Legendary
	The *Life of St. Alexis*
	Fols. 237ʳ⁻ᵛ
	Somer Soneday (incomplete at the end)

Table 1 | MS Laud Misc. 108: A Fourteenth-century Index[9]

Although issues of codicology have often been left out of literary studies, as few researchers of medieval texts reflect upon the importance of a narrative's manuscript location, these points are revealing. First, because they clearly suggest that whoever enumerated the set of texts in this manuscript regarded them as a sequence, a fact that can provide relevant clues as to how the texts might have been understood in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, "[t]he successive numbering of religious and secular texts in the manuscript invites readers and listeners to read the texts consecutively and thus understand the romances and *Somer Soneday* as part of a continuum of saints' lives and religious matter" (Bell and Couch 9). In this context, it is relevant to take into account the last texts added by Scribe D since these alter the construction of the manuscript, resulting in the only two romances in the codex becoming enclosed by hagiographic and religious texts. Therefore, there is a "reinforcement of a codicological sense of generic continuity between the manuscript's religious and secular

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ownership mentioned earlier. The manuscript also contains a few miscellaneous items on the flyleaves, including a sixteenth-century table of contents of *vitae* (which does not match the manuscript's contents) written on paper and pasted to parchment as well as a prayer to Mary.

[9] This tentative index has been partially based on Kimberly K. Bell's version in "Resituating Romance: The Dialectics of Sanctity in MS Laud Misc. 108's *Havelok the Dane* and Royal *Vitae*" 32.

matter" (Bell 32). This fact also explains why the MS Laud Mis. 108 had been described in the old catalogue of the Bodleian Library as a *Vitae Sanctorum* (Skeat i).

Second, for this study in particular, previous knowledge that the romance *Havelok the Dane* is included in a codex that is not only entirely copied in ME, but also features English saints' lives implies there was a deliberate and conscious choice in the language used.[10] If, as suggested by Thorlac Turville-Petre in *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340,* writing in English became a statement about belonging (11), then communicating in English must have been regarded by the compilers and audience of the MS Laud Misc. 108 as central to being English. The language of the manuscript can thus be deemed as a defining component of potential readership, which leads us to our next, third point.

Though much has been written on whom might have been the audience of medieval popular romance and on *Havelok the Dane*'s public in particular,[11] few have taken into account its manuscript context which, given its hagiographic nature and use of language, implies that there could be "a localized audience, whether that be a group of nuns or the household of a rural gentry" (Bell and Couch 15). On this matter Kimberly K. Bell argues that:

> The manuscript evidence clearly suggests that *Havelok the Dane* in this only complete surviving copy was read or listened to (and, therefore, understood) in relation to texts that primarily focus on hagiographic concerns. As a result, the hagiographic texts collated with *Havelok the Dane* dictate the audience's horizon of expectations for understanding the romance. (32)

The problem with Bell's theory is acknowledged by the scholar: it considers – and in truth can only consider – one manuscript. Assuming there were more, now lost copies of the ME *Havelok the Dane*, which is likely given the tale's popularity in Lincolnshire,[12] would these also be collated with hagiographic texts? The only other romance in this codex, *King Horn*, is preserved in two other manuscripts[13] but neither has as many hagiographic texts as the MS Laud Misc. 108. The question of audience hence remains largely unanswered for even if the public reading or listening to this particular manuscript was a devout one, this does not mean lay audiences did not have access to the narrative through other written and/or oral sources.[14]

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[10] The texts in the MS Laud Misc. 108 are written in ME but many of them contain rubrics in Anglo-Norman and Latin, including *Havelok the Dane* which begins with a rubric in Latin to be analysed further on in this chapter.

[11] See Brewer, *English Gothic Literature* 76; Crane 43-48.

[12] The origins of the tale of Havelok the Dane, including its likely oral transmission will be addressed in the following sub-chapter.

[13] They are: British Library MS Harley 2253 (late thirteenth century to the first half of the fourteenth century) and Cambridge University Library MS Gg.4.27.2 (c. fifteenth century).

[14] For an extended consideration of issues of audience in the MS Laud Misc. 108, see also Pickering 1-14.

What is unequivocal here is that the texts collated in this specific manuscript were deliberately written *in* ME *for* an English public, discussing English settings, landmarks, customs, shrines as well as political events and the language itself (Bell and Couch 15). The fact that most narratives are geographically localised in England, as *Havelok the Dane* testifies, underscores this idea and sets this manuscript apart from other Latin, Anglo-Norman or OF codices.

All things considered, we can conclude that the MS Laud Misc. 108 is about England and its nationalistic undertone reveals a vision of a single community established in a territory with a specific language and a history (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 8). It may not be a "handbook of the nation" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 112)[15] but "it emerges as an eminently useful anthology for understanding early Middle English culture" (Bell and Couch 18). While presenting definite answers to issues about the English nation and nationhood (and, we believe, its plausible medieval origins) is not at the core of this research, we argue that, in this particular case, manuscript context provides key clues for the analysis of the ME romance *Havelok the Dane* as it sheds light into why England, as one unified kingdom with an identifiable landscape is so relevant in a poem about a Danish prince. What is more, it might also help us better understand the medieval king presented by the poem's narrator, his unusual vulnerability, why heroism is constructed differently in this specific text and what that tells us about identity in late-thirteenth- to early-fourteenth-century England.

5.2. 'The tale is of Havelok': The ME *Havelok the Dane* and its Textual Ancestors

The ME romance *Havelok the Dane* was first (re)discovered by Sir Frederic Madden who, in 1826, accidentally came across the text while peering through the MS Laud Misc. 108 at the Bodleian Library. The romance was then later edited by him in 1828 for the Roxburghe Club with the following title page: "*The Ancient English Romance of Havelok the Dane*, accompanied by the French Text: with an introduction, notes, and a glossary, by Frederic Madden, Esq., F.A.S. F.R.S.L., Sub-Keeper of the MSS. in the British Museum. Printed for the

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[15] When discussing the Auchinleck manuscript, Advocates MS 19.2.1, in *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290-1340*, Turville-Petre dubbed it the "handbook of the nation" for its "shared perception of social roles and functions, and a shared concept of England, the state of its present and the contributions of its past" (112).

Roxburghe Club, London. W. Nicol, Shak[e]speare Press, MDCCCXXVIII".[16] On the importance of such (re)discovery, Madden states that:

> Of its value, not only in a Glossographical point of view, or as an accurate picture of the manners and customs of former times, but also as serving in a singular manner to illustrate the history and progress of our early poetry, there can be but one opinion, and on each and all of these accounts, it must certainly be considered as a highly interesting addition to the specimens we already possess of ancient English metrical composition. (iii)

As the title enounces, the volume contains not only the ME romance *Havelok the Dane*, but also its two known textual predecessors: an episode in Geoffrey Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engleis* (c. 1130-35) and a version of the *Lai d'Haveloc* (c. late twelfth- to early thirteenth- century) from a manuscript in the Heralds' College. This is an interesting editorial choice for it invites the reader to compare the three versions available in a single edition, though it may also suggest that the ME text is somehow indebted to these older renditions of the tale.[17] Such a proposal is not unreasonable since the possibility of a common Anglo-Norman source to all extant texts was once thought credible (Kleinman 246), though this thesis has been dismissed.[18] More recent studies have found in oral tradition a likely source of inspiration not only for Gaimar, but also for the later anonymous writers (Pearsall 98; Bradbury 117; Kleinman 251), which seems plausible considering that "the sources for the written tradition of the Middle Ages lie overwhelmingly in the sphere of oral tradition" (Gurevich 52).

Although Nancy Raymond Bradbury has argued that we should "allow for 'contamination' from a French literary version" (117), the story of Havelok seems to be tied closely to tales in oral circulation in the region of Lincolnshire, a hypothesis primarily suggested by the fact that both Lincoln and Grimsby are key locations to the action in all known

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[16] Frederic Madden's edition is currently available in digital format in the online catalogue of the HathiTrust Digital Library. See https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015083979875

[17] It is also interesting to note that later editions of the romance have opted to leave out the earlier Anglo-Norman texts. Among later editions are: *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, edited by W. W. Skeat, Trübner, 1868 and the 2nd edition revised by Kenneth Sisam, Clarendon Press, 1915; *Havelok the Dane*, edited by Ferdinand Holthausen, Carl Winter, 1901; *Havelok the Dane*, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, edited by Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, Prentice Hall, 1930, 71–176; *Havelok the Dane*, in *Middle English Verse Romances*, edited by Donald B. Sands, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966, 55–129; *Havelok the Dane*, in *Medieval English Romances, Part One*, edited by A. V. C. Schmidt and Nicolas Jacobs, vol. 1, Holmes and Meier, 1980, 37–122; *Havelok*, edited by G. V. Smithers, Clarendon Press, 1987; *Havelok the Dane*, in *Medieval English Romances*, edited by Diane Speed, vol. 1, Durham Medieval Texts, 1993, 25–121; *Havelok*, in *Middle English Romances*, edited by Stephen H. A. Shepherd, W. W. Norton, 1995, 3–74; *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, edited by Ronald Herzman, et al., Medieval Institute Publications, 1999, 73–185; *Middle English Romances in Translation: Amis and Amiloun, Athelston, Floris and Blanchefor, Havelok the Dane, King Horn, Sir Degare*, edited by Kenneth Ecket, Sidestone Press, 2015, 141-208.

[18] See A. Bell 29-79.

renditions. Concerning the earliest extant written version of the tale, an episode in the chronicle *L'Estoire des Engleis*, there is evidence that Geoffrey Gaimar only encountered the Havelok story after he moved to Lincolnshire (Kleinman 251).[19] Most likely the story was already widespread in the area when Gaimar heard it and decided to interpolate details into his own account, which is in line with the (undisclosed) 'authorities' the author claims to have resorted to when telling of Cuaran (Havelok) and Argentille (Goldeboru)[20]: "Sicum dï[en]t l'antive gent" (line 95).[21] Since there are no written records of the story before Gaimar's chronicle, it can be presumed that the accounts mentioned by the author were orally transmitted amongst the people, "l'antive gent". On this point, it should be further noted that Gaimar seems to have been influenced by numerous sources when writing *L'Estoire des Engleis*, including the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae,* so the "general impression conveyed (...) is that Gaimar's form of the Havelok story is pieced together from different materials that were not necessarily originally related" (Kleinman 252). If some elements and characters come from separate sources, this manifold origin would explain some of the incoherencies in the narrative and be consistent with the variety often found in narratives in oral circulation.

Further compelling evidence of the tale's oral circulation is found in Robert Manning's *Chronicle* (1338), a translation into English of Peter Langtoft's *Chronicle* (c. 1300) where Havelok is mentioned. Robert Manning of Brunne, a near contemporary author of the MS Laud Misc. 108, lived in Lincolnshire and described the oral spread of the Havelok tales in his 1338 work where he states never to have found any written source to support Langtoft's claim that Havelok was fathered by King Gunter or any reference to a king Athelwold:

> Bot I haf grete ferly, þat I fynd no man,
> Þat has writen in story, how Hauelok þis lond wan.
> Noiþer Gildas, no Bede, no Henry of Huntynton,
> No William of Malmesbiri, ne Pers of Bridlynton,
> Writes not in þer bokes of no kyng Athelwold,
> Ne Goldeburgh his douhtere, ne Hauelok not of told,
> Whilk tyme þe were kynges, long or now late
> Þei mak no menyn whan, no in what date.
> Bot þat þise lowed men upon Inglish tellis,
> Right story ca me not ken, þe certeynte what spellis.

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[19] See also A. Bell 18-19 and 71.
[20] Although further details on Gaimar's account of the tale will be given later on, for the sake of clarity it is important to highlight that Havelok is called Cuaran in *L'Estoire des Engleis* while Goldeboru is called Argentille.
[21] "According to ancient testimony." Quotes and Modern English translation taken from Ian Short, *Geffrei Gaimar: Estoire des Engleis: History of the English* which used the British Library, MS Royal 13 A. xxi (last quarter of the thirteenth century or possibly first quarter of the fourteenth century) as its base manuscript.

Men sais in Lyncoln castelle ligges ȝit a stone,
Þat Hauelok kast wele forbi euer ilkone.
& ȝit þe chapelle standes, þer he weddid his wife,
Goldeburgh þe kynges' douhter, þat saw is ȝit rife.
& of Gryme a fisshere, men redes ȝit in ryme,
Þat he bigged Grymesby Gryme þat ilk tyme.
Of alle stories of honoure, þat I haf þorgh souht,
I fynd, þat no compiloure of him tellis ouht.
Sen I fynd non redy, þat tellis of Hauelok kynde,
Turne we to þat story, þat we writen fynde. (lines 1-20)

Manning's baffled words are especially meaningful for this study since they attest the oral transmission of Havelok's vernacular tale as he seems to contrast the (lack of) information found in "bokes," that is, reliable written sources like chronicles by well-known authors, with what "lowed men upon Inglish tellis" (line 9). This comment implies that "[w]hile he may have heard someone read out loud a rhymed narrative about Grim and the founding of Grimsby, or heard of such entertainment, he has no written, scholarly text to consult to verify the historicity of Havelok and his cohorts" (Bradbury 121). Manning's references to the stories told in English suggest that some kind of tale or legend was conveyed orally, "Men sais" (line 11); what is more, though less certain, these stories could vary, "Right story ca me not ken, þe certeynte what spellis" (line 10). Because these tales are, on the one hand, presumably (re)told orally and, on the other, recounted by "lowed men", they are not deemed authoritative.

However, this passage is also confusing for although the author repeatedly claims he cannot find any references to Havelok (lines: 1-2; 18-19), he also states that "men redes ȝit in ryme" (line 15) which seems to imply a written source. According to the *MED*, the verb *rēden* (also spelled *red[e]*) could mean "to read aloud" (Def. 2a.[a]) and when combined with the preposition 'in', as is the case, may mean "hear (sth.) read in a particular language" (Def. 2a.[e]) which again directs us to an oral medium of transmission. Even if this is not the case, what is clear is that Manning has doubts about the reliability of these (oral or written) sources, that is, he distrusts the "lowed men," the ones who "sais in Lyncoln castelle ligges ȝit a stone" (line 11) as well as the ones who "redes ȝit in ryme" (line 15). A further point that may raise doubts is on line 20 as the statement that he will now turn to "þat story, þat we writen fynde" seems to contradict what was asserted in the previous lines. On this claim Bradbury proposes that Manning is simply referring back to his primary source, Peter Langtoft's *Chronicle* (120).

Finally, the characters' names mentioned by Manning are those used in the anonymous ME romance. The different names that the main characters have in the three key medieval sources analysed here are listed in the table below:

L'Estoire d'Engleis	Lai d'Haveloc	Havelok the Dane
Cuaran/Haveloc	Cuaran/ Haveloc	Havelok
Grim	Grim	Grim
Argentille	Argentille	Goldeboru
Adelbriht	Ekenbright	Athelwold
Gunter	Gunter	Birkabeyn
Edelsi	Alsi	Godrich
Edulf, Odulf	Hodulf	Godard
Sebrug	Saburc	Leue

Table 2 | Names in the Havelok story[22]

Manning's *Chronicle* also attests that the names Havelok, Goldeboru and Athelwold were known to the audience and recited by "lowed men" so they already belonged to oral tradition in the early fourteenth century.[23] This being the case, either there was a change in the names used for the main characters at some point in the late twelfth- to early thirteenth-century or Gaimar altered the names in oral circulation for the purposed of his episode, which is unlikely given that there seem to be no reasons to do so. Turville-Petre suggests the changes found in the names of the ME romance are connected to an attempt to locate the story in early medieval England, aiming to "lend a historical and factual air" (*England the Nation* 144) to it which is achieved through the use of Anglo-Saxon sounding names, such as Athelwold that is meant to evoke names of Anglo-Saxon kings, like Athelstan or possibly Æthelwulf (r. 839–858, Wessex), father of Alfred, the Great. The use of titles such as "Earl of Cornwall" or "Archbishop of York" in the ME text further highlights that the main goal is to "help to build up an impression of an England of geographical range and familiar institutions" via familiar and "reasonably ancient" names (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 149). Eleanor Parker has made a similar point, claiming that:

> These names may suggest that the poem is deliberately drawing on narratives dealing with Danish rule in England to create a sense of its pre-Conquest setting, perhaps in order to suggest there is historical precedent for the legend of Havelok

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[22] As Kenneth Sisam notes, Grim and Havelok are the only names common to all versions (XIX). This table was partially based on the one listed in Sisam's "Introduction" to *The Lay of Havelok*, XIX.

[23] Besides the ME romance, the name Goldeboru appears in chronicles for the first time in the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* in the late thirteenth century.

without tying the story to any particular dynasty or specific moment in English history. (435)

A separate testimony to the existence of a well-known tale circulating orally in Grimsby in particular can be found in the town's own seal (Figure 3). Although the seal has not been positively dated, it might be a close contemporary to the MS. Laud Misc. 108 or be much older, its existence corroborates Manning's claim that the story was "rife" (line 14). It is highly unlikely that the medieval inhabitants of Grimsby would choose to depict Havelok, Goldeboru and Grim in their town seal if these were not popular figures somehow connected to its history. In fact, the ME narrator of *Havelok the Dane* refers to what can be identified as a foundation myth as he links Grim, his family and Havelok's arrival in Lindsey with Grimsby's very genesis:

> In Humber Grim bigan to lende,
> In Lindeseye, rith at the north ende.
> Ther sat his ship upon the sond;
> But Grim it drou up to the lond;
> And there he made a litel cote
> To him and to hise flote.
> Bigan he there for to erthe,
> A litel hus to maken of erthe,
> So that he wel thore were
> Of here herboru herborwed there.
> And for that Grim that place aute,
> The stede of Grim the name laute,
> So that Grimesbi it calleth alle
> That theroffe speken alle;
> And so shulen men callen it ay,
> Bitwene this and Domesday. (lines 734-49)

As tales "about the origins and foundation of political communities (....) iterated through ritual, carried by myth and defended by religious or scholarly orthodoxy (...)" (Garman 97), foundation myths can add to our understanding of how a sense of community is created since "where we choose our point of beginning can say much about who we see ourselves as and who we exclude from such a sense of communality. By establishing boundaries over the flux of time and space, meaning becomes possible and political allegiances and roles are defined and validated" (Garman 97). Likewise, other identities can become marginalised or annulled, a concept that is deeply tied to the definition of nation, which "necessarily involves exclusion. What does not belong needs to be identified in order to safeguard the unity of what is part of the nation" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 1). If foundation myths are stories of

origin and arrival at a specific destination (Garman 97), then we can hypothesise that the haven Grim and his family – including his adopted son, Havelok – find in England is not solely a geographical location constructed for literary convenience but an ontological statement that implies that the spatial and temporal journey embarked on by the characters defines and asserts the identity of a particular community. On this point it is also relevant to take into account that foundation myths "are not only stories that are told, but are often revised on a regular basis since political communities are not only 'imagined' but also enacted" (Garman 97). The revisionist nature of foundation myths as well as the fact that they might be "alluded to obliquely or used as reference points for narratives on other subjects" (Sweeney 1) can perhaps help explain why Grim's role in the actual founding of Grimsby is so reduced in the different accounts of the legend of Havelok. Indeed, because Grim's reputation as the mythical founder of Grimsby seems to predate Havelok's, it is likely that the latter's early story may have been collated with that of Grim, "[m]ost likely the popularity of the tale of Havelok in East Anglia came from Gaimar's choice to attach his story to that of Grim, whom local legend probably already held to be the founder of Grimsby" (Kleinman 265).

The presence of an enduring medieval legend, now lost, centred on Grim, his foundation of Grimsby and his feats is probable and seems to be suggested by the town's seal. In Figure 3, a reproduction of the Grimsby Seal, Grim takes centre stage, towering above Havelok and Goldeboru, a depiction that poses many questions. First, there is Grim's figure who, armed with a shield and a sword drawn, is hardly what we would expect of a fisherman, "fishere" (*Havelok the Dane*, line 524), and a servant, a "thral" (*Havelok the Dane*, line 527). As Bradbury has highlighted, there is no extant version of the tale in which Grim engages in battle (125) so either the seal's medieval designer opted to depict him in an attire thought suitable to the format or the seal points to a more significant, warrior-like hero rather than the character Grim found in the Havelok tales. If this hypothesis is correct, the seal would attest to an independent legend which, as previously argued, was collated to Havelok's own tale. The reasons for such association are hard to fathom. Could the two heroes, Grim and Havelok, have been tied together by mere chance? Might Gaimar have heard the two stories and decided to combine them or did he listen to a version which already intertwined the two? At this point, given the lack of manuscript evidence, a definite answer is unfeasible and only tentative guesses can be made.

Another point worth underscoring when it comes to the Grimsby Seal is that Havelok and Goldeboru, our leading couple, are identified by the names they are given in the ME romance, not the ones in earlier versions. This detail seems to imply the dating of the seal might

be closer to that of the ME romance, but if oral versions of the story were already in circulation before the only extant written copy of the romance was produced, the seal could also confirm the importance of these characters in local tradition. Moreover, there are some interesting details added to each figure: Havelok is depicted with a battle axe, a weapon only used by the hero in the Anglo-Norman versions, and a ring with a crown hovers above it; facing Havelok is Goldeboru with a crown just slightly above her head, one of her hands extended as if ready to take hold of the ring offered by Havelok while the other clenches what may well be a royal sceptre. Curiously, the crown, which indicates sovereignty, is associated with Goldeboru, she is the one who is already crowned while Havelok is not. The fact that a crown appears over the ring on Havelok's hand suggests it is through marriage that he will become king, which can lead us to some thought-provoking questions: did Havelok at some point depend on marrying Goldeboru to become king? Such interpretation would naturally imply he may not always have been depicted as a royal heir himself, but there are no records that would allow us to corroborate this assumption. On the other hand, could the seal refer solely to the sovereignty of England? Do the crowns illustrated symbolise the English throne, which the hero can only attain through lawful marriage? Is his ascension thoroughly intertwined with Goldeboru? This reading seems to be more likely or at least more easily verified for it corresponds to what is found in the surviving written sources. In effect, although he is the heir of the king of Denmark, Havelok only becomes king after marrying Goldeboru. It is by becoming rightfully tied to the English princess that Havelok has a legitimate claim to sovereignty in England whether it is of an area of the island, like East Anglia in Gaimar's version, or of the country as a whole, as featured in the ME version. What is more, it is Goldeboru who encourages Havelok's return to Denmark, especially in the Anglo-Norman versions wherein the male hero has a much more passive role.

Finally, regarding further evidence that might attest the narrative's likely origin in local oral legend, we turn to the text itself. The abundant marks of orality found in the ME poem have led to some speculation about whether or not they signal the story was orally recited before it was written, which, given the evidence already presented, seems like a strong possibility. In fact, the numerous interjections made by the poet throughout the text hint that the text was meant to be performed out loud to an audience. It has already been pointed out that the analysis of the use of formulas or tags, such as the ones found in the first lines of the ME *Havelok the Dane*, must take into account that in many ME romances "they are purely literary convention, designed to create an atmosphere of lively recitation, and they were probably in the majority of cases read out from the manuscript rather than improvised" (Mehl 8). However, we would argue that the narrator's oral exchanges with the audience in text

contained in the MS. Laud Misc. 108 comprise more than the usual conventions Mehl addresses. Besides the initial (lines 1-20) and final appeals (lines 2994-3001) to the audience, which seem more or less to follow a formula, there are also the narrator's comments towards the audience (lines: 11-13; 732-33), his pleas for piety (lines 2996-97) and justice (lines: 335; 434-35; 446; 1102; 1189) as well as the name-calling directed at the traitors Godrich (lines: 319; 1101; 1102; 1109; 1134-35; 1159; 2533; 2844) and Godard (lines: 423; 425; 496; 506; 627; 666; 693; 1410; 1412; 2229; 2401; 2499; 2512) and cursing (lines: 445; 2447; 2511; 2757). The latter clearly aim to vilify those who oppose the main couple and to evoke compassion, leading the audience to engage emotionally with the performance. According to Bradbury, "[t]he oral art of traditional narrative relies heavily on the immediate emotional and rhetorical impact of each scene as it comes along, and places far less emphasis on the need for realistic consistency from scene to scene" (133). These ideas help explain some of the inconsistencies found throughout the narrative, like Grim's quick change of heart when it comes to young Havelok or the hero's odd preparation for troubles that never occur at Ubbe's feast, for instance. If the story circulated orally in English in the areas of Lincolnshire and possibly East Anglia that would explain both the colloquial nature of the narrator's interjections and these incongruities.

Acknowledging that the Havelok tale was already in oral circulation before it was written is not to say that the earlier Anglo-Norman copies did not have any influence on the ME popular romance as it survives today. On the contrary, it would be imprudent to disregard the textual predecessors of the ME *Havelok the Dane.* It is clear that the ME poem "adapts and expands its source material in order to create a portrait of the growth and education of the ideal king" (Staines 602) while simultaneously engaging with the exploration of a sense of regional and national identity which by the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century had become a major concern for English writers (Turville-Petre, "History of the Nation" 121). We contend that this is done especially through the story's main male hero, Havelok, but to understand how the ME poem achieved this, we must consider prior literary 'Haveloks'.

Starting with Gaimar's episode in *L'Estoire des Engleis*,[24] the action is set in the time of King Constantine who is identified as a nephew of the legendary King Arthur. In the story Adelbriht (Athelwold), "riches hom fu si ert Daneis" (line 48),[25] rules East Anglia and is

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[24] *L'Estoire des Engleis* is preserved in four manuscripts; they are: MS Durham Cathedral Library C. IV. 27 (late twelfth- to early thirteenth-century); Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library 104 (late thirteenth century); London College of Arms Arundel XIV (150) (first quarter of the fourteenth century); British Library, MS Royal 13 A. xxi (last quarter of the thirteenth century or possibly first quarter of the fourteenth century).
[25] "a powerful man and a Dane."

married to the ruler of Lincolnshire's sister, Orwain, with whom he has a daughter, Argentille (Goldeboru). Upon her parents' death, Argentille is put under her uncle's care, Edelsie (Godrich), who marries her off to a young cook, Cuaran, whose real name is later revealed to be Haveloc.[26] Gaimar provides a detailed description of Haveloc, highlighting his attractiveness:

> Cil Cuheram [Haveloc] estait quistrun,
> mes mul part ert bel valetum:
> bel vis aveit e bele[s] mains,
> cors eschevi, süef e plains, -
> li sons semblanz ert tut tens lez -
> beles jambes out e bels piez. (lines 105-10)[27]

Much like the Havelok of ME popular romance, the young cook is stronger than other men, has a gentle nature and seems to be loved by all, including noblemen. Haveloc is also assisted by two men that are later revealed to be Grim's sons, viz., his adoptive brothers who are evidently of inferior rank. Absent from the ME text, this detail serves to highlight the hero's superiority and noble birth, which he remains unaware of until he is (forcibly) married to Argentille. Gaimar's Haveloc is "a markedly royal figure whose nobility has been submerged but not destroyed by his lowly upbringing. (…) At Edelsie's court (...) Havelo[c] is united with the nobles in kindness and generosity" (Staines 604), which seems to imply that true nobility asserts itself even in the most unlikely situations. For the same reason, we believe, Haveloc is careless about his possessions dispensing whatever gifts he can to those around him (like a king should):

> Mes il n'aveit soing de lüers:
> de tant doner com il aveit
> ço lui ert vis ke poi estait;
> e quant il n'aveit ke doner,
> volunters l'alout enprunter,
> puis le donout e despendeit;
> ço k'enpromtout tresben soldout;
> quantk'il aveit trestut dunout,
> mes nule rien ne demandout. (lines 144-52)[28]

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[26] For clarity sake, the characters' names in the ME version of the tale are identified in brackets.

[27] "This Cuaran did menial work in the sculleries, but was an extremely handsome young man: he had a beautiful face and fine hands, a slim body with soft and smooth skin, shapely legs, and delicate feet."

[28] "However, he attached no importance to his own wages, and his view was that it was of no great consequence for him to give away as much as he had. And when he had nothing left to give away, he would be quite willing to

The text suggests there is a connection between nobility of blood and nobility of character as Haveloc's true self is revealed through his generosity. As noted by Helen Cooper, "[i]t is part of the political fantasy of romance that high social rank is both justified and discoverable through innate nobility even when that rank is occluded" (*English Romance* 380). Although Gaimar's text is not considered a romance, it seems the author resorts to the same "political fantasy," to portray this character who grows up unaware of this lineage. Later in the story, when trying to evade the dishonour in which the newlyweds live at Edelsie's court, the couple travels to Grimsby where Haveloc's adoptive sister, Kelloc, reveals his royal ancestry:

> Me celez bien vostre segrei:
> vus fustes a un bon rei;
> Danemarche out par heritage
> si out son pere e son linage
> (…)
> Ço estes vu, sicum jo crei
> Danz Haveloc le fiz le rei. (lines 399-422)[29]

This is another relevant detail in the narrative since the English Havelok grows up aware of his lineage but willingly chooses to work as a "cokes knave" (*Havelok the Dane*, line 1124), despite having to perform tasks below his condition. As a result, there is an obvious difference in character development: Haveloc, called Cuaran by his adoptive family in order to protect him, performs tasks he believes are fit to his rank while the English Havelok completes the same tasks fully aware that they are not. In addition, Gaimar's Danish prince is a more passive individual so, for instance, he goes back to Grimsby because his wife tells him they should and then travels back to Denmark after Kelloc advises him to do so. As a result, his destiny seems to be actively fulfilled not through his own agency but through the actions and decisions made by other characters.

When the hero finally arrives to his native country, despite his noticeable resemblance to the late Danish king Gunter, his father, Haveloc has to fight to prove his worth and protect Argentille from an attempted abduction. It is only after he is able to blow his father's horn that he is acknowledged as the rightful heir. The blowing of the horn test, a scene absent in the ME romance, serves to justify the young man's lineage since only the Danish king or his heir could

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go and take out a loan, and this he would then either give away or spend – though he was always careful to repay his loans. He would give away everything he had, but would make no demands on others."

[29] "But here's a secret you must keep well hidden: by birth you are the son of a king, a legitimate king who, like his father before him and his ancestors, had hereditary rights to Denmark. (...) you, that is, Lord Haveloc, son of the king, as I believe you to be."

perform it. What is more, a magic ring of great power awaits the one able to pass this test, which of course Haveloc successfully does and is immediately recognised by Sigar Estarle, his father's faithful steward and justiciar, as well as the remaining Danish people. After defeating the throne's usurper with the support of forty thousand men, Haveloc is proclaimed king of Denmark and is ready to assist Argentille in her claims to the East Anglian throne. Upon the couple's return to England, a battle against Edelsie ensues and he ends up defeated through a military scheme devised by Argentille whose rightful place as queen of East Anglia is acknowledged. Argentille and Haveloc then rule for twenty years.

At some point in the later half of the twelfth century and the first decades of the thirteenth century an anonymous writer retold the story of a young Danish prince who grew up in England oblivious of his heritage. Little is known about how the story developed from Gaimar's account to the later Anglo-Norman lay, the *Lai d'Haveloc*, so it is unclear whether this narrative is a reworking of Gaimar's text, of a lost source or both. Either way the Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Haveloc* "has habitually been perceived as intermediate between Gaimar's earlier chronicle episode and the late-thirteenth-century Middle English romance" (Field, "Patterns" 78). The lay closely follows the pattern laid out by Gaimar adding a courtly tone to the narrative and employing the Breton lay framework. The anonymous text begins in Denmark where Haveloc's father, King Gunter (Birkabeyn), entrusts his son and wife to one of his loyal barons, Grim, who then travels to England to protect the prince from his father's enemies. As recounted by Gaimar, Haveloc's mother dies in the journey and the prince is raised under the moniker Cuaran by Grim and his family in Grimsby. However, fearing that the small town is not adequate, Grim urges young Haveloc to depart and make himself loved by all.

Haveloc eventually finds employment at Alsi's (Godrich) court which leads to his marriage to Argentille (Goldeboru). Haveloc's strength is again stressed since his wedding to the English princess is always dependent on her guardian's promise to her father that she will marry the hardiest man in the realm. However, as David Staines points out, "[t]he emphasis in the *Lai* falls on Haveloc's role as heir to the throne. Not only does Grim depart from Denmark for Haveloc's safety, but he sends him away from Grimsby because he believes the town is not the proper place for a prince's education" (605). Yet, unlike the other extant versions (both the earlier and the later), in Lincoln, Haveloc's amicable nature does not serve to create a bond between him and the noblemen at court, who mock his naivety and innate goodness. In addition, in this version, Haveloc knows he has a flame that shines from his mouth when he sleeps, thereby showing an awareness the character does not have in other accounts. The remainder of the story follows the overall structure laid out by Gaimar, except for the scene

where Argentille seeks to learn more about the flame that appears in her husband's mouth as he sleeps and visits a hermit who reveals it can only be a sign of royal lineage, which prompts her to urge Haveloc to go back to Grimsby in search of his true family. Although Haveloc remains rather obedient to his wife, in the *Lai d'Haveloc* the prince has become more active and aware of the obligations he has towards his subjects, an idea stressed in the poem by his role as a military leader concerned with the lives of the men he commands into battle first against Hodulf and then against Alsi (Godrich) (Staines 606). In this sense, Havelok's depiction in the lay is closer to what audiences find in the ME romance given that both poems "share a close thematic harmony (…) invest[ing] legality and social order with great importance in the justification of inheritance rights. The hero again carries the destiny of his people and provides them with a sense of common purpose" (Crane, *Insular Romance* 40). Despite the similarities, the presentation of the main male character changes for "[w]hereas Gaimar tried to create precedents for Danish (and by implication foreign) rule in East Anglia, later writers were more interested in the nature of its contribution to the formation of the English nation" (Kleinman 277).

Moving from chronicle to lay to romance, Havelok becomes more in tune with his role as king, participates more actively in plot developments and instigates other characters' physical mobility (in the ME text he is the one who decides to go back to Grimsby with Goldeboru, for instance) as well as social mobility (in *Havelok the Dane* he decides to make his adoptive brothers' noblemen and his sisters' noblewomen by ensuring the latter marry men of high social status). Naturally, there are further differences in the extant written accounts of the tale of Havelok. However, for our present goals there are only three more significant alterations we would like to highlight.

First, the setting. Space and place[30] are, as we shall see, important narrative techniques in the construction of identity in the ME *Havelok the Dane*, so the fact that the poet-narrator chooses to speak of England rather than Britain or East Anglia is significant. It is especially

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[30] Although they seem easy to understand, space and place can be rather difficult terms to define and while "in their 'everyday' use, the two are often used synonymously with terms such as environment, region, location, area and landscape [,] (…) most human geographers have sought to differentiate between them, suggesting that they are related but distinct concepts" (Hubbard 41). Following Hubbard's discussion, we believe space and place are more valuable, for this study at least, when read as concepts "that are both real-and-imagined assemblages constituted via language. As such, the boundaries of place and space are deemed contingent, their seeming solidity, authenticity or permanence a (temporary) achievement of cultural systems of signification that are open to multiple interpretations and readings" (46). In addition, we agree that "space and place are made and remade through networks that involve people, practices, languages and representations[,] (…) [and that] we might usefully conceive of both space and place as constantly becoming, in process and unavoidably caught up in power relations" (47). For a thorough discussion of both concepts, see Hubbard 41-48.

revealing that England is often referred to as a whole rather than several kingdoms under different rulers. As concluded by Thorlac Turville-Petre, "[t]he local descriptions in *Havelok* are particularly memorable, but the English poem differs from Gaimar and the related Anglo-Norman accounts in setting the local scenes within a national framework" (*Nation* 147). Second, there is careful attention paid to the hero's childhood which, as already contended in the previous chapter, is a defining period in Havelok's character formation, actively shaping his adulthood as well as his heroic subjectivity. Third, the hero's body, a sight the audience is frequently drawn to, also features a mark that distinguishes it from its Anglo-Norman counterparts, "a kynmerk" *(Havelok the Dane*, line 605). Besides the flame that comes from the hero's mouth when he sleeps, the cross-shaped birthmark on Havelok's shoulder underscores his exceptional nature and serves to further illustrate his royal destiny.

Finally, in addition to these texts, it is also relevant to keep in mind that, perhaps because of Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engleis*, Havelok's tale was integrated into several chronicles including a short summary in the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* (c. 1272-1300) where the names Gunter and Argentille have already been replaced by Birkabeyn and Goldeboru in some manuscripts. There is also Rauf de Boun's 1310 chronicle, *Le Petit Bruit*; Peter Langtoft's *Chronicle* and its translation found in Robert Manning's *Chronicle*, which we have already addressed; *Castleford's Chronicle*, written in the first half of the fourteenth century; and Henry Knighton's *Chronicle*, written in the late fourteenth century (a translation of Rauf de Boun's text), among others.[31] The numerous references to Havelok found in medieval chronicles, whose authors struggle to include the character in the sequence of English monarchs, might explain why Thorlac Turville-Petre notoriously stated that, "[t]hough we are accustomed to classing *Havelok* as a romance, it would be closer to the medieval view of the work to call it a history. (...) it is clear that *Havelok* was unhesitatingly accepted as a history in the early fourteenth century" ("History of the Nation" 121). However, although it seems likely that early fourteenth-century historiography understood Havelok within a larger pattern of Danish and (or perhaps versus) Anglo-Saxon claims to sovereignty, thereby locating the story in the Anglo-Saxon period (Moll 169), it is clear that:

> The fact that chroniclers struggled to incorporate Havelok's story and lineage into the chronology of British kings attests to a double tendency: to integrate popular romance material into historical narratives, and to fit in with a more general tendency to smooth over the passage of dominion from Anglo-Saxon to Danish rule. (Radulescu, "Genealogy" 18)

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[31] For a complete list of examples, see Moll 165-206.

Moreover, while we can acknowledge that some readers and perhaps chroniclers too might have accepted the historical authority bestowed on Havelok, "the confusing manner in which the story was inserted into history and the multitude of Haveloks available to a late medieval audience sowed the seeds of doubt. The question had not yet been settled by the fifteenth century, at which point a variety of Haveloks could still be found within the *Brut*" (Moll 205). In the previous chapter we argued that the authors of ME popular romance aimed for their narratives to be read as historically accurate and that fiction and history were reinvented throughout the twelfth century, a development that was crucial to the fabrication of "historical illusion." Simultaneously, rhetorical strategies borrowed from chronicles were used in order to confer a sense of authenticity upon romances. Yet, admitting the Havelok-poet has used these strategies does not imply that *Havelok the Dane* is not a romance. The analysis of the text we propose here is based on the premise that *Havelok the Dane* is indeed a romance but one with pseudo-historical ambitions.

There are several reasons for this choice. The first lies primarily in the already established conceptual framework. It is clear that as a text *Havelok the Dane* easily fits "in any conceptualising of English romances" (Field, "Curious History" 39). Equally evident is that the ME *Havelok the Dane* makes use of themes and motifs as well as formulaic patterns traditionally associated with ME popular romance, which is why "[w]here other romances may cause difficulties in classification, *Havelok the Dane* alone represents everything that has been claimed for the Matter of England" (Field, "Curious History" 39). In tandem, it should be noted that most academics who have studied the poem have identified it as a romance, since they "recognize attributes that mark *Havelok* as a romance, invested as it is in the formation of a particular noble social identity" (Couch, "Defiant Devotion" 55), even if, like Robert Rouse, they also recognise this narrative was one of those "available to be read as historical accounts of England's past" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 91). What is more, as argued by Kenneth Sisam, "the *Havelok* story corresponds to no history at all" (xxvi), an idea also supported by Richard Moll's argument which clearly establishes that the variety of 'Haveloks' available would serve to raise some doubts about the authenticity of the narrative. In fact, the scepticism expressed by Robert Manning in his 1338 *Chronicle*, especially on lines 1-8 and 17-18, somewhat confirms that the "seeds of doubt" suggested by Moll were planted. This is not to say that the connection between the ME *Havelok the Dane* and history is to be dismissed. Since fiction and history were reinvented throughout the twelfth century (Ashe, *Fiction and History* 1), the boundaries between these categories were surely more eroded than they are at present. The historical nature of the ME *Havelok the Dane* is indeed emphasised by the many references

made to the story in chronicles and in the narrative, which, as we intend to demonstrate, establishes a strong connection to the English landscape. Finally, we believe that romances can be "understood as fictionalizations of the past rather than as reflecting historical truths" and because of that they "are uniquely able both to avoid the constraints of contemporary historiographies and to open up a [new] discursive space (...)" (Faletra 353).

We will thereby take into account the romance's use of the early medieval past in service of the late medieval present and how its employment of history means that the past can be of great cultural and political use "by appearing in the likeness of the present's own highest values, or conferring legitimation on its structures of power" (Ashe, *Fiction and History* 33). Adding to this point, it should be noted that although *Lai d'Haveloc* is dated to the late twelfth- to the early thirteenth-century, the two surviving manuscripts in which the narrative is found are actually dated to the late thirteenth- and the early fourteenth-century[32] meaning these were roughly being copied at the same time as the ME text. According to Rosalind Field:

> This suggests that the Havelok story was in demand as a result of chronicle treatments, giving rise to two concurrent responses, each typical of the time – the recreation of the material as the expanded and radical Middle English *Havelok the Dane* and at the same time the copying of the traditional treatment in the Lai. Rather than seeing these as aimed at different audiences it may be preferable to treat them as two different generic responses to material which already has a dual generic identity. ("Patterns" 78)

Clearly, there were concurrent productions of the Havelok story being developed throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In fact, the character appears in what modern critics would classify as very different genres: chronicle, lay and romance. Besides these written forms, there were most likely tales about Havelok in oral circulation, which must have held sway over its medieval audience, too. It is at present hard to tell how these different texts communicated with each other and with their audiences, especially because the ME romance is preserved, as far as we know, in only one manuscript, the MS Laud Misc. 108, about which we know so little.

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[32] They are: Cologny-Geneva, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, MS 82 and London, College of Arms, Arundel MS 14, respectively.

5.3. 'Wholly English': The ME *Havelok the Dane*

The ME romance *Havelok the Dane* starts as many other texts: with an *exordium* to the audience. As per usual, the prologue has three main components: the narrator-poet urges the audience to pay attention, offers a formulaic outline of the main character and prays to God.[33] However, from its very beginning, the poet-narrator of the tale attempts to set it apart not only from previous versions of the story, but also from other romances:

> Herkneth to me, gode men -
> Wives, maydnes, and alle men -
> Of a tale that ich you wile telle,
> Wo so it wile here and therto dwelle.
> The tale is of Havelok imaked:
> Whil he was litel, he yede ful naked.
> Havelok was a ful god gome -
> He was ful god in everi trome;
> He was the wicteste man at nede
> That thurte riden on ani stede.
> That ye mowen now yhere,
> And the tale you mowen ylere,
> At the biginnig of ure tale,
> Fil me a cuppe of ful god ale;
> And wile drinken, her I spelle,
> That Crist us shilde alle fro helle.
> Krist late us hevere so for to do
> That we moten comen Him to;
> And, witthat it mote ben so,
> *Benedicamus Domino*!
> Here I schal biginnen a rym;
> Krist us yeve wel god fyn!
> The rym is maked of Havelok -
> A stalworthi man in a flok.
> He was the stalwortheste man at nede
> That may riden on ani stede. (*Havelok the Dane*, lines 1-26)[34]

Described by Julie Nelson Couch as "personal, indignant, [and] empathetic" ("Defiant Devotion" 56), the narrator of *Havelok the Dane* begins by greeting "gode men" and women. His "rym" is directed at "alle men" thereby establishing a wide-ranging audience – "Wo so" (line 4) – where seemingly all, young and old, married or single ("Wives, maydnes", line 2),

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[33] The relevance and structure of the *exordia* have already been analysed in subchapter 2.4., Chapter Two.
[34] Henceforth, all the quotes concerning the romance of Havelok are taken from the ME *Havelok the Dane* unless specifically stated otherwise.

upper or lower estate, are invited to listen to a tale that he will tell them – "ich you wile telle" (line 3) – a claim that "sets up an interdependent relationship between narrator and audience" (Couch, "Defiant Devotion" 63). Quickly, the *you* identified by the storyteller evolves into *us* (line 13 and then again on lines 16-19), creating a communion between the narrative, the storyteller and its listeners or readers. By bringing the audience into the tale, which is after all "ure" (line 13), the narrator establishes a dynamic relationship during which the first will be asked to pray for the protagonists, emotionally engage with their fate and loathe those who oppose them. Ultimately, "the linguistic construction of an elaborated, agential audience from the beginning sets the tone and pace for a poem that draws its forward movement and its emotional energy from the active, emotional investment of this requisite audience" (Couch, "Defiant Devotion" 63)

The narrator also begins by asking the audience to provide him a beverage, "a cuppe of ful god ale" (line 14). While we might presume such request points to a secular or tavern context[35] wherein the narrator simply wants to clear his voice before starting, the reason for such request is made immediately clear: he drinks so that Christ shields *us* from Hell. According to Couch, "[t]he cause-effect grammatical structure invokes a salvific mechanism. Now, *we* – the narrator and audience – are invested not merely in narrating/hearing a tale but also in heavenly salvation" ("Defiant Devotion" 64). This analysis is in line with the rhetorical framework of the *SEL* and the saints' lives that precede the romance in the MS Laud Misc. 108, an idea which is further highlighted by the narrator's prayer on line 20, "*Benedicamus Domino*!" – 'Let us bless the Lord'.

Used as a closing salutation in the Roman Mass, *Benedicamus Domino* is a verse not often found in literature (Herzman, et al. 160) and was to be answered by *Deo Gratias* – 'Thanks (be) to God'. Given the hagiographical nature of the MS. Laud Misc. 108 and how well-known the address was (is), it is very likely that the narrator's audience would offer such a response out loud, though it is not given in the romance. Nevertheless, what this verse does is open up a textual space that highlights how the audience is invited into the "rym['s]" performance and its narrative. What is more, "[t]he liturgical phrase affirms a seriousness of tone (perhaps unexpected and uncomprehended by modern readers), arranging a palimpsest of spiritual practice over the narrator's recounting of the more formulaic, the more expected introduction of a romance hero (…)" (Couch, "Defiant Devotion" 65). Although *Havelok the*

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[35] Dieter Mehl suggests this on pages 166-167 in *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries.*

Dane begins with a formal introduction, following the typical three-part structure, we argue that this is not an entirely conventional *exordium*.

At first, Havelok certainly seems to be introduced in a rather formulaic way: "The tale is of Havelok imaked" – "The tale I compose is about Havelok"[36] (line 5); however, the following line immediately creates a visual image of the hero that is to some extent more unusual, "Whil he was litel, he yede ful naked" (line 6), only to go back to a more customary representation on lines 7 to 10. The fact that the narrator starts by deliberately drawing the public's attention to the hero's youthfulness and frailty, though not unheard of, is surprising, since it helps establish a hero who is not the bold and unwavering knight of a chivalric romance, but one who needs to be saved. The character's vulnerability is emphasised by the reference that he is "ful naked" since nakedness can be employed to indicate exposure and hence convey a sense of fragility and defencelessness. Traditional descriptions made of heroic figures often identify them as men of extraordinary physique, great dexterity and near invincibility; they are the saviours, the rescuers, and time after time they are the problem-solvers. Indeed, the following portrayal (lines 7 to 10) underscores this conventional depiction, resorting to well-known formulas and claiming the hero's superiority above all others. In a sense, Havelok is described both as the 'maiden in distress' and the 'knight in shinny armour' anticipating the hero's portrayal throughout the remainder of the text, as he is depicted as both vulnerable and unbeatable, gentle and strong.

In addition, the hero's bare body takes centre stage on line 6, which will happen several times throughout the narrative. As argued by Aaron Hostetter, "[i]n charting the course from Havelok's exile in infancy, youth of toil, and ultimate reclamation of his inheritance, the romance *never* stops watching his body (…)" (54. Emphasis added). The ME romance seems to be particularly voyeuristic in how it compels the audience to look at the hero's body from the very beginning and throughout. If we consider that the remaining verses of the *exordium* essentially follow a typical structure used in ME romance to introduce the hero, the first detailed shred of information given about Havelok is that he walked around half-naked when he was little, that is, when he was a child. The addition of this detail at the outset of the story signals not only the importance of the hero's childhood, which is portrayed as a period of great vulnerability, but also of his body in the narrative and evokes a particularly striking image, establishing Havelok's figure as a *locus* to be gazed at and a site through which the story will – in part – be developed.

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[36] This verse's translation is proposed by me.

From the outset, the main male character is a conspicuously physical hero whose body and its needs are given special attention. As expected Havelok is identified as the most handsome, "Was non so fayr under God, / That evere yete in erthe were" (lines 973-74), the tallest, "Than was Havelok bi the shuldren more / Than the meste that ther kam (…) / Havelok stod over hem als a mast" (lines 983-87) and the strongest, "In Engelond non hise per / Of strengthe that evere kam him ner" (lines 990-91); furthermore, news of his stature travel wide:

> Ful sone it was ful loude kid
> Of Havelok (…),
> Hw he was fayr, hw he was long;
> Hw he was with, hw he was strong;
> Thoruth England yede the speche,
> Hw he was strong and ek meke;
> In the castel, up in the halle,
> The knithes speken therof alle (lines 1061-69)

Yet, especially at the beginning, Havelok is repeatedly described as being nearly naked all the time (lines: 6; 418; 854; 86l-62; 963; 2132). As a child under Godard's care, he has "feblelike (…) clothes" (line 418), as the young man raised by Grim, he walks around "so naked" (line 884) that his adoptive father decides to make him a cloak out of a sail so he can go to Lincoln mildly covered, but while there he is stated to be "(…) almost naked: / For he ne havede nouth to shride / But a kovel ful unride" (lines 963-65). Such insistence on the hero's exposure serves to highlight his body as a space that is vulnerable to violence (and therefore open to suffering) but also marvellous or *miraculosus* in several ways.

First, Havelok's body is central to the narrative's development as it bears the marks of his unique nature: in the ME romance he has a king's birthmark, "On hise rith shuldre a kynmerk, / A swithe brith, a swithe fair" (lines 605-606), that serves to identify his due place in society and assures all men recognise his lawful, God-ordained right to the throne of Denmark. Often used as a literary strategy, the "distinguishing birthmark (…) always serves the same purpose in romances, i.e., to emphasize the uniqueness and the special destiny of each individual, despite all outward changes of state due to fortune or malice" (Hanning 601). In addition, the cross-shaped imprint on the hero's skin clearly has a divine origin and the fact that it is "of gold red" (line 1263), a colour so "fully aristocratic [that it] was the favourite (…) of great and minor nobility, who valued all things red" (Pastoureau 74), underscores how Havelok's body has been chosen and literally marked by God to rule. Second, Havelok's body displays another differentiating mark given that he also has "a sunnebem" (line 593) that shines

from his mouth when he sleeps. Powerful enough to light a room at night, the ray of light is an explicit Christological symbol (Bell 46) that, when compared to the light coming from wax candles[37] (lines: 594-95; 2124-25), establishes a religious or even a liturgical association between the hero and Christ (Hirsh 18-19). Such associations have been read by critics, like Couch and K. Bell, as symbols of Havelok's Christ-like nature, with Couch suggesting that the validation of Havelok as a rightful heir comes precisely from the character's divine tokens of identity along with his saintly qualities ("Magic of Englishness" 223). However, though this reading fits well into the manuscript context wherein we find the only extant copy of the ME romance, we suggest that the religiously charged symbols imprinted onto the hero's skin are a literary strategy aimed at establishing a romanticised biography of the ideal king who would necessarily have to be a pious man like Athelwold.

Taking into account that medieval romance in general is often concerned with issues of lineage, inheritance and the legitimate passing on of power and lands, it is paramount to identify rightful heirs in unequivocal ways. In the case of *Havelok the Dane* this is particularly crucial for the lives of two peoples, the English and the Danish, are at stake. What better way, then, to distinguish the sole male heir than to have divinely ordained marks inscribed onto his body? Helen Cooper argues that:

> A disputed succession calls for some sign by which the rightful king can be known, whether by magic, miracle, or some recognizable natural or material proof. Its precise metaphysical status matters less than its signification: it must be a sign visibly and demonstrably beyond everyday experience, such as raises the man who bears the mark of it beyond the common run of humanity. (*English Romance* 324)

Perhaps other strategies could be used, but ultimately the marks on Havelok's figure, which are intrinsically a part of who he is, that is, a hero-king, serve to prove there is a divine order that endorses him and by extension the social hierarchy he represents. The ME romance, focused as it is in telling the story of lost heirs and the recovery of their crowns, seems to suggest that only the rightful king can be a good king and vice-versa. As a result, when royal succession is interrupted by tyrants like Godrich and Godard, undoubtful proof of who the legitimate monarch is becomes necessary. Perhaps for this reason, Havelok's body must enclose hints to his noble birth, which confirm and attest his right to sovereignty. Furthermore,

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[37] Traditionally linked to Christ's purity and divinity until the late Middle Ages, wax candles were used for Mass as well as other liturgical ceremonies.

the marks advance the hero's progress, as their recognition signals different stages of Havelok's journey toward maturity and the concurrent recovery of his lawful place in society.

The audience is made aware of Havelok's exceptional physical traits at three specific times. The first is the night when Grim and his wife Leve prepare to drown the child Havelok at Gordard's command:

> She saw therinne a lith ful shir,
> Al so brith so it were day,
> Aboute the knave ther he lay.
> Of hise mouth it stod a stem
> Als it were a sunnebem;
> Al so lith was it therinne
> So ther brenden cerges inne.
> "Jesu Crist!" wat Dame Leve,
> "Hwat is that lith in ure cleve?
> Ris up, Grim, and loke wat it menes!
> Hwat is the lith, as thou wenes?"
> He stirten bothe up to the knave
> For man shal god wille have,
> Unkeveleden him and swithe unbounden,
> And sone anon him funden,
> Als he tirveden of his serk,
> On hise rith shuldre a kynmerk,
> A swithe brith, a swithe fair. (lines 589-606)

Always employed together, the cross-shaped birthmark and the light from Havelok's mouth make men and women acknowledge his rightful social position, prompting Grim's prophetic visions of the future (lines 607-15) and later an angel's announcement that reveals to Goldeboru her husband is in fact meant to become the ruler of Denmark and England (lines 1266-75). In both episodes, though perhaps more straightforwardly in the second, divine intervention is at work in the characters' recognition of Havelok's identity and their subsequent change. The first, Grim, is initially chosen by Godard to murder the young prince at sea – a charge Grim and his wife Leve seemingly accept without much questioning:

> And [Grim] seyde, "Wite thou this knave,
> Al so thou wit mi lif save!
> I shal dreinchen him in the se;
> For him shole we ben maked fre,
> Gold haven ynow and other fe:
> That havet mi louerd bihoten me."

> Hwan Dame Leve herde that,
> Up she stirte and nouth ne sat,
> And caste the knave so harde adoun
> That he crakede ther his croune (lines 560-69)

Enticed by Godard's promise of freedom and great riches, Grim and Leve's treatment of Havelok, who would not have been more than three years old, is cruel and uncaring. They tightly bind and gag him, violently throw him on the floor, breaking his head and heartlessly prepare to drown him. It is only when they witness the beam of light coming out of the child's mouth and notice the cross on his shoulder that a profound change happens. While Grim's vision of Havelok's future is a significant moment, as divine intervention assures the audience that this is a tale of loss and recovery, the emotional impact of the scene is equally important. Grim cries and throws himself at the boy's feet, acknowledging his inferiority and pledging him and his wife to Havelok (lines 616-32). This scene is then followed by the first of six feasts in the romance, which "is the first concrete sign that Havelok has stepped back from the brink of death" (Hanning 596). This sequence of events effectively changes the emotional tone surrounding the prince's (mis)adventures, turning Grim into a loving father whose great concern for his adoptive "sone" (line 661) prompts him to leave Denmark with Leve and their five biological children: Roberd the Rede, Wiliam Wenduth, Huwe Raven, Gunnild and Levive. The journey to England is another pivotal episode in the tale, which will be addressed shortly, but what we would like to point out at this stage is the impact Havelok's marks have on the characters' *affectus.* It appears that glimpsing at the king's mark on Havelok's shoulder and seeing the light coming out of his mouth causes an emotional shift in the characters. This is notorious in Grim and his family – who become loving and devoted allies to the hero and his cause, effectively advancing it and, in a way, ensuring Havelok's success – and in Goldeboru herself.

Presented as the sole heir of the English king Athelwold, Goldeboru's story of neglect and treason mirrors that of Havelok. Like the male protagonist, she too is superior to others in beauty, chastity, wiseness and bravery, but, unlike Havelok, she is never willing to relinquish her right to her father's kingdom. Quite the reverse, Goldeboru unceasingly reiterates her royal lineage, refusing to marry below her station:

> She answerede and saide anon,
> By Crist and bi Seint Johan,
> That hire sholde noman wedde
> Ne noman bringen hire to bedde

> But he were king or kinges eyr,
> Were he nevere man so fayr. (lines 1112-17)

Her sex prevents Goldeboru from engaging in direct battle with Godrich, a role that will be fulfilled by Havelok, as well as from ascending to the throne unmarried, so her refusal is swiftly dismissed by Godrich who seeks to sit his own son on the throne despite never attempting to marry him to the princess.[38] The main characters' marriage is posed as an act that seeks to undermine Godeboru's right to the English throne and effectively disavow her and her descendants of any claims to the crown. The audience, though, remains fully aware that Havelok and Goldeboru are quite literally a match made in heaven and marrying the Danish youth will have the opposite effect. Yet, such is not Goldeboru's stance as, after leaving Lincoln to seek shelter with Havelok's adopted family in Grimsby, she feels "sory and sorwful (…) / For she wende she were biswike / That she were yeven unkyndelike" (lines 1249-51). The sight of Havelok's royal traits as well as the revelation told by an angel quickly change her mind about her marriage, but it also induces a change of heart: "She was so fele sithes blithe / That she ne mithe hire joie mythe, / But Havelok sone anon she kiste" (lines 1278-80). The sudden shift in Goldeboru's feelings towards Havelok might be justified by her realisation that she will be queen in spite of Godrich's efforts. However, she did not need to become so quickly devoted to her husband as she does. Although Havelok and Goldeboru's union can hardly be seen as an example of courtly love, on the contrary it seems to be a more practical marriage that secures, sustains and endorses social order as well as claims of inheritance and family stability, the affection between them is genuine. What is more, it seems to steam from the episode of the discovery of Havelok's "destiny marks."[39] Therefore, these episodes serve not only to advance the hero's path to sovereignty, but also provide the emotional support that enables that journey to be completed while contributing to the hero's maturity process.

The third revelation, or discovery, episode takes place in Denmark after Havelok, Goldeboru and his three adoptive brothers are attacked by a group of sixty-one outlaws who seek to do them harm (lines 1766-1919).[40] Seeing the group's display of prowess and moved

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[38] This is one of the inconsistencies found in the plot. If Godrich wished his son to be king, why not marry him to Goldeboru and seal the union between his heir and Athelwold's daughter? All in all, this seems like a much easier solution but it is never addressed in the text.

[39] The expression "destiny marks" to identify Havelok's unique physical traits is taken from Hanning 594.

[40] The provenance of the outlaws and their aims are somewhat unclear in the text. A connection might be established between the sixty men Ubbe sends to the watchman's place along with Bernard Brun (lines 1746-51) to supposedly guard Havelok and Goldeboru whose beauty is such that it poses a threat to those she is with. While the sixty strong men seemingly vanish from the narrative, sixty-one opponents appear in their place, suggesting that, despite Lord Ubbe's words of kindness and affection towards Havelok and Goldeboru, he may be the one who orchestrated the attack. However, at no point in the text is this acknowledged by the narrator or the characters.

by an alleged great love for Havelok and Goldeboru, Ubbe offers them shelter, a room adjoining his own where the couple and the hero's siblings would be well-guarded from those who might wish to harm them (lines 2072-85). It is at night that Ubbe sees the gleam coming from Havelok's mouth and calls upon "(…) arwe men and kene, / Knithes and serganz swithe sleie" (lines 2115-16) to witness the marvel, which will lead to the discovery of the birthmark and Havelok's subsequent identification as king Birkabeyn's lost son. However, Ubbe's emotional response to this revelation is much more contained than those of Grim and Goldeboru, as he does not seem to care more for the young man after knowing his lineage. Ubbe had taken a liking to Havelok and Goldeboru quickly after meeting them and even before the feast that takes place in his castle starts, Ubbe is:

> (…) blithe of mod
> That he saw him so fayr and hende;
> Fro him ne mithe his herte wende,
> Ne fro him, ne fro his wif -
> He lovede hem sone so his lif.
> Weren non in Denemark that him thouthe
> That he so mikel love mouthe.
> More he lovede Havelok one
> Than al Denemark, bi mine wone. (lines 1703-11)

Ubbe's immediate fondness towards the hero seems to anticipate any knowledge of his lineage, which reinforces the idea that nobility is innate. It may also signal that, even unknowingly, Ubbe recognises something of Birkabeyn in Havelok and so cares for him like he cared for his father. However, the truthfulness of Ubbe's great love for Havelok might be in doubt throughout and after the assault perpetrated against the prince, his wife and siblings, but the narrator assures the audience that it is honest, "bi mine wone" (line 1711), a statement that further highlights the confusing nature of the attack on the protagonists.

In addition, though Ubbe, too, foresees that Havelok will become king of Denmark (line 2178), his speech seems less like a prophesy and more a plausible assumption. The reasons for a change in the literary technique used before and after the revelation scenes can only be inferred, but it might be related to the point where Havelok is in the narrative. Earlier, as an infant with Grim, Havelok could hardly have been able to convince the fisherman to acknowledge him as the future king and after marrying Goldeboru such claims would have

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Ubbe's motives for planning such an attack also remain elusive and no clear-cut reason is provided when it comes to why he would want to kill or harm the protagonists. The scene may alternatively be understood as a test to the hero's strength and prowess in battle.

lacked substantiation as well since no one could confirm them. Greater divine intervention is thereby needed and both episodes feature very similar prophecies. However, when Havelok returns to Denmark with his adoptive brothers, he is in a very different position. Not only is the hero accompanied by allies who are already aware of and have recognised his ancestry, but he has also married the heir to the English throne and has overall come to terms with his identity to the point that he "nevere hwil ich lyve / Ben glad til that ich Denemark se!" (lines 1439-40). Going home to Denmark becomes of paramount importance to the young hero, which has to do with the dream-vision he has after returning to Grimsby with Goldeboru:

> And [Havelok] seide [to Goldeboru], "Lemman, slepes thou?
> A selkuth drem dremede me now –
>
> Herkne now what me haveth met.
> Me thouthe I was in Denemark set,
> But on on the moste hil
> That evere yete cam I til.
> It was so hey that I wel mouthe
> Al the werd se, als me thouthe.
> Als I sat upon that lowe
> I bigan Denemark for to awe,
> The borwes and the castles stronge;
> And mine armes weren so longe
> That I fadmede al at ones,
> Denemark with mine longe bones;
> And thanne I wolde mine armes drawe
> Til me and hom for to have,
> Al that evere in Denemark liveden
> On mine armes faste clyveden;
> And the stronge castles alle
> On knes bigunnen for to falle -
> The keyes fellen at mine fet.
> Another drem dremede me ek:
> That ich fley over the salte se
> Til Engeland, and al with me
> That evere was in Denemark lyves
> But bondemen and here wives;
> And that ich com til Engelond -
> Al closede it intil min hond,
> And, Goldeborw, I gaf thee.
> Deus! lemman, what may this be?" (lines 1284-1313)

According to Aaron Hostetter, a dream-vision "in medieval literature represents a type of knowledge that is not governed by reason or logic – it is spontaneous and revelatory" (69). In this scene, which is not paralleled in any of the previous versions, Havelok looks down on

Denmark, its immense landscape (lines 1290-91) and embraces towns and strong castles (line 1294) as well as all who have ever lived in that land (line 1300). Holding land and people tight, Havelok "comprehends his realm in relation to himself. (…) his body symbolically united with the earth that forms his rightful inheritance" (Hostetter 71). At this point, the hero is able to acknowledge all of Denmark as his while (metaphorically) the land recognises its legitimate monarch, swiftly surrendering to his embrace (lines 1302-04), which is why "[t]he act is somatic and performative, and most importantly, it is consensual" (Hostetter 71). The eagerness and reciprocity of the parties involved in this embrace, monarch and land, is crucial, serving to establish contrast and similarity to other sovereigns.

Firstly, it is clear the union of land and king in Havelok's dream-vision reinforces how Godrich and Godard's rule is non-consensual, which emphasises their identity as abusers and tyrants. Indeed, the poet describes how both take possession of the realms of England and Denmark, respectively, by force and fear. Of Godrich the narrator claims that:

> Sothlike, in a lite thrawe
> Al Engelond of him stod awe –
> Al Engelond was of him adrad,
> So his the beste fro the gad. (lines 276-79)

Like the beast (here possibly meaning cattle) fears the prod, so the English people grow fearful of the Earl of Cornwall who is then able to do what he will "[f]ro Dovere into Rokesborw" (line 265) or, in other words, in the whole of England. Godard's takeover in Denmark is even more brutal as he immediately seizes king Birkabeyn's children, locking them away in a castle without proper food or clothing. With the rightful heirs swiftly hidden, he is able to force the Danish, "[r]iche and poure, lef and loth" (line 440), into submission and "havede of al the lond" (line 437) in his hands. Godard's wickedness, more so than Godrich's, is further established by the narrator's continuous reproaches: like Godrich he is called a wicked Judas (line 425), but on top of that he is the greatest traitor, "the moste swike" (line 423), and described as a devil from hell (line 446). What is more, he completely disregards the oaths he made to protect the royal siblings (line 419) and plots to kill them (line 443-44) shortly after Birkabeyn's death (line 408). These specific details also show that Godrich and Godard, though both traitors and usurpers, are different: Godrich sends Goldeboru away, but the narrator does not mention that the princess is starved at such a young age. Likewise, Godrich does not forget his promise to Athelwold, that is, that he should marry the English king's daughter to "[t]he beste man that micthe live – / The beste, fayreste, the strangest ok" (lines 199-200). Instead, he twists around

the oath he made to his advantage, forcing Goldeboru to wed a man who has these characteristics but who Godrich believes is a "thral" (line 1098). Murdering the English heiress as a baby also never seems to cross his mind. A contrast between Godrich and Godard is thereby established by the narrator and while both will be sentenced to death for their crimes, the latter's punishment is noticeably more gruesome, a fact that is one of the means through which English identity is affirmed and distinguished from the Danish.[41]

Secondly, Havelok's love and close physical connection to the land mirrors that of the two great kings who precede him, the English king Athelwold and the hero's father, Birkabeyn, the Danish monarch. Despite not taking centre stage in the ME *Havelok the Dane*, the two sovereigns are crucial to the plot and along with Havelok serve as vehicles to establish one of the main themes in the romance: the legitimate heir is the good king or, in this case, the legitimate heirs are the good monarchs. Like Cooper points out:

> (…) romances that tell the story of lost heirs and their recovery of their kingdoms are the clearest example of the objective of romance to promote the well-being of the realm, the common wele. (...) their insistence on presenting models of good rulers, and their tendency to equate tyranny with a false claim to the crown, both promote the idea that the rightful king is also the good king. Prowess in battle, faithfulness in marriage (a consistent element of English romance, for men as much as for women), due reward of his followers, firm rule in accordance with the law, and keeping his word, all mark a kingship that carries the approval of God and the goodwill of the people. (*English Romance* 340)

Embodying all the traits identified by Cooper, Athelwold, Birkabeyn and Havelok become idealised representations of the "good king" adding to the fiction that the rightful monarch will rule well. In addition, the descriptions made of Athelwold and Birkabeyn's reigns contribute to ground the narrative in a peaceful golden age, which, for England, the narrator implies is the period before the Norman Conquest. Finally, the account given of both kings sets up and foreshadows that of their heirs who "both duplicate and extend their parents' lives" (Crane, *Insular Romance* 42).

After the *exordium*, the narrator focuses his attention, not on Denmark, but on England, starting his tale by telling of an English king of earlier days (line 27) whose name was Athelwold (line 106). Nevertheless, before this great monarch is identified, there are about 80 verses that solely describe the exceptional nature of Athelwold's rule: he makes good laws (line 28), is loved by all the people (lines 30-34) and loves God with all his strength (line 35); under

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[41] The distinction and contrast made between the two nations will be analysed further ahead.

his leadership thieves, traitors and all kinds of outlaws are prosecuted and hanged (lines 39-44), so much so that the poet-narrator declares that:

> In that time a man that bore
> Wel fifty pund, I wot, or more,
> Of red gold upon hiis bac,
> In a male with or blac,
> Ne funde he non that him misseyde,
> Ne with ivele on hond leyde.
> Thanne micthe chapmen fare
> Thuruth Englond wit here ware,
> And baldelike beye and sellen,
> Overal ther he wilen dwellen -
> In gode burwes and therfram
> Ne funden he non that dede hem sham,
> That he ne weren sone to sorwe brouth,
> And pouere maked and browt to nouth.
> Thanne was Engelond at hayse -
> Michel was swich a king to preyse
> That held so Englond in grith! (lines 45-61)

Resorting to the motif of the safety of the king's roads, or more broadly the peace of the roads, a traditional formula used to describe a peaceful kingdom (Bennett 381), the poet-narrator "equates the strength of a lord's rule with the degree of safety afforded to those who travel" (Rouse, "Peace of the Roads" 116). The employment of this motif also seems to operate as a sign of Athelwold's authority, since it is a key element "in the depiction of the royal authority of the figures to which it is attached, signifying this authority through the practical implications of the act of maintaining such a peace" (Rouse, "Peace of the Roads" 123). What is more, according to Rouse, "the appearance of the motif of the 'peace of the roads'" can be explained "as being part of a rhetorical strategy of appropriating the language and motifs of chronicle in an attempt to provide the romances with a veneer of historical authenticity" ("Peace of the Roads" 123). As a result, the narrator is effectively painting a flawless portrait of Athelwold as the ideal king, who:

> As his country's political head (...) is a stern and hard monarch; he is both the wise king who creates good laws and the strict monarch who enforces them. By his legislation, he returns his country to a state of prelapsarian perfection. Thieves and traitors meet their deaths through his fervent and faultless justice. (…) Athelwold's justice and legislation are complemented by his generosity; to the poor and the needy his home is always open. (Staines 611)

Athelwold's England, therefore, becomes "an idealized medieval state in which equity and good order are maintained by a stern but just monarch who enforces his laws with impartial rigour, earning the respect and love of all classes" (Barron 71). The good rule of the law is another important theme in *Havelok the Dane*'s narrative that significantly contributes to construct English identity in the text.

Described as "truly a romance of the law" (Crane, *Insular Romance* 48), *Havelok the Dane* mirrors late medieval English society's interest in the Anglo-Saxon legal past, lending a hand to "the idea of the Anglo-Saxon past as a Golden Age of the Law" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 94). Linked to the rule of a legitimate monarch who acts within the boundaries of the law and conceived as a distinctively English period, this concept started being developed as early as the twelfth century and is employed by the narrator as part of a literary strategy that aims to set the narrative in pre-Conquest England. By doing so, he is justifying the legitimacy of the rules of government laid out by Athelwold since, in the Middle Ages, laws had to be old to be good and vice-versa; as Kern argues, "law must be 'old' law and must be 'good' law. Mediaeval law could dispense with the sanction of the State, but not with the two qualities of Age and Goodness" (149). In this ME romance, interest in legal matters is mostly seen in the descriptions made of king Athelwold's reign, in the legal claims of the child-heirs and in the trials set up to judge Godard and Godrich's crimes against the royal couple and their kingdoms.

As we have seen, *Havelok the Dane* virtually starts with an account of Athelwold, revealing how "in his time were gode lawes" (line 28). The English king's love of the rule of law is key and highlights that "the peace that the king establishes throughout England is born of a respect for law, and the equitable application of this law among all his subjects, regardless of age or status" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 101). The beginning of the romance thereby sets a particular mood for the remainder of the narrative, which continuously emphasises the importance of respecting lawful inheritance rights and what the consequences of not doing so may be. As a result, the "familiar question of inheritance rights (…) expands to a comprehensive interest in legality as it affects all of society. Many passages emphasize that all ranks are bound, both theoretically and effectively, by good or evil rule" (Crane, *Insular Romance* 48). As Havelok and Goldeboru's rights are stressed and understood within a particular legal framework, that of Anglo-Saxon England, those who have sought to harm and dispossess them must be punished accordingly. However, because the good ruler is the one who both enforces and follows the law, the traitors Godard and Godrich are not simply dealt

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with in the field of battle but are instead judged by parliaments[42] that act in place of their victims throughout society. The final verdict in the two cases is death but how it is delivered varies, highlighting key differences between Denmark and England and inviting the audience to compare their legal systems and their peoples.

The first usurper to be judged in the ME romance is Godard, whose propensity to violence is met with equal force. After being captured by "the kinges [Havelok's] men" (line 2430), he is tightly bound and thrown on a mare with his nose turned back into its behind (lines 2436-52), an act that would have been deemed humiliating and particularly degrading as it is implied that Godard's nose is pressed against the animal's buttocks. Taken to king Havelok, the traitor is judged by "Hise erles and hise barouns alle, / Dreng and thein, burgeis and knith" (lines 2465-66) who decide he will be flayed alive, dragged by the streets and hanged with a sign stating:

> 'This is the swike that wende wel
> The king have reft the lond ilk del,
> And hise sistres with a knif
> Bothe refte here lif.' (lines 2476-87)

In naming the greatest crimes committed by Godard, and the reasons why he met such a brutal fate, the poet-narrator chooses to recall the murder of Havelok's sisters, an act that seems to be as relevant to the verdict as his usurpation of the Danish throne, which inevitably suggests that some form of revenge is also being enacted.[43] In fact, despite Godard's cries for mercy (line 2501), Havelok remains silent when the sentence laid out by the parliament of men he summoned (line 2475) is carried out. Perhaps in a different text, telling the audience about the Danes' decision would have been sufficient, but in what might be a reflection of ME popular literature's "sensationalist taste for (...) violence" (McDonald 1) or a "consistent trend [for

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[42] According to Conor McCarthy, "While kings had always sought the counsel and consent of the leading lords of the realm in political matters, the idea of parliament, a body representative of a broader political community, was an innovation of the thirteenth century. An initial impetus may perhaps be seen in the writs of King John, issued at moments of crisis in 1212 and 1213, summoning representatives from each county to join him at a specified location. The word 'parliament' itself was first used to describe a representative assembly in 1237. Parliaments were attended by the great lords, sacred and secular, each of whom received an individual summons to attend, and by the representatives of the commons, elected for each county and borough. Parliament's business was in three areas: war, and business related to the king and the royal family; the common business of the realm such as judgments and legislation; and the private petitions of members, relating either to individual or collective grievances. The most usual business of parliament came to be assent to taxation, increasingly important in state finance during the fourteenth century" (168-69).

[43] Eleanor Parker notes that, despite often overlooked, the revenge motif "is fundamental to the movement of the story between England and Denmark and central to both Havelok's growth to adult maturity and to his relationship with Goldburh" (440).

excessively violent executions] in Middle English romances" (Tracy 144), Godard's punishment is described in gruesome detail:

> Sket cam a ladde with a knif
> And bigan rith at the to
> For to ritte and for to flo;
> And he bigan tho for to rore
> So it were grim or gore,
> That men mithe thethen a mile
> Here him rore, that fule file!
> The ladde ne let nowith forthi,
> They he criede, "Merci! Merci!"
> That ne flow him everil del
> With knif mad of grunden stel.
> Thei garte bringe the mere sone,
> Skabbed and ful ivele o bone,
> And bunden him rith at hire tayl
> With a rop of an old seyl
> And drowen him unto the galwes,
> Nouth bi the gate but over the falwes,
> And henge him thore bi the hals -
> Datheit hwo recke: he was fals! (lines 2493-2511)

Admitting that Godard's trial equals a reinstitution of law and correct rule, the thorough description of Godard's skinning along with the narrator's chastising anyone who might feel sympathy for him, "Datheit hwo recke" (line 2511), seems to evoke the image of a medieval society wherein sadistic and unnecessary violence is common. Although this depiction is in line with the portrayal of the Middle Ages as a period during which people could be subjected to cruel torment for no reason, a rendering that has become a dominant myth (Tracy 1), "torture was neither wholly accepted nor celebrated by medieval audiences or authors as a means of enacting justice" (Tracy 20). Despite not being a common motif in secular literature, since on the whole medieval romance seldom contains graphic accounts like the one found in the scene above, during the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries torture started to appear more frequently; at the same time, a notion of a distinct English identity began taking centre stage (Speed 136; Tracy 134). Larrisa Tracy suggests the reason for this has to do with the fact that English authors sought to distance themselves, and by extension the English community, from other societies which, because of their use of torture, became equated with barbarian lands and corrupt authorities (134). Consequently:

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> Torture may be used more freely as a literary motif in English texts specifically because torture was not part of English law. English authors could more vocally condemn its use, claim national autonomy from such practices and take pride that England's traditions were grounded in a more just Anglo-Saxon past. (Tracy 134)

From this perspective, the somewhat macabre execution enacted by the Danish serves to underscore their otherness and establishes the legal (and civilisational) superiority of the English, who will judge the traitor Godrich in a similar parliament, but without resorting to bloodshed or a public spectacle of torture (lines 2818-41). What is more, after Goldeboru and Havelok return to England to reclaim the first's right to the throne, upon seeing his great military prowess, Havelok makes Godrich an offer of peace:

> '(...)
> Godrich the erl, (…)
> Do nu wel withuten fiht
> Yeld hire [Goldeboru] the lond, for that is rith.
> Wile ich forgive thee the lathe,
> Al mi dede and al mi wrathe,
> For I se thu art so with
> And of thi bodi so god knith.' (lines 2715-21)

Willing to forgive the many deaths he has caused, Havelok demands only that the Earl of Cornwall returns the land he has unlawfully taken from Goldeboru, a kindness he never bestows upon his fellow countryman Godard and which Godrich rejects (line 2722). After defeating the Cornish usurper, Havelok sends him to England's true heir, Goldeboru (line 2760), effectively yielding the right to judge him to Athelwold's daughter who commands he must be guarded, neither beaten nor subjected to shame, before he is sentenced by his peers (lines 2762-65). Once again, a substantial difference in treatment is perceived, suggesting the rule of law in England is stronger (Speed 152) or at least more civilised. To the six earls that will trial Godrich, Havelok asks that they judge him rightly, "Lokes that ye demen him rith, / For dom ne spareth clerk ne knith" (lines 2812-13). Despite being married to Goldeboru, at this point Havelok does not have the legal authority to trial the Earl of Cornwall for he has not yet received the fealty of the English, so "he appears to be appealing to the innate sense of the rule and procedure of law that seems to be present in England – in contrast to Denmark, where law needs to be imposed from above, or perhaps from without" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 104). Furthermore, Havelok's statement evokes the "gode lawes" (line 28) of Athelwold's reign and the importance of their enforcement among all subjects, no matter their age or status.

In the end, while at first the trials of Godrich and Godard seem to follow a very similar process, a closer analysis reveals the poem presents a "construction of English legal space" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 102) that ultimately serves to distinguish and ennoble English identity for:

> In subjecting Godard to more gruesome torments there is a clear delineation between Havelok as a Dane and Goldeboru as an English ruler, potentially drawing on English fears of foreign invasion in portraying the Danish process as more prone to violence or acknowledging cultural anxieties concerning the chronicle accounts of Danish raiders (…). (Tracy 151)

The differentiation between the two nations can be noted earlier on and if we are to compare the portrayal of Athelwold's reign with that of Birkabeyn's, the first is distinguished by its reliance on and maintenance of the good rule of law. In fact, of Birkabeyn, the narrator simply states that:

> In that time, so it bifelle,
> Was in the lond of Denemark
> A riche king and swythe stark.
> The name of him was Birkabeyn;
> He havede mani knict and sweyn;
> He was fayr man and wict,
> Of bodi he was the beste knicth
> That evere micte leden uth here,
> Or stede on ride or handlen spere. (lines 339-47)

Because the ME *Havelok the Dane* follows a double-plot structure, it is clear Birkabeyn's rule is intended to be a mirror of that of his English counterpart, so "[e]ach king provides a model of rulership that fosters social and political stability in their respective realms and functions to the continuance of the 'office' of monarch when the king dies" (Herzman, et al. 75). Likewise, the prematurely dead monarchs serve as role models to the main couple, though we would argue this is more obviously seen in Havelok for whom "the similarity between father and son, expressed in physical likeness and noble attributes, becomes a crucial structural element (...) through the language of emulation and identification and also through the revenge quest (…)" (Lim 24).[44] Moreover, the pairing of Birkabeyn's death with Athelwold's at the beginning of

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[44] On this issue Gary Lim adds that "descriptions of fatherhood would have held the interest of a medieval aristocratic audience as the father-son relation gained importance during the High Middle Ages as the basis of patrilineal inheritance by primogeniture. (…) father-son relation took precedence over all other familial relationships and became increasingly concerned with the extension of lineage and guarding the integrity of

the narrative serves as the first hint that Havelok's future rule is associated with that of the late English king with whom he shares numerous traits, such as generosity, selflessness and a love of justice.

Taking this into account, we must also acknowledge that despite the monarchs' similarities "Denmark is constructed as a legal vacuum" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 104) when compared to England. Perhaps for this reason the justice enacted by the English is more restrained and, in a sense, more temperate for their laws are rooted in time and because of it they are 'good laws'. The Danish, on the other hand, lack laws of ancient provenance so the punishment carried out is immoderate, more violent and ruthless – an image that seems to coincide with the frequent descriptions of Viking raids found in chronicles[45] and of which Godrich makes use to convince the English to fight against Havelok and his army (lines 2576-91). The fact that Godard's punishment is carried out with the consent of the Danish nobility might also be understood as a sign of the bloodthirsty inheritance of the Danish from which their descendants on English land, in particular the Anglo-Scandinavian population of Lincolnshire, must separate themselves in order to forge a new English identity (Tracy 145).

In the ME *Havelok the Dane* this idea is conveyed through its main male protagonist in particular who, as the title of the romance implies, is a Dane but is neither entirely so, nor is he entirely English. Instead, the character and his "growth and development (...) into the kind of king Athelwold represents" (Staines 612) become vehicles through which issues of identity and nation, among others, are reflected upon. Moreover, while we agree that "Havelok's straddling of Danish and English identities ironically enables him to attain the double kingship" (Faletra 371) and that, therefore, he is "a cultural hybrid-figure who both manifests and facilitates the union of the two nations" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 105), it is clear the poet's main focus lies in England and in developing an imagined group identity linked to the Anglo-Saxon period which is in turn connected with the Danish settlements that occurred during that time. In his essay "The Ends of Romance: Dreaming the Nation in *Havelok the Dane*," Michael Faletra suggests that "Havelok becomes king of England not in spite of his being Danish but because, according to the economy of the story, Havelok's very Danishness consolidates the status of 'Engelond' and Englishness as stable and usable concepts" (348).

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inheritance (...). [In addition,] anxieties regarding the stability of the father-son relationship surface in the plots of many Middle English romances, where the disruption of the relationship is the source of dramatic tension" (23).

[45] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, for instance, describes one of the first raids perpetrated by Danes in 973 in England in the Convent of Lindisfarne as being preceded by a great storm with "immense sheets of light rushing through the air, and whirlwinds, and fiery dragons flying across the firmament" – a possible hint of the dark days to come. Soon after, on the "sixth day before the ides of January in the same year, the harrowing inroads of heathen men made lamentable havoc in the church of God in Holy-island, by rapine and slaughter."

Because defining the nation always involves a process of inclusion and exclusion (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 1), Havelok's alterity and Denmark's role as England's doppelgänger accentuate the cultural and legal values of the latter, ultimately serving to strengthen English individuality and communicating "a sense of history, a diversity of people together involved in the actions of just kings and faithless lords" (Turville-Petre, "History of the Nation" 133).

As a result, when analysing the text, we must also consider that the ME *Havelok the Dane* is deeply intertwined with Lincolnshire where a stable population of partly Scandinavian origin fostered a strong sense of a separate cultural heritage (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 143). To the population residing in the region, who preserved the memory of their Danish heritage, the discourse often found in English chronicles, which present Vikings as invaders, Cnut and his sons as foreign kings and Danes as aliens, would have been unsatisfactory, to say the least. According to Turville-Petre, after the Great Army invaded England in 865, Viking settlement happened on a massive scale in different parts of the country, but nowhere more than in north Lincolnshire where secondary settlement brought farmers who occupied previously deserted sites and marginal lands (*England the Nation* 152). In time, these Vikings settlers would become integrated into English early medieval society. H. R. Loyn argues that "[t]he first three-quarters of the tenth century saw the golden period of West Saxon monarchy. The Danes, settled in eastern Mercia and East Anglia, submitted to Edward the Elder, Alfred's son. His son, Athelstan (…) exercised a virtual imperium over most of the island. (...) under Edgar the Peaceful, 959-75, the authority of the West Saxon king was exercised on Wessex itself, English Mercia and the whole of the so-called Danelaw (…)" (54). Furthermore, while "[t]he nature of the Scandinavian settlements varied from region to region in the Danelaw[,] (...) when it came to settlement, one general feature of a distinctly unexpected nature stands out: there was apparently no major displacement of existing population. Where the Dane or Norwegian settled, they supplemented rather than superseded the existing community" (Loyn 55). Therefore, "it does appear that one collective identity of Englishness had an enduring currency through the pre-Conquest period, transcending the significant separation brought about by the existence of a multiplicity of different political organisations and ethnic groups among the Anglo-Saxons" (Foot 49).

Accordingly, the hero's ethnic origin may not only serve to "consolidate the status of England" (Faletra 348) but also to address the specific concerns of the Anglo-Danish by presenting – through Havelok – a revisionist view of the Danes as a people that actively contributed to bring peace, justice and union to the land. Regarding this point, the fact that

Havelok's reign is one founded on the rule of law is especially important, since his succession to the English throne is justified by his marriage to Goldeboru who is repeatedly called Athelwold's "eyr" (lines: 110; 1096; 2805) and "the rithe eyr" (lines: 289; 2769). The narrator's continuous emphasis on Goldeboru's legitimate claim to the throne may very well serve to underscore Havelok's lawful right to rule in England, opposing him to the historical Danish king Cnut who ruled from 1016-1035. Although his union to the English princess is not the only reason why Havelok will become a good king, their legitimate marriage is pivotal to establishing "the integration of the Danes into the fabric of English identity as part of the English 'national stock'" (Tracy 149). However, the narrative does not imply the opposite is true. The narrator-poet's interest is so fixated on England that any issues related to the Danish nation, such as the effects of having a monarch who has spent more time immersed in a(n Anglo-Saxon) culture different from their own or the political impact of Havelok's decision to allow Ubbe to rule in his place while he remains in Winchester,[46] are ignored.

The pivotal importance of England is first confirmed by the very manuscript in which the sole copy of the ME *Havelok the Dane* is found. We have already established that MS Laud Misc. 108 as a whole has a nationalistic undertone that reveals a vision of a single community across English territory. To this point, we would like to add that in the case of the specific text under study, the folio on which it begins (Figure 2) provides a visual reinforcement of the manuscript and the text's deliberate focus on England. At the top of folio 204ʳ, before the beginning of the romance, we find an *incipit* in red that reads: "Vita Hauelok quondam Rex Anglie· ∞∞∞∞∞ Et Denmarchie" – "Life of Havelok former King of England. ∞∞∞∞∞ And Denmark." The rubricator who titled the romance as a *vita* evidently believed Havelok's role as an English monarch surpassed his position as king of Denmark, which can be attested through several details. Firstly, before all else Havelok is called king of England; secondly, upon close examination, a medial punctus, which was normally used to end a sentence, can be seen after *Anglie* (K. Bell 41) while the 'e' that follows in *Et* has been capitalized, which suggests that the punctuation employed was in fact used as a period. A decorative braid is also noticeable immediately between the medial punctus and *Et* after which there seems to be some space. Kimberly Bell proposes that:

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[46] This information is not found in the text where on line 2943 the poet-narrator states that Havelok is crowned in London, which is the last specific geographical detail given in the text that ends about 50 lines later. Nevertheless, since Athelwold's court is located in Winchester, it seems feasible to assume the royal couple would live in the same city.

whether the rubricator intended it or not, Havelok's rule over Denmark appears only as an afterthought. It is possible that a medieval reader may have been influenced by the visual cue of the title, particularly since in the rubricator's other surviving *incipits* and *explicits* that include a braid-like decoration, the braid is drawn after the text to indicate the end of the line (…). (41)

The manuscript context seems again to confirm the hypothesis that *Havelok the Dane* as a text is especially centred on England and its people.[47] Looking at the romance, several elements in the narrative reinforce this too.

To begin with, most of the narrative action takes place in England, with the poem starting with a long description of the state of affairs in the nation and the death of king Athelwold before briefly turning its attention to the dying Danish monarch and his realm; Havelok spends his childhood in Grimsby, a city to which he is intimately linked on account of his attachment to its founder, Grim; the hero then spends his formative years in Lincoln, where he works to sustain himself and marries the English princess, Goldeboru; the only epic battle in the poem is between Havelok and Godrich and takes place in England; finally, the narrative ends with Havelok surrendering the throne of Denmark to Ubbe, now his sworn vassal, while he stays in the English territory with his wife where they live for "sixti winter[s]" (line 2965) in marital bliss. In addition, unlike its textual predecessors, in the ME *Havelok the Dane* Athelwold is not king of a region; he is clearly and unambiguously identified as the ruler of "al Engelond" (line 250) – an idea that is stressed throughout the poem and which serves to emphasise the completeness of England as a single, unified entity and imply its uniqueness as a distinctive identity (Speed 150).

Furthermore, very few details are given about Denmark and none is expressly specific so, for instance, there is no indication about where Birkabeyn's court is; after the Danish king dies, Godard imprisons his children "in the castel" (lines 412), but there are no references as to where it is located; the same thing happens with Ubbe's abode, about which the audience is simply told that it has a tower with adjoining rooms (lines 2072-73) and presumably a dining hall where a feast takes place after Havelok's arrival in Denmark. Medieval estates advertised status and could be spaces loaded with symbolism and metaphorical meaning. The absence of any specificities is thereby conspicuous, since castles and the overall surroundings of a royal or noble residence are key elements in the development and construction of the 'chivalric landscape', a phrase that according to Oliver Creighton:

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[47] With that said, since there are no other extant manuscripts where the romance has been fully preserved, the fact that MS Laud Misc. 108 has a nationalistic undertone and the *incipits* added may also be coincidental.

evokes an imaginary literary setting from the milieu of medieval romance – the domain of the questing hero on which wild and wooded places inhabited by fantastic creatures contrast with the cultured courtly surroundings of the castle or palace. (...) Many different features within the medieval countryside could be imbued with chivalric meaning, some much more obviously than others, so the 'chivalric landscape' could embrace a multitude of sites, spaces and places, including hunting and pleasure grounds as well as venues for martial performance and action in the form of tournament sites and battlefields. (187)

While the poet-narrator in *Havelok the Dane* does briefly evoke some of these usual chivalric landscapes, like the hunting grounds wherein Godard is caught by Havelok's men in Denmark (lines 2381-83), he seems little concerned with providing distinguishing features to these spaces. On the contrary, he merely acknowledges their existence and focuses instead on historical details of place in England: Athelwold's court is located in Winchester (line 158) and his kingdom comprises the land from Roxburgh to Dover (line 139) where Goldeboru is sent to live in isolation by Godrich (line 320). When Havelok and his adoptive family arrive in England, there is a rather precise description of Grimsby's location, "In Humber Grim bigan to lende, / In Lindeseye, rith at the north ende. / Ther sat his ship upon the sond" (lines 734-36). This concise reference shows the poet knew the area well for, as Kenneth Eckert notes, the Humber River moves into an inlet northwest of Grimsby, while present-day East Lindsey is slightly further south (*Havelok* 158).[48] Havelok then leaves Grimsby to find work in Lincoln (line 863). Finally, Havelok is crowned king of England in London (line 2943).[49] Though no further episodes take place in other English locations, there are references to Cornwall, Chester and York through characters who are specifically associated with these areas: Godrich is the earl of Cornwall; when the English army engages in battle against Havelok's Danish army, the earl of Chester, Reyner, is said to be there (line 2607);[50] and the Archbishop of York marries the main couple (lines 1175-81).[51]

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[48] Eckert also suggests the journey embarked on by Grimsby would have been rather long for a humble fishing boat, estimating that a Viking longship traveling at 14 knots might have completed the trip of 600-800 kilometres from southwest Denmark to Grimsby in about two days (*Havelok* 158).

[49] At this point, Havelok had already been crowned in Denmark (lines 2312-19), but the narrator makes no reference to any specific city in the kingdom.

[50] Later in the narrative, the earl of Chester is mentioned again when Havelok marries him to Gunnild, one of his adoptive sisters (lines 2859-95).

[51] Turville-Petre suggests that the use of titles that are familiar in English history and relatively ancient help build an impression of an England of geographical range and familiar institutions ("History of the Nation" 127), implying that these references are a literary strategy consciously employed by the poet-narrator to evoke in contemporary audiences a sense of closeness.

Even though there is little thought given to imbuing the landscape with chivalric meaning, chivalry not being one of the narrator's main concerns, place and space are relevant. In fact, by straightforwardly identifying particular medieval English towns, a sense of authenticity is conveyed to the text, as:

> History is not only recorded texts; it is also imprinted upon the landscape. (…) Places make the past real; they provide concrete connections with the world of these historical romances by encoding the narrative into a landscape familiar to the audience. (…) Places (…) engage the audience with the real world of both the past and the present. (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 60)

The England depicted in the text is implied to be the same England a twelfth- to thirteenth-century audience would know, simply at a different point in time. *Havelok the Dane* thus seeks to connect itself to English territory, especially the region of Lincolnshire, exploring the relationship between its past and present and offering "an idealized biography" (Murtaugh 613) concerned with the dynastic history of England. What is more:

> The appropriation of place is an integral part of the representation of the Anglo-Saxon past, providing familiar ground for the remembrance and reconstruction of historical narrative. (…) [So] the appropriation of familiar places by these narratives allows the audience to feel in control of, and identify with, the popular historical narratives that take place in them. (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 68)

If "[p]laces both construct stories and are themselves constructed by the narratives that surround them" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 61), by effectively imagining a past in which England shares a close link with Denmark that in turn shapes English identity (E. Parker 446), this ME romance seeks to address contemporary anxieties about national, cultural and ethnical identities. We would further argue that it also attempts to provide answers about what it means to be English, especially for those of Scandinavian ancestry.

However, addressing issues of nation and nationality in the medieval period is often a thorny affair. To "write about 'medieval England' is not a straightforward matter" (McCarthy 165), in particular considering the number of well-known critics who have suggested that English identity was established after the period that has traditionally been called the Middle Ages ended. Among these are Ernest Gellner who, in his seminal work *Nations and Nationalism*, argues that nations are born after the industrial period, asserting that nationalism is "primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be

congruent" (1).[52] In addition, authors like Benedict Anderson have promoted the idea that medieval western Europe was so impregnated with universal Christian thought, which created "a sacred imagined community" (41), that it would have been impossible for national sentiments to arise.[53] Naturally, many medievalists have contested this view.

In *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, the well-known Dutch historian Johan Huizinga argues that the concept of imperial dominion within Latin Christendom did not in fact prevent the development of national structures and adds that Christianity even contributed to national divisions. The scholar demonstrates this by discussing the Crusades as military expeditions during which the members of Latin Christendom came "together again and again in martial equipment, battle array, and a more or less sanctified rivalry" (108). The Italian writer and philosopher Umberto Eco also reminds his readers that the Middle Ages gave rise to what we now call Europe, its nations, its modern languages, and the institutions that – in spite of changes and revolutions – are still ours (13). Addressing the issue of English national identity in particular, in *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination*, Peter Ackroyd notes that "[t]here is clear evidence that the concept of Englishness – the 'Englishness' of the Anglo-Saxons as opposed to the 'Britishness' of the Celts – circulated widely in the Anglo-Saxon world" (xx). What is more, one of the earliest references to England[54] as a nation can indeed be found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which mentions that "the whole English nation" or "all Englishkind" came together in 886 to bow to king Alfred in London – an account that provides some ground to the theory that towards the end of the ninth century a self-perception of English cultural individuality had begun to develop (Foot 25).

However, as Janet K. Nelson explains, the 'English' described in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* included the Mercians along with the West Saxons, but not those under subjection to the Danes; so, claims of unity must be viewed with circumspection. On the other hand, we must also consider that while Alfred ruled only in Wessex, he had a vision of something larger, a vision of a unified England that did not exclude Scandinavians (Nelson 48). King Alfred's ideal seems to have been passed on to his descendants who actively pursued the dream of ruling

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[52] See also Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity.* Harvard UP, 1992; Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background*. 1944. Transaction Publishers, 2005; Gerald Newman, T*he Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1997; Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge UP, 2003.

[53] See Anderson 37-46.

[54] The term 'England' appears after the Anglo-Saxon invasion which, as we have seen, according to Bede began in 449. The new inhabitants of the island would come to call it 'Anglesland' – the land of the Angles – since the latter were the biggest Germanic tribe to occupy the territory now known as England.

over an undivided land and by 926 Alfred's grandson, Athelstan (r. 924-39), became the first king of England.[55] What is more:

> [t]hrough his [Alfred's] promotion of the term *Angelcynn* to reflect the common identity of his people in a variety of texts dating from the latter part of his reign, and his efforts in cultivating the shared memory of his West Mercian and West Saxon subjects, King Alfred might be credited with the invention of the English as a political community. (Foot 25)

The use of the term *Angelcynn*[56] has been seen as a construction that aims to encompass a single people who shared a common cultural heritage, a language (*Englisc*)[57] and a religious belief (Christianity). Sarah Foot is not alone in locating in pre-Conquest England the creation of a semi-congruent proto-English political community, a hypothesis that is also backed by Conor McCarthy who argues that:

> The creation of a single English political community took place in the tenth century, through the unification of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under the rulership of the West Saxon kings Æthelstan and subsequently Edgar. The concept of an English nation, however, seems to predate this political unity by some centuries, going back at least to the Venerable Bede's eighth-century literary construction of an English people (*gens Anglorum*) as a single Christian community (…). (165)

Similarly, Nicholas Higham in *King Arthur. Myth-Making and History* contends that historians can perceive a sense of a "common 'English' identity" since Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, adding that "one could even argue that Bede invented the English nation" (99). Through a careful construction of "a common descent and origins mythology, common language and a literary tradition" (Higham 99), Bede – claims Higham – established a vision of providential history, taking Gildas' narrative in *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (*On the*

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[55] According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Athelstan became king of Wessex and Mercia in 925 after his father, king Edward, and brother, Elward, died the same year. In 926, the *Chronicle* claims he took Northumbria and "governed all the kings that were in this island: – First, Howel, king of West-Wales; and Constantine, king of Scots; and Owen, king of Monmouth; and Aldred, the son of Eadulf, of Bamburgh," which has led historians to identify Athelstan as the first English king. Interestingly, coins from the period have been found with the inscription 'Æthelstan *rex totius Britanniae*' suggesting Athelstan must have seen himself – or want others to see him – as ruler of the whole island of Britain, an ambition that seems to surpass that of his grandfather.

[56] According to Foot, the word *Angelcynn* is first found in a Mercian charter of the 850s from Worcester, where it is employed to distinguish those of English origin from foreigners. However, the term only became common "in the last two decades of the ninth century when it appears in a variety of texts associated with the Alfredian court, notably in works which were part of the king's programme of educational reform and revival" (Foot 30).

[57] This point is debatable since according to Bede in *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (c. 731) Britain was multilingual: "[t]here are in the island at present, following the number of the books in which the Divine Law was written, five languages of different nations employed in the study and confession of the one self-same knowledge, which is of highest truth and true sublimity, to wit, English, British, Scottish, Pictish, and Latin (...)."

Ruin and Conquest of Britain, sixth century) "about divine retribution and the path towards redemption for his own people, but then massaged it into a providential history for the *Angles seu Saxones* which entirely undermined and ultimately denied the moral and ideological positioning of the Britons" (98). What is more, in *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Adrian Hastings proposes that:

> England presents the prototype of both a nation and a nation-state in the fullest sense, that its national development, while not wholly incomparable with that of other Atlantic coastal societies, does precede every other – both in the date at which it can fairly be detected and in the roundness that it achieved (…). Much of this, I will be claiming, was detectable already in Saxon times by the end of the tenth century. (4-5)

Although the dating proposed by these scholars is different, with McCarthy and Higham implying some form of an English society was already in formation in the eighth century, all agree that there was an English political community, or nation, before the Norman Conquest. Such claims must be carefully considered for the Anglo-Saxon kingdom's interests were often at odds and regional diversity should not be dismissed in favour of a unitary theory. Andy Orchard recalls that the Anglo-Saxons came from disparate parts of Continental Europe and maintains that "it is clear that throughout the period the Anglo-Saxons themselves recognised regional distinctions at a deeper level than a simple division into Angles and Saxons" (18). Similarly, Nelson remarks that the "enthusiastic celebration of England's tenth-century unity is premature. Under pressure, the kingdom tended to fall apart again into its component parts, Northumbrians, then Mercians accepting Danish lordship, while Wessex maintained resistance" (57).

Considering everything, most early medieval scholars admit that a proto-English nation already existed before the Norman Conquest, but the term nation must be used with caution.[58] Indeed, the debate has been marked by issues of terminology, which might be why Patrick Wormald defends that "[i]f the word 'national' still sticks to the throat, let it be 'ethnic' (…); let it even be 'tribal', so long as you have no illusion that bonding overall was perceived as in any way biological" ("Germanic Power Structures" 118). On this point, Susan Reynolds argues that the contemporary terms *gens*, *nation* and *populus* ought to be translated into Modern English as "a people" in the sense of "a community of costume, descent, and government" bound by "the habit of obedience to a lawfully crowned king" thereby constructing a "regnal

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[58] See also Wormald, "*Engla Lond*" 1-24; Smyth 24-52.

community" (254-56). Addressing issues of nationhood in the thirteenth century, Geraldine Heng makes a similar point, claiming the:

> medieval nation is not, of course, a modern state: among the distinguishing properties of the medieval nation – always a community of the realm, *communitas regni* – is the symbolizing potential of the king, whose figural status allows leveling discourses and an expressive vocabulary of unity, cohesion, and stability to be imagined (…). ("Romance of England" 139)

In light of these ideas, Laura Ashe concludes that the "robustness of pre-Conquest English identity, and the power of English kings and government, is no longer in doubt" (*Fiction and History* 3) although she also acknowledges that "the Conquest was a deep trauma which developed, over the early years of unsuccessful revolt and ruthless oppression, into a thoroughgoing threat to English identity" (*Fiction and History* 5). Marjorie Chibnall, on the other hand, suggests a different reading asserting that the invading Normans had, from very early on, "a common interest in the prosperity of the land they occupied" and quickly came to appreciate "the arts of government that contributed to the wealth of its rulers. Within a generation they were beginning to cherish its traditions and venerate its saints alongside their own" (208).

Ultimately, much debate was and still is held about how to outline specific medieval forms of the English nation as well as the feeling of identification to and within a community. For the present purposes, it suffices to say that from the thirteenth century onwards "discourses of the nation are visible and can be read with ease in medieval England" (Heng, "Romance of England" 151). Yet, how these were developed involved "considerable efforts of distortion to shape both the land and the people into a vision of a single community" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 7), especially since:

> The geographical boundaries of England, themselves not entirely fixed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, were narrower than the political and legal influence of a developing English state the reach of which extended politically and militarily into Wales, Scotland, Ireland and France. Nor was the identity of people of English descent equivalent to the political community of the state, for the ruling class of medieval England in this period was of primarily Norman descent, and could be identified as such (albeit in polemical terms) as late as the end of the thirteenth century. Additionally, substantial English colonial populations existed outside of England itself, in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Medieval English identities, then, political, cultural, ethnic and linguistic, could be complex, multifaceted and sometimes hybrid. (McCarthy 167)

In the early twelfth century, England had become a trilingual society – French, English and Latin – that inherited a number of conflicting ideologies and was territorially bound to continental Europe. There were issues concerning land borders, marked regional differences and overlapping identities of occupation, class, gender, religion, family, borough and shire (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 7). Moreover, for the first century and a half after the Norman Conquest, it seems Anglo-Norman England was a rather international realm with goods and people circulating between the island and continental Europe, namely within the lands held by the rulers of the House of Normandy and later the House of Anjou and by the noble Norman families. A "multi-racial society," as Marjorie Chibnall calls it (208), early medieval England witnessed the coexistence between different "incoherent, diverse, antagonistic populations" which, as further noted by Thomas Hahn, "provided a powerful incentive – for political leaders, lawyers, intellectuals – to imagine a larger community" ("Difference" 7-8). At the same time a growing sense of loyalty had begun to emerge along with feelings of separation from the continent. The loss of Normandy in 1204 and the growing xenophobia, or Franco-phobia, during the reigns of John and Henry III[59] would come to put the seal on this process of separation and mark the beginning of a series of hostilities between England and France that would culminate in the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453).

With royal and noble attention increasingly drawn to the insular territory, the disintegration of the Angevin empire became a decisive moment in the development and strengthening of an English sense of national identity. In addition, if we consider that "war, in medieval history as in medieval romance, is a productive channel for nationalism" (Heng, "Romance of England" 139), an overall desire to assert and differentiate the English people from Others grew – a desire we believe is echoed in ME popular romances like *Havelok the Dane*. Before we proceed, though, and while we acknowledge that providing definitive answers to the issue of English nation and nationhood as well as its presumptive medieval origins would require us to substantially broaden the scope of this study, there are two further points we would like to highlight.

To begin with, in spite of the fact that words like nationalism and Englishness only started being used in the nineteenth century, the term nation itself is much older. The Latin *natio*, which lies at the etymological root of the ME *nāciŏun*, could mean "being born, birth;"

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[59] In his analysis of late medieval England's politics, Chris Given-Wilson adds that because Henry III's court "came to be dominated by the king's Poitevin and Savoyard relatives," a vehement "[h]ostility to their influence" grew. As a result, "[t]he repeated demands for the aliens' expulsion reflect not only widespread resentment among the English baronage at their virtual monopoly of royal patronage, but also the growing sense of Englishness among the thirteenth-century nobility (…)" (105). For an in-depth analysis, see Given-Wilson 102-16.

"I. the goddess of birth;" and "II. a breed, stock, kind, species, race (…) [and more rarely] class (...); B. In a more restricted sense, a race of people (…)" (Lewis and Short 1189). The different definitions provided by Harpers' *New Latin Dictionary* point out "the deep biological and racial structure that often underlies national feeling" (Lavezzo XV). In the *MED*, the first definition for *nācǐŏun* is "(a) A nation, people; a race of people; a political country, nationality; ~ and lede, nations and peoples; of english ~, of English nationality; (b) in pl.: country; (c) fellow countrymen; also, members of a delegation; (…)", so the general sense we find in Latin is in part maintained in ME. This may have to do with the fact that "[later m]edieval concepts of the nation are ethnic, indeed racial" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 17). In this framework, nationality was something acquired by birth and a binding principle. Therefore:

> Englishness was most commonly assumed by contemporary writers to be something that a person was born with (…). [And f]rom at least the mid-thirteenth century, references to the English people in official rhetoric were increasingly closely associated with the kingdom of England and to the rule of the English king. (…) Birth was a dominant theme; both birthplace, usually within the kingdom of England, and birth to English parents. (Ruddick 58)

Granting that these definitions hardly provide a straightforward answer to the issues at hand, they prove the term was in use before the modern period and its meaning had already begun to be conceptualised in the Middle Ages. Of course, the question 'what was a medieval nation?' endures as it seems to resist uncomplicated explanation or interpretation, leading us to the obvious conclusion that it had (and still has) distinct meaning(s) to different people(s); Lavezzo argues that:

> The bundle of attributes that the members of a nation are *imagined* to share are far from stable, but instead can range from the diachronic (territory) to the synchronic (history), from the biological (race) to the cultural (religion, language, etc.) and to the political (the state). (XIV-XV. Emphasis ours.)

This takes us to our second point. Lavezzo resorts to what we would like to suggest is a key word in the development and construction of nation and national identity in medieval romance (and perhaps elsewhere too): imagined. In order to understand its relevance, we must look into Benedict Anderson's proposed definition of nation. In the introductory pages of *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, the author proposes:

the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (…) In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished (…) by the style in which they are imagined. (5-6)

Somewhat against Anderson's warnings that his proposal is given in "an anthropological spirit" (5), medievalists (Faletra 351; Heng "Romance of England" 150) have argued that if a nation is an "imagined political community" whose members share an "image of their communion" even without knowing each other, then it was indeed possible to imagine an English community in the medieval period.[60] In fact, by examining *Polychronicon* (c.1327 - c.1360), a universal history based on earlier authors written by the Benedict monk Ranulph Higden, we can quickly realise there was some awareness of the fact that fantasy or the imagination played a role in envisioning the nation in the medieval period. This is particularly noticeable when Higden criticises Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae* and how the latter depicts Arthur as king of France and emperor of Rome, despite there being no Frankish or Roman historical records of such great conquests. On why Arthur seems to have a larger-than-human status in Monmouth's work, Higden invites us to contemplate why heroes like Arthur are constructed and to what purposes, suggesting that "perhaps it is the manner of every nation to extol in excessive praise some one from their members, as the Greeks do their Alexander, the Romans their Octavian, the English their Richard, the French their Charles; and thus it follows that the Britons overly extoll their Arthur" (qtd. in Lavezzo XIV).

The Cheshire monk also hints that those heroic figures serve to testify to the greatness of the people and community they represent, thereby contributing to an idealised construction of the latter's identity. In addition, he claims this is done for three reasons: for pleasure, to intensify the allure of the narrative or to praise the people whom the hero represents (qtd. in Lavezzo XIV). The last point is especially interesting for us since – with this framework in mind – we can understand Havelok as a hero-king whose story aims to express appreciation for and celebration of the Anglo-Scandinavian heritage in England. Of course, this construction or imagination of the nation was done in many different ways.[61] However, since a number of

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[60] Heng even advocates that "a consensus has emerged that discourses of the nation in the medieval period (…) hinge on Ben[edict] Anderson's formulation of the nation as an 'imagined (political) community' while departing in other details – cultural, social, political, economic – from nationalist formations in postmedieval centuries" ("Romance of England" 150).

[61] Kathy Lavezzo provides a full list of examples of how the English community was imagined in her "Introduction" to *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*. See pages XVII-XVIII. See also Turville-Petre's Chapter

romances "have as a primary function a construction of England that articulate[s] the partially conceptualized impulses observable in the new English-language writing of the preceding [twelfth] century" (Speed 145), what we would like to assert here is that romance, in particular ME popular romance, is a key part of how this(these) (re)creation process(es) happened.[62] Because medieval romances are fictionalisations of the past, they are free from the constrains of historiography and can more easily, we believe, open a literary discursive space wherein England as a nation is imagined and articulated. Much like Diane Speed, we too hold that *Havelok the Dane* is one of the ME texts that express an "imagined political community" engaging in "the discourse of the nation" (Speed 145) in late thirteenth to early fourteenth century. What is more, we propose the ME romance of Havelok participates in this "discourse" through inclusive and exclusive literary strategies that ultimately strengthen an English sense of identity.

We have already referred to processes of communal or national identity building which are defined not only through who or what is included, but also "*against* (...) [and] always *in terms of* the other" (Heng, "Romance of England" 147). In the ME *Havelok the Dane* we believe there is one clearly identified Other: the Danes. On the one hand, the poem is centred on a Danish heir whose rule inaugurates a golden age that echoes the one of the last legitimate English monarch, Athelwold. It also acknowledges and celebrates Anglo-Scandinavian unions, like those between Havelok and Goldeboru,[63] ending "with a vision of harmony throughout society, as people not only of different ranks but also of different ethnic origins witness the coronation in London" (Turville-Petre, "History of the Nation" 134). The happy and peaceful outcome of the main couple's (mis)adventures seems to suggest that English and Danes can live amicably, integrated into one unified nation. A positive representation is thus clear. Yet, on the other hand, the ME text makes an effort to distance the actions of the English people from those of the Danish, an effort that is particularly noticeable through the depiction of its main antagonists, Godrich and Godard, and the manner of their punishments. We have previously contended that Havelok's Danish foe, Godard, is especially villainous, capable of committing acts that his English counterpart is not and for that reason the penalty imposed

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One in *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* on the central role that thirteenth-century chronicles have in representing the nation.
[62] On this matter, Geraldine Heng advocates that "Middle English romances form a special category of cultural articulation, though an equally privileged literature is also (...) that genre of English chronicle histories of England/Britain called the *Brut*, spawned from Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin *Historia Regum Britannie* and its French vernacular derivatives" ("Romance of England" 154).
[63] But also, the ones between the English Earl of Chester and Bertram and the Danish Gunnild and Levive, respectively.

upon the first is harsher and more brutal. No mercy is granted to Godard because, as the narrator seems to imply, he deserves none. Given these depictions, we surmise that the different treatment of two apparently very similar characters can be read as a sign of their separate identities since:

> Torture and excessive brutality are markers of the cultural Other, (…) their rejection is part of the discourses of the nation. This has particular resonance for the audience of Anglo-Danish descent addressed in *Havelok*, whose ancestry figured into the complexities of cultural inheritance and identity. (…) The absence of torture is a trait of this identity, and authors who situate its use outside of England define their nation in opposition to those where it is legal. (Tracy 190)

Self-identification[64] is crucial to the notion of an imagined (political/cultural/ethnical) community, so placing brutal acts of violence, even if lawful, out of the English space helps create a sense of inclusiveness: 'we', the English, do not employ torture whereas 'they', the Danish, do. Therefore, we can gather that "[t]he Havelok-poet draws clear boundaries of inclusion, divorcing the Anglo-Scandinavian population of Lincolnshire [in particular] from the barbaric Danish past and establishing England's civilizing effect on the invading population" (Tracy 143). Some English may share a common ancestry with the Scandinavian but they, the text seems to imply, are more like Havelok himself, a population that became more civil by living in England and following laws that are less barbarous and unmerciful.[65] Naturally, this association between the Danish people and brutality may also be understood as a conjuration of the violence perpetrated by Viking incursions throughout the early medieval period in England. However, if so, our interpretation remains the same: Godard is "more abominable" because he is not a member of the English community – he is one of the Others against whom their identity is measured.[66]

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[64] According to Geraldine Heng, "[p]art of that self-identification involves a recognizably national form of address perceptible in the literary, historical, and cultural documents of a country at various stages of medieval nationalist discourse. Equally distinctive is the production of a symbolic system that uniquely signals and presents a nation as occupying a different cultural and symbolic space from others within transnational groupings such as Western Christendom. Finally, the role of language, geographical boundedness, and ideologies of solidarity that cut across competing, antagonistic interests among the social and economic groups in feudal society are indispensable components of the nation-in-progress" ("Romance of England" 150-151).

[65] In "'Hise uten laddes *here* comen': Exploiting the Image of the Dane in *Havelok the Dane*" Hiroki Okamoto's analysis of Godrich's speech about the violence to be unleashed on the shores of England by Havelok and his army also makes an interesting point regarding this matter. The author comments that Havelok's transformed nature allows him to construct what the Danes would normally be expected to destroy (76) – a nation, a community, or more literally spaces like the priory Havelok vows to build in Grimsby (line 2522). In addition, Okamoto suggests that by "[m]aking a false charge against Havelok, Godrich's speech (…) serves to reemphasize the difference between Havelok and the potentially warlike Danish people" (76).

[66] In *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England* Robert Rouse suggests that Godrich, as the Earl of Cornwall, can also be seen as Other since "Cornwall seems to be a place that is associated with treachery in *Havelok*, *Guy of Warwick*

This point is also suggested by the nature of the oaths Godrich and Godard make to the dying monarchs of England and Denmark at the beginning of the narrative. In England, the narrator reveals Godrich is chosen by and amongst the king's men for being a "trewe man wituten faile / Wis man of red, wis man of dede" (lines 179-80) and a ceremony takes place:

> A wol fair cloth bringen he dede,
> And thereon leyde the messebok,
> The caliz, and the pateyn ok,
> The corporaus, the messe-gere.
> Theron he garte the erl swere
> That he sholde yemen hire wel,
> Withuten lac, wituten tel,
> Til that she were twelf winter hold (lines 185-92)

Godrich's sworn declaration follows the same order of service used in mass: there is the book of missals, the chalice which would contain the wine used in communion and the paten holds the bread wafer, that is, the Host. Once the latter are consecrated, they are placed on the "corporaus," a white linen cloth, and the Earl of Cornwall takes his oath. The ceremony is outlined to invoke the Holy Eucharist and make Godrich's promise more solemn and meaningful, which makes his betrayal more appalling. In Denmark, Athelwold's counterpart, Birkabeyn, chooses a friend (line 375), "A riche man that under mone / Was the trewest, that he wende" (lines 373-74), without the advice of his people. The text seems to imply Birkabeyn approaches Godard, wishing him to swear on the altar:

> He wel trowede that he seyde,
> And on Godard handes leyde;
> And seyde, 'Here biteche I thee
> Mine children alle thre,
> Al Denemark and al mi fe,
> Til that mi sone of helde be,
> But that ich wille that thou swere
> On auter and on messe gere,
> On the belles that men ringes,
> On messe bok the prest on singes,
> That thou mine children shalt wel yeme,
> That hire kin be ful wel queme,
> Til mi sone mowe ben knicth.
> Thanne biteche him tho his ricth:

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and the *Morte Darthur*, suggesting that it has a role within the poetics of English identity as that of the location of an insular Other" (87-88). See Rouse, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England* Chapter Four.

Denemark and that ther til longes -
Casteles and tunes, wodes and wonges.'

Godard stirt up and swor al that (lines 382-98)

Although the image conveyed by this episode is intended to mirror what happens in England, the narrator then states that Godard rises and swears everything Birkabeyn wanted him to, which seems to cast some doubt over whether the religious ceremony took place or not. Once more the differences between the two realms are underlined: Athelwold gathers a parliament and asks for the council of those under his command before selecting his daughter and his kingdom's protector, showing prudence and judiciousness, while Birkabeyn is more impulsive and chooses one of his powerful friends without enquiries; the English king ensures a formal, almost sanctified ceremony takes place whereas the narrator implies his Danish counterpart wants to do the same but then fails to provide specific evidence that the ritual occurred. Athelwold's pious nature is further highlighted by the fact that he takes communion and confession five hundred and five times and then self-flagellates (lines 212-16). Later in the narrative, Havelok too is described as a devout man, "Of bodi (…) mayden clene" (line 996), who engages in religious practices, a trait not mentioned in any of the earlier versions of the tale and which seems to imply Havelok's life in England has had a Christianising and, by extent, civilising effect on the character. In spite of his birthplace, the hero grows more English than Danish, progressively becoming a suitable embodiment of the ideal English king.

A division between the two identities is thus made explicit. In *Havelok the Dane*, England is described as a nation with a clearly identified and delimitated geography, an economy, a set of cultural traditions as well as a body of legal practices that suggest there are some shared rights and duties. In addition, there is a common system of communication, English. We have already argued that language can be a means through which a sense of national community is established. Consequently, the use of English is both an inclusive literary strategy, everyone who is English understands it, and an exclusive one for very similar reasons, that is, the English are the only ones who would know how to speak it. In this framework, English "becomes a mark of those who share national identity" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 21).[67]

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[67] Of course, as expected, not all scholars agree with this stance. In "The Idea of Englishness in the Fifteenth Century" Derek Pearsall proposes that the use of the vernacular cannot be connected with a popular wave of national feeling. Instead, he proposes earlier texts are "evidence of fragmentary, sporadic, regional responses to particular circumstances" (17). More recently, Laura Ashe suggests sharing the same language "is not a pre-requisite for the expression of national identity" (*Fiction and History* 9). On the irrelevance of language to medieval ethnic groupings, see also Geary 37-40.

The association between the English language and English identity is related to the increasing disassociation with French (and France) in general, a process that became evident when, after an attack by France in 1295, Edward I accused the French people of trying to eradicate the English language. In the following century, in 1362, Edward I's grandson, Edward III, would enact the Pleading in English Act (also known as the Statute of the Pleading) that stipulated all pleas had to be pleaded, shewed, defended, answered, debated, and judged in English, which effectively served to replace French as the language used in legal documents and in law courts. Before that, in 1349, it had also stopped being used at English universities. These decisions indicate that at least by the late thirteenth century nationalistic associations between land, people and language were finding a political expression. According to Turville-Petre, "by the 1290s (...) the association between language and nation was well established, so that writers could adopt the powerful position of using the language that was distinctive to the English people and a demonstration of their common Anglo-Saxon heritage" (*England the Nation* 9). Yet, reality was slightly different as there were a wide variety of dialects, which means mutual understanding would have been hard in some parts of the island. That being said, in the ME *Havelok the Dane*, as in other ME popular romances, these linguistic concerns are largely ignored with the text benefitting from a vague use of the past that removes the narrative from specific concerns that are historical in nature (Faletra 368). Instead, what audiences find is an *imagined* vision of England as a nation of people who speak the language of their ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons. This point is especially relevant for our current purposes since, albeit the setting resembles late-thirteenth- to early-fourteenth-century England, the ME *Havelok the Dane* broadly places the action in the Anglo-Saxon period – a choice we believe is not accidental.

The cultural process(es) of remembrance and reimagining early medieval England after the Norman Conquest began immediately after the Battle of Hastings in 1066 (Rouse, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England* 1).[68] Divided into two distinct periods – the arrival of the Saxons and the period after the Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – Anglo-Saxon England is often employed as a temporal backdrop in ME popular romance[69] which makes use of the Anglo-Saxon past in order to appropriate it and reinforce the ties between the present and the

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[68] This cultural, literary and historical process has been called Anglo-Saxonism and is defined by Allan Frantzen and John D. Niles as "the process through which a self-conscious national and racial identity first came into being among the early peoples of the region that we now call England and how, over time, through both scholarly and popular promptings, that identity was transformed into an originary myth available to a wide range of political and social interests" (1).

[69] Besides *Havelok the Dane*, see also *King Horn*, *Athelston*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and *Guy of Warwick*, among others.

past. The fact that early medieval England "is represented as similar to the fourteenth-century world is characteristic of a narrative that emphasizes continuity between the experiences of the fourteenth-century English and their Anglo-Saxon ancestors" (Rouse, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England* 56). Therefore, by resorting to such strategies authors align their narratives with a discourse that aims to stress the importance of the pre-Conquest period and its persistence, "[t]hese are texts that manifest a concern with both establishing the parameters by which the English nation is to be conceptualized and merging genealogical concerns which would otherwise appear as divergent — thus to ensure continuity" (Radulescu, "Genealogy" 14).

In the ME *Havelok the Dane*, the hero and future English king's ancestry would most likely be viewed as "divergent" for if nationality and Englishness were something one was born with, Havelok could not be regarded as part of the English people. The same could be said of those who descended from the Danes (and by extension the Normans), especially because to achieve a "concept of racial unity (…) the English nation [could not] be, as in fact it was, an amalgam of Celts, Romans, discrete German tribes, and Normans" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 97). An alternative that would allow regions where the population's origins were not preponderantly Anglo-Saxon had to be imagined. Turville-Petre has suggested that the ME *Havelok the Dane* is part of that construction which attempts to provide the Anglo-Scandinavian population of Lincolnshire and East Anglia a more positive representation of their Viking ancestors (*England the Nation* 142-43). With "a strong sense of a separate cultural heritage which could not fit comfortably into the overarching national myth," the author proposes the "integration of divided loyalties is the driving force behind Havelok, as it constructs a revised national story in which the Lincolnshire community plays a central part" (*England the Nation* 143). To this we add that the poet-narrator imagines the integration or merging of English and Danish identity through the character of Havelok, which makes the kind of heroism he displays particularly important.

John Halverson argues that Havelok is an "unknightly hero" (150), a statement that seems to be validated by the ME romance's lack of reference to chivalric values, a code of conduct or even traditional jousts or quests. The poet-narrator undeniably seems little or not at all interested in exploring the typical chivalric themes found in Arthurian romance, insular or Continental. This disregard is also noticeable in the attention paid to everyday activities, like the extended account of the fish Grim catches to provide for his family (lines 750-64) or the importance given to food and eating in the text. On this matter, Alexis Kellner Becker comments that "(…) *Havelok the Dane* is full of hunger and labour, famine, and quotidian

details of material life. This Middle English romance is energized by environmental anxieties about where food will come from (…)" (84).[70]

Nevertheless, Havelok possesses all the characteristics associated with the best knights: he is tall, handsome, noble, a distinguished warrior, brave, honourable, pious, pure of mind and body, etcetera. In essence, Havelok embodies the ideal knight without the text paying much attention to why he has such unmatched traits. Eventually, though, Havelok becomes a knight, a condition that seems to be paramount for him to be able to claim that which is rightful his, the Danish throne:

> Hwan he havede manrede and oth
> Taken of lef and of loth,
> Ubbe dubbede him to knith
> With a swerd ful swithe brith,
> And the folk of al the lond
> Bitauhte him al in his hond,
> The cunnriche everil del
> And made him king heylike and wel. (lines 2312-19)

As in most ME romances, the knighting ceremony episode in *Havelok the Dane* is abrupt and, since nearly no details are given, it might be easily overlooked. The fact that the poet-narrator included a short description confirms the relevance that being a knight still held in the imagined worlds of romance and how the figure of the knight is still associated with that of the hero. From this point onwards, Havelok displays all the martial skills expected of a warrior trained to become a knight. When he engages in physical combat against Godrich, Havelok fights like a knight. He comes to the battlefield to meet Godrich ridding a steed (line 2702) and engages in combat with a shield and a sword (lines 2700-03), an accoutrement that identifies Havelok as a knight. Ultimately what we believe this shows is that the poet-narrator is aware of the customary traits linked to heroism and employs them, though not necessarily because he is invested in creating a knightly hero. On the contrary, as we have already implied, Havelok is a hero-king who personifies the *rex pacificus*, the peaceful king, embodying the 'higher cause' others fight for. In fact, it is our belief that the portrait of the ideal king, which begins with Athelwold, culminates in Havelok and it is through his unusual path to sovereignty that he becomes a true embodiment of the land(s) and people(s) he serves. As proposed by Staines:

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[70] For the relevance of food in the narrative, see Farreri 145-59; Hostetter 53-77; Murtaugh 477-88.

> From the moment when he begs a cup of ale before beginning his tale, the romancer develops the portrait of a prince who is not isolated in his royal throne; Havelok becomes a king both of the people and for the people. His education makes him conscious of the needs and problems of his subjects. His accession to the throne heralds the return of a time when merchants wander freely, when the hungry receive food at the king's table, when the king recognizes his primary commitment to the needs of his people. (613)

As noted in the last chapter, the description of the hero's childhood is a crucial part of the text. Starting as a child-heir whose vulnerable body becomes a site of violence and neglect, Havelok's exposure to assault, murder, hunger and cold effectively shape his character as an adult. Taken to England to escape a likely deadly fate in Denmark, Havelok grows strong and seemingly well loved by his adoptive family. By the age of fifteen, Havelok reveals he is aware of the pressure that providing for his uncanny hunger places on Grim and his family, "Ich ete more, bi God on live, / Than Grim an hise children five!" (lines 794-95), a realisation that leads him to decide to work for his sustenance:

> '(…)
> Goddot! I wile with hem gange
> For to leren sum god to gete.
> Swinken ich wolde for my mete -
> It is no shame for to swinken!
> The man that may wel eten and drinken
> Thar nouth ne have but on swink long -
> To liggen at hom it is ful strong.
> God yelde him, ther I ne may,
> That haveth me fed to this day!
> Gladlike I wile the paniers bere -
> Ich woth ne shal it me nouth dere,
> They ther be inne a birthene gret
> Al so hevi als a neth.
> Shal ich nevere lengere dwelle -
> Tomorwen shal ich forth pelle.' (lines 797-811)

Growing up with Grim and his family seems to make Havelok more mindful of the struggles of those who are, to all effect, below his station. He not only joins them in their work but also contributes to increasing their wealth, thereby becoming one of the *laboratores*, those who work – an experience that allows him to better understand "the needs of his people" (Staines 613). In addition, Havelok's statement that it is no shame to work (line 800) adds an interesting layer of depth to the character, as he seems to be speaking directly to the audience. There being no shame in working for one's food and drink implies there is shame in those who do not,

which might be read as criticism to the estates that do not labour. Like Murtaugh points out, this open-hearted assertion:

> goes against the well-known aristocratic snobbism about manual labor that prevails in romance. It is an example of the poem tending to talk over the heads of the feudal nobility to the productive commoners who actually feed the king. Havelok identifies with this group and, indeed, takes his place in its ranks, and he does so out of an altruistic concern for the burden that his six-times-normal hunger places upon them. That marks him as a king as surely as does the light from his mouth. (482)

Havelok's empathy towards those weaker than him is also apparent in his love for children with whom he plays, apparently assenting to their every will:

> It ne was non so litel knave
> For to leyken ne for to plawe,
> That he ne wolde with him pleye.
> The children that yeden in the weie
> Of him he deden al here wille,
> And with him leykeden here fille. (lines 950-55)

The hero's behaviour markedly contrasts the treatment he faced as a child himself and his ability to relate to those around him, whether young or old, rich or poor, is one the reasons why he quickly becomes loved by all, "Alle him loveden that him sowen / Bothen heye men and lowe" (lines 958-59). Because Havelok has experienced deprivation and grew up in England, he can better understand the hardships of the English people with whom he shares a bond, potentially greater than the one he has with the Danish. By consistently presenting Denmark as a space wherein cruelty and harsh treatments are imposed upon all, including royal heirs, the poet-narrator makes England the first space where Havelok knows genuine affection, whether that is through his adoptive family or through its people. On this point, he again resembles Athelwold who is similarly said to be loved by all (lines 30-34). Havelok's inherent kindness, though, seems to set him apart from any other character and can be read as another sign of his royal authority since "his goodness is untainted by consideration of himself first. That quality is itself spiritual and exclusively kingly. (…) Only Havelok's benevolence is disinterested, placing the happiness of his supporters before his own. That is what a king does" (Murtaugh 481).

Havelok becomes an unmatched, selfless hero-king whose purity of mind and body as well as humility aligns him, according to Kimberly Bell, with the notion of the saintly ruler

("Resituating Romance" 38). To this scholar, Havelok's journey is based on atypical themes: instead of featuring military exploits, that is, conventional literary strategies audiences would expect to find in a chivalric romance, Havelok's development is often built on suffering, which draws him "much more closely (...) to the saints' quests for heavenly perfection found only through torment, affliction, and humility" ("Resituating Romance" 43). Julie N. Couch takes a similar stance, remarking that:

> Much of the validation of Havelok as the rightful heir of England comes from his saintly qualities and divine tokens of identity. Havelok possesses the romance attributes of being the strongest and most handsome of all, but it is his saintly and divine features that link him to his 'fellow' saints in [MS.] L[aud Misc. 108] and confirm his right to rule England. ("Magic of Englishness" 230)

Although it is clear that Havelok has been chosen by Divine Providence to become a ruler and that his Christian devotion mirrors that of king Athelwold, we believe his innate goodness and nobility, which quite literally shine through, are not enough to ensure his ascension to the throne(s). Unlike the Havelok character we find in previous accounts, in the ME *Havelok the Dane* the main male character is an active individual and the instigator of plot developments. He bears a cross-shaped kings' mark and a divine light beam emanates from his mouth, but it is "his strength in fighting, not the miraculous cross, that enables him to fulfil his prophetic dream of clasping Denmark in his arms and England in his hand, the hand by which Goldeburh has taken him in marriage" (Cooper, *English Romance* 343). The marks on Havelok's body give divine sanction to the position he occupies at the end of the narrative; yet, his deeds, like springing into action against the thieves in Denmark or engaging in battle against Godard, are decisions he makes of his own free will – decisions which have a direct impact on the plot. Furthermore, as Cooper remarks, his union with Goldeboru has a symbolic meaning and so the night when he has the dream-vision is the same night he consummates his wedding to Goldeboru. The nearly simultaneous events suggest, on the one hand, that Havelok's newfound love for his kingdom becomes "entwined in his relationship with his new wife" (E. Parker 435), and, on the other, that his physical relation with Goldeboru means he has become united to England. Therefore, in the dream-vision where Havelok is able to take both lands, Havelok's body is symbolically united with the territories that form his and Goldeboru's inheritance while he "solemnly becomes the corporeal equivalent of the entire countr[ies] he is destined to rule" (Hostetter 71). Their marriage can thus be read as a metaphorical representation of the union

between Denmark and England while the "future of their various territories is assured by their having fifteen children, all of whom become kings or queens" (Cooper, *English Romance* 343).

Finally, the emotional attachment between Havelok and Goldeboru echoes the love the English people in particular hold for the hero who "commands the homage of all classes" (Staines 611). The community's affection is not motivated solely by his royal nature but by his generous and kind actions too, which is why young and old, rich and poor, feel emotionally linked to him even when they only know him as a "cokes knave" (line 1124). Havelok's association with the people, the *laboratores*, further contributes to his acceptance since, because of the manual labour he has performed, the hero is put "in the same position as those who were depicted in the beginning of the poem as benefiting from Aþelwold's ideal rule, and when Havelok takes over Aþelwold's throne, he is demonstrably capable of representing the interests of the whole English body politic" (Speed 151).[71]

Described by Herzman, et al. as "a walking metaphor for kingship" (75), Havelok's identity gradually becomes greater than himself as he grows into an idealised personification of the best virtues of a monarch. In this sense, the ME *Havelok the Dane* presents an unprecedented treatment of the Havelok legend, reworking its Anglo-Norman predecessors and most likely drawing on tales in oral circulation to introduce a hero whose saintly qualities, martial prowess and unlikely mundane experiences of hard manual labour make him an embodiment of the ideal king. His behaviour becomes "a handbook for princes" and can be seen as "a guide for the proper behavior of the wise monarch, as a lesson for the king who is willing to heed it" (Staines 263). In presenting a foreigner, and a Dane on top of that, as an exemplary ruler of a unified Anglo-Saxon England, the poet-narrator is also providing a "positive view of the Danish contribution to English identity, in which the Danes bring to England the rule of a just king and families of industrious settlers" (E. Parker 446). We hold this decision is deliberate, aiming to integrate the divided loyalties of eastern areas of England where Anglo-Scandinavian ancestry would have made it hard for the population to have become included in the national myth that identified only those of Anglo-Saxon blood as the true English people. In addition, *Havelok the Dane* can be read as a text that becomes "part of

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[71] A metaphor for hierarchical corporate entities, the expression body politic was notoriously used in the medieval period by John of Salisbury in *Policraticus* (c. mid-twelfth century), a treatise on political philosophy where the author discusses monarchy and offers a contrast between a prince and a tyrant. According to Salisbury's metaphor, political society mirrored the healthy human body with the king or prince as the head and "subject only to God and to those who act in His place on earth" (67). It should be noted that Salisbury's metaphor is separate from Ernst Kantorowicz's theory in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* where the author argues the monarch has two bodies: a natural one that lives and dies and a symbolic one, a body politic, which consists of policy and government and is constituted for the direction of the people.

a genuinely distinctive historiographical tradition, concentrated in the East Midlands, which allowed for a variety of ways of understanding the relationship between England and Denmark and the long history of Anglo-Danish interaction in the pre-Conquest period" (E. Parker 446).

However, this neither means that the ME romance implies Danish independence from the English kings, nor does it attempt to identify and justify precedents for Danish rule in England. Although we believe such reading is feasible from a twenty-first-century perspective, given the manuscript context as well as the historical, literary, cultural and linguistic framework, it seems improbable the poet-narrator intended to give some legitimisation to the Norman invaders, who may also be viewed as of Danish descent. In fact, by the time the only written copy of the romance was transcribed, the Anglo-Normans, including the royal family, had already begun to distance themselves from the continent and any possible associations with France. What the text does is present Anglo-Saxon England as a distinct but also sufficiently vague temporal space where "supra-national and regional tensions of national identity can be examined and incorporated into a national fantasy of Englishness" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 158) from a safe distance. We believe English identity in *Havelok the Dane* emerges as heterogeneous by incorporating different origins, ethnicities and estates, but also seemingly homogenous. The poet-narrator does not actually emphasise Havelok and his adoptive family's otherness. Instead, he projects that difference onto Denmark and the Danish, those who have not grown up and lived in England and therefore have not been influenced by its civilising effect. By extent, the contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian population in England would also not share the characteristics attached to Denmark and its people but those associated with Havelok and his descendants.

Havelok's portrayal thus becomes crucial for such a process of identification and unification of people(s): his peaceful demeanour, his goodness and sanctity are only matched by his love for the people and fierceness in battle. Yet, he does not fight unless he must and always in defence of land and law. His humility allows him to work alongside those of lower rank, empathise with them and acknowledge that nobility may take different shapes, which is why he rewards his adoptive brothers and sisters as well as the cook Bertram with titles and riches. Their elevation is justified either by their excellence in the field of battle or by their loyalty and endurance or, in the case of his male siblings, both. Elsewhere it was pointed out that this imagined portrait of the ideal king whose largesse extends to all social estates is a "peasant fantasy" (Halverson 149) and that it is given "from the point of view of the lower classes" (Staines 623). However, when considering these points, *Havelok the Dane*'s depiction of lower estates seems more like one that would please the upper ones, presenting subjects who

willingly pledge themselves to a monarch without much dispute or any feuds. We propose that a debate concerning the rigidness (or lack thereof) of the English community is not ultimately what is at stake for the poet-narrator but to present an imagined unified community.

If "romance is, in fact, a genre of the nation: a genre about the nation, and for the nation's important fictions" (Heng, "Romance of England" 160), then what matters is how that nation is constructed. In this text, we believe the main male character plays a key role in the creation of a complex, sometimes conflicting and ethnically different medieval England and it is through him that the latter is brought together. Havelok shares with the English kingdom the same exceptional nature and his great qualities, like those of Athelwold before him, become intertwined with those of the nation. For these reasons, we believe that in *Havelok the Dane* we find a story and a hero that are "wholly English" (Skeat iv), where difference is acknowledged but integrated into a single vision of an imagined community. Ultimately the whole supersedes the different parts that compose it and what matters is England, a nation united under one legitimate king, one culture, one law and one language.
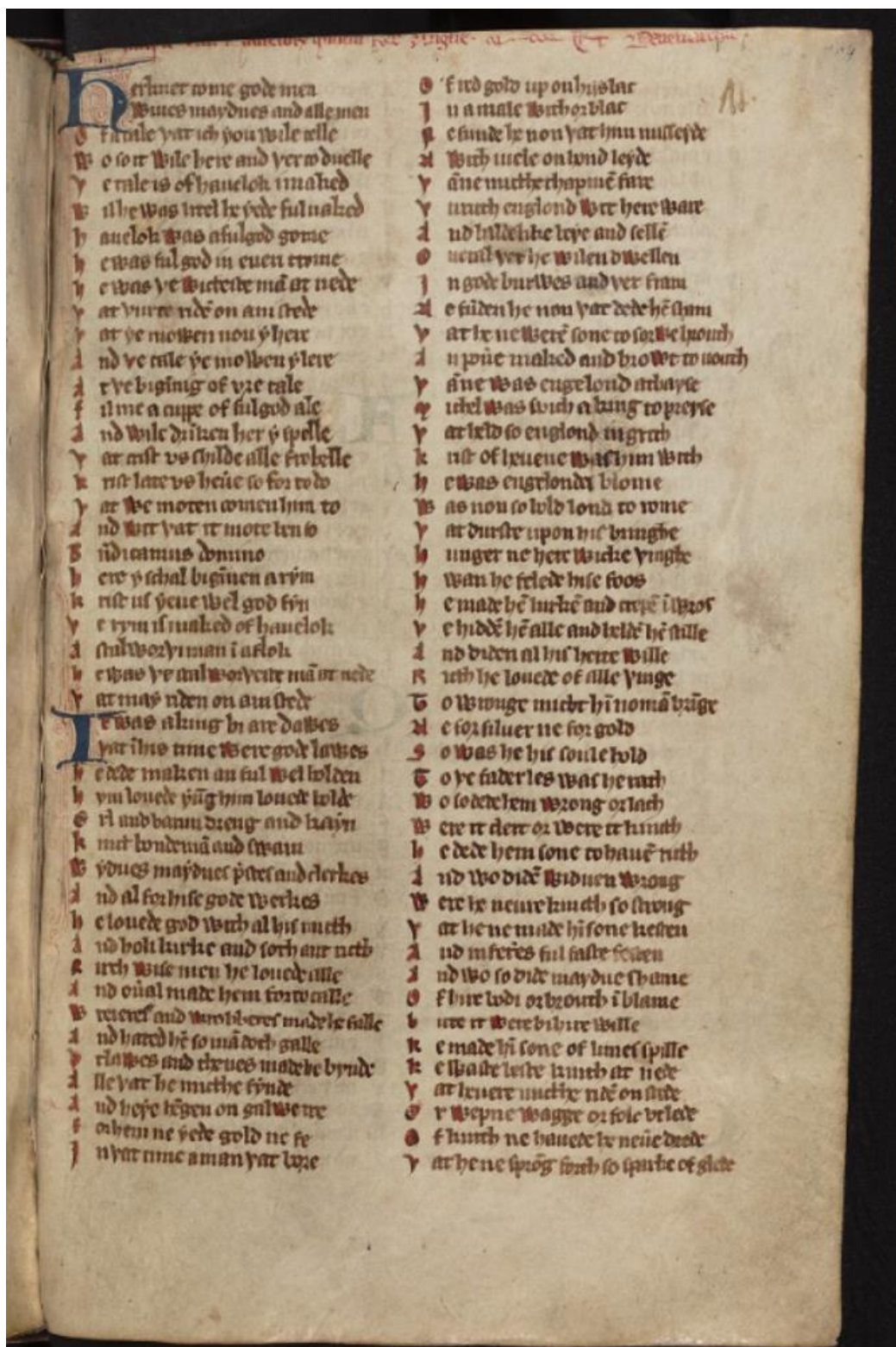
Figure 2 | *Havelok the Dane*, Bodleian Library MS. Laud Misc. 108, fol. 204ʳ. Bodleian Digital Library

Figure 3 | Grimsby Seal as reproduced in the front cover of *The Ancient English Romance of Havelok the Dane*, edited by Frederic Madden, Shakspeare Press, 1828.

CONCLUSION

"Nu have ye herd the gest al thoru / Of Havelok and of Goldeboru"

The hero (…) carries the destiny of his people and provides them with a sense of common purpose.

<div align="right">Crane, Insular Romance 40</div>

Throughout the ages the figure of the hero has been a source of great interest for audiences in general and for academia in particular. How heroism is depicted, what actions are deemed heroic and who the hero is (or is not) are issues frequently addressed in the field of literary studies. Researchers in medieval romance in ME are no different, as we too are often both enthralled and mystified by the figure of the hero in the Middle Ages (Aertsen; Ashe "The Hero"; Bloomfield; Bolgar; Cartlidge, "Introduction" *Heroes*; Connell; Couch; Eckert, "The Redemptive Hero"; Huppé; Keyes; Lowrey; Rouse "Crusaders"; Varandas "O Rosto do Herói"). We would even venture taking one step further and suggest that if romance is a "medieval narrative (…) relating the legendary or extraordinary adventures of some hero of chivalry" (*OED*, Def. 1), then to discuss medieval romance implies examining the hero. This idea is in line with Northrop Frye's proposal in *Anatomy of Criticism* where the author argues that "in literary fictions the plot consists of somebody doing something," and that "the somebody, if an individual, is the hero" (33). The hero is thus at the core of a work of fiction, which is also why the "story begins, as any good romance should, with the hero" (Keyes 50).

To accept Frye's proposal and his later division of fiction into five literary modes according to the hero's power is also, we believe, to accept that the hero plays a key role in the construction of the imaginary worlds of literature, worlds whose elements are acknowledged and accepted by readers or audiences as long as they do not disrupt any rules of probability established at the outset. Furthermore, if the hero is a figure who embodies the values of his people, who we choose to be our heroes reveals something about how we see ourselves as a community or, as R. R. Bolgar puts it, "[h]eroes have their importance for the history of culture because they serve to show us what traits and types of behavior have enjoyed public favor. (…) they provide a useful index of its values" (120). The hero's identity is by extension associated with the identity of the people he (or she) represents, which he also helps define and assert, providing "them [the people] with a sense of common purpose" (Crane, *Insular Romance* 40). Likewise, those who oppose the hero embody traits that stand against the moral principles of the community and also disclose information about it, its beliefs and culture. Assuming the process of defining an imagined community or nation is one of inclusion, given that determining who belongs shapes that very same community, those who are barred or expelled

are equally relevant. It is in light of these ideas that we have attempted to examine the ME romance *Havelok the Dane* and how its main male protagonist conveyed to a medieval English-speaking audience a particular sense of identity, delivering a carefully-delineated "imagined political community" (Anderson 5).

However, Havelok is not the typical romance hero. As already noted, he is an "unknightly hero" (Halverson 150) who is at times more concerned about where his next meal will come from than about the fate of his crown. He also appears, at least at first, to be untroubled by the fact that a usurper, Godard, sits on the throne of Denmark, a seat that is his by birthright. In fact, the hero is only revealed to be aware of and distressed by this once he (under duress) marries the English princess, Goldeboru, and must then flee Lincoln. Upon returning to his adoptive Danish family in Grimsby, Havelok is hailed as a great lord who has finally returned:

> (…) Welkome, louered dere!
> And welkome be thi fayre fere!
> Blessed be that ilke thrawe
> That thou hire toke in Godes lawe!
> Wel is hus we sen thee on live.
> Thou mithe us bothe selle and yeve; (lines 1214-19)

The feast that follows his first symbolic return home becomes a "ritual of remembered allegiance [that] rekindles Havelok's self-knowledge" through which "Havelok is brought to self-recognition" (Hostetter 70). Of course, this understanding of the events accentuates the character's passivity, which Havelok seems to have inherited from his textual predecessors – namely Geoffrey Gaimar's episode in the chronicle *L'Estoire des Engleis* and the Anglo-Norman lay, the *Lai d'Haveloc* – that might have in part been used as source material. This element further underscores the unusual nature of this 'English' hero-king as, in addition to him not being English born, his (mis)adventures are not first registered in writing in English, which may lead us to question how English the narrative is after all.

Moreover, the poet-narrator's unrelenting attention to Havelok's body, its nakedness, exposure and vulnerability also invites us to gaze at it as a *locus* that, akin to the English land itself, can be subjected to great violence, stripped of lawful authority and taken over. Unlike the Knights of the Round Table, Havelok is not described as the (close to) ideal warrior of courteous manners with a strict code of honour. He does not have a paramour and initially barely knows what to do with a spouse, "bi my lif! / Hwat sholde ich with wif do?" (line 1138). As a result, at this point we must concede that Havelok can at times hardly fit the medieval

hero's most common guise, viz., the knight. Yet, from the poem's very beginning, Havelok is destined to be not only a hero but also a king of two peoples, the English and the Danish.

Trailing a path that starts with "a long period of obscurity," which is also "a time of extreme danger, impediment, or disgrace" (Campbell 326), Havelok must face what we might identify as mundane daily challenges – endure physical discomfort, poverty, work for his sustenance, *inter alia*. These experiences firmly position him as a typical hero of romance, that is, as a man who is "superior in degree to other men and to his environment (…), whose actions are marvelous but who is himself identified as a human being" (Campbell, *Anatomy* 33). Havelok's childhood is a crucial period in the hero's journey as it serves to bring him closer to the people he will govern, creating a bond between the one who rules and those who are ruled, independently of their estate or age. Interestingly, in the ME *Havelok the Dane* that bond is formed primarily between the hero and the English people, not the Danish from whose land the child-hero must escape in order to keep his life. Havelok is thereby obliged to overcome an early childhood of abuse and neglect until he finds a modest safe haven with Grim and his children in Grimsby, England.[1]

While life in Grimsby is not portrayed as one suitable for a prince, the poet-narrator acknowledges that "[t]husgate Grim him fayre ledde: / Him and his genge wel he fedde" (lines 786-87). It is after a great famine occurs (line 825) that Grim tells his most distinguished child, Havelok, that he must depart to Lincoln in order to feed himself. When he departs, Havelok wears only "a covel" (line 659) made from a sail of his adoptive father's boat; "To Lincolne barfot he yede" (line 863) and there he spends "[t]wo dayes (…) fastinde" (line 866) until he starts working for the Earl's cook. However, in spite of these circumstances, we do not believe the rough experiences the hero of the ME *Havelok the Dane* presumably shares with "Everym[e]n" (Keyes 62) aim to make him "win the admiration of the lower classes" (Staines 613); instead, we maintain they serve to establish Havelok as an idealised hero-king whose understanding of the harsh realities the English people must face brings him not only closer to them but also underscores how he becomes one of them, integrated "into the fabric of English identity" (Tracy 149). Therefore, despite not being ethnically English, Havelok becomes English on acount of his experiences and upbringing on English soil, which is another factor that distinguishes this ME hero.

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[1] We do not include Grim's wife, Leve, here because she seems to disappear from the narrative when the family departs Denmark.

The worlds of ME popular romances differentiate themselves from the ones imagined in the continental romance tradition, namely the Arthurian. The distinctions between these two concurrent but distinct chivalric romance traditions have been pointed out throughout this work and include aspects such as (prospective) authorship and audience, language, verse and form, as well as themes and motifs.[2] For the most part, we agree that "[r]omance in England [particularly ME popular romance] is (…) centred differently from romance in France or Italy or Spain" (Furrow 71), which is why we have sought to provide a tentative definition of ME popular romance as well. Even though we agree with Ad Putter's contention that selecting this terminology does not miraculously make all issues regarding classification disappear ("Introduction" 3) and certainly adds difficulties as well,[3] having some theoretical limits was crucial to centre our research and limit it to a particular period, geography and representation. As a result, taking into account definitions given in previous studies, namely Radulescu and Rushton's proposal in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance* who identify this set of romances as "those texts in Middle English, sometimes with origins in Anglo-Norman versions, which show a predominant concern with narrative at the expense of symbolic meaning" (7) in addition to McDonald's position in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England. Essays in Popular Romance* where she argues that ME popular romance is "fast-paced and formulaic; (…) comparatively cheap and, in performance, ephemeral; it has a sensationalist taste (…). [And is] 'Popular' in capacity to attract a large and heterogeneous medieval audience (…) as well as (…) judged low-class" (1-2), we have established a theoretical framework which served as a basis to the analysis here presented.

'ME popular romance' is therefore at this time understood as those romances written in ME, which were in production between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries and may originate in Anglo-Norman or French romances or stand as original works of fiction. Such texts are here viewed as having been widely read by or performed to an audience that did not necessarily belong to the court. For this reason, despite the bias often associated with the word popular and the inherent problems of resorting to this term,[4] we have opted to keep it since it seems to us that texts, like *Havelok the Dane*, were generally well-liked, enjoyed by and written

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[2] For an analysis of these points in ME popular romance, see especially Chapter Two.

[3] One of the obvious problems of providing a definition, even a tentative one, to this *corpus* lies in the sheer number of texts and their diversity, which ultimately means that by constricting our interpretation we may be excluding texts that might well be regarded as ME popular romances because of their "family resemblance", to use Cooper's terminology (*English Romance* 8-9). Moreover, by looking at previous studies, it is easy to realise that attempting to impose a definition onto a set of narratives whose authors and audiences most likely did not care about establishing such boundaries makes whatever definition is proposed, whether more or less inclusive, a flawed one. This discussion is more fully developed in Chapter Two.

[4] On the nature of these problems see pages 46-47.

for the people. As noted by McDonald, we too agree that they are fast-paced, exceedingly depend on formulas and often use nearly identical sentence structures as well as plot-patterns, settings and locations (1-2). Furthermore, we believe it is possible to distinguish ME popular romances from other ME narratives on account of their themes and motifs, which mostly deal with "the bases of human existence in society" (Field, "Popular Romance" 29). We also argue that while it is possible to find in this set of romances some of the same preoccupations of their French counterparts, such as courtly themes, these are generally (if extant) less relevant. The supernatural and the marvellous too play smaller roles in ME popular romance. However, it is clear that the *miraculosus*, the Christian marvellous (Le Goff, "The Marvelous" 30), can be very much present in these texts.[5] Finally, in ME popular romance, we find a set of main characters, heroes and heroines, who share some values with their Arthurian counterparts, like bravery, audacity, faithfulness and generosity, but also have distinguishing traits.[6]

Noble-born, the heroes of ME popular romance are usually men who, after being wrongly exiled, must take back their land(s), social position and thereby re-establish their lawful place in a community. Similarly, Susan Crane upholds that:

> The English hero is an adopted ancestor whose exploits and nobility establish and enhance the status of the insular aristocracy. His story typically traces the loss and recovery of his inherited lands and titles, not through historically mimetic fines, inheritance duties, and petitions to the king, but through a glorious exile, a righteous and sometimes bloody return (…). (*Insular Romance* 23)

Upon the hero-kings of ME popular romance, in particular, often falls the responsibility of leading armies, unite the people under one banner, ensure peace, prosperity, safety, social and economic stability as well as rightful government. Thereby, when audiences read or listen to this set of romances, they encounter very different monarchs from Britain's most famous king, Arthur Pendragon, who over time became depicted as a passive ruler. These are men who directly engage in battle and fight for a goal greater than fame, reputation and love. In *Havelok the Dane* the ultimate aim is restoration of law and legitimate authority, which is accomplished through the forging of an alliance between the English and Danish peoples.

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[5] *Havelok the Dane* is a prime example of just that.
[6] It should be noted that adopting prototype theory, as argued by Liu, or the family resemblance theory, supported by Cooper, means that texts can be connected through chain relationships that may well reach over traditional genre boundaries. Thus, we grant that narratives which may not to fit into the definition proposed here are not necessarily excluded from being read as ME popular romances.

Given that their goals largely differ, the values these hero-kings actively pursue and aspire to can be quite distinctive from those of the heroes of courtly romance. Like Barron notes, these heroes might "know the conventions of chivalric deportment" but their struggles spring from "the oppressive forces of a wicked world" (85). Barron makes a relevant point that we would like to expand on: in the ME *Havelok the Dane* neither chivalry plays a prominent role nor do courtesy or courtly love. However, in order to fully comprehend the construction of the main male character, it is key to take into account the development of cavalry and its evolution as a group of warriors that were not simply armed but effectively became a separate estate, the *bellatores*, an order with its own set of norms and ideals. The values promoted by this group – prowess, courage, loyalty, largesse and friendship, all qualities established by Europe's warrior elite for centuries – have had an indubitable impact on how heroism was conceived throughout the medieval period and, consequently, depicted in romance, especially after chivalry began to emerge as a separate concept.[7]

Like we have established, chivalry, "the value system and behavioural code of the secular aristocratic elite of the Middle Ages" (Saul viii) that "gained currency as the sustaining ethos of warrior groups" (Keen 42), was not simply a movement or an institution. As an aristocratic system of values, it significantly helped produce a figure that became central to the identity of the medieval elite – the knight – and held wide influence across medieval society with a substantial impact on culture (Saul 4). At the same time, the great ideological transformations of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which contributed to the development of new models of conduct and ideals, namely courtesy and courtly love, play a role in our understanding of the ME *Havelok the Dane*. So, for instance, though we have remarked that Havelok and Goldeboru's union is a more practical one, driven by political, legal and dynastic concerns, Havelok behaves courteously towards his new wife. He flees Lincoln because he realises "[m]en sholde don his leman [Goldeboru] shame" (line 1192), then engages in direct battle to protect the princess' honour in Denmark and challenges Godrich to secure her right to the throne. He also does not force himself upon her and the marriage only seems to be willingly consummated when they arrive to Grimsby. Of course, this does not mean the love between them can be said to be courtly. Nonetheless, it is clear the author was aware of the system of values developed in the previous centuries and the behaviour associated with them given that Havelok embodies all the qualities expected of a great knight (and monarch): he is strong and

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[7] This we have seen is connected to the appearance of the first knighting ceremonies. In the words of Marc Bloch, "[t]he old delivery of arms was transformed into a sacrament and cemented the feeling that the order of chivalry was a society of initiates" (374).

powerfully built, brave, faithful, generous, selfless, chaste (until he joins Goldeboru in matrimony) and, most importantly, pious.

In medieval Europe, Christian religion became the most significant founding principle, serving as a lens through which to perceive and apprehend the world or, in other words, as an "adhesive paste" (Barbosa 343) that shaped and held everything together. Considering the influence the Christian church attained over nearly all aspects of medieval society, by the twelfth century it had become nearly impossible for a literary hero to be anything other than a Christian. This fact is discernibly connected to the authority the clergy had been able to secure over the chivalric order which is in turn mirrored (and even amplified by) medieval romance through heroes like Galahad, the perfect *miles Christi*. In the ME *Havelok the Dane*, both Havelok and Athelwold are described as markedly pious men whose devotion to God serves to underscore their sincere and virtuous nature. In a sense, they are good kings not only because they enforce and follow old laws, but also because, unlike Godrich and Godard, they are good Christians. Havelok's portrayal is especially relevant since the character's engagement in religious practices is mentioned nowhere else, making it a trait unique to the ME romance. What is more, Havelok's own body bares marks – "a kynmerk" (line 605) and "a sunnebem" (line 593) that shines from his mouth when he sleeps – that give divine sanction to the position he occupies at the end of the poem. The poet-narrator implies that Havelok has been chosen and literally marked by God to rule so, in spite of the tribulations set before the hero, a divine order clearly endorses him and the social hierarchy he represents.

Evidently, we might argue that the reason why Havelok personifies all the aforementioned qualities is related to the fact that ME popular romance tends to be quite depend on formulas and often uses nearly identical sentence structures. Proclamations that Havelok "was the stalwortheste man at need / That may riden on ani stede" (lines 25-26), a formula which is used in nearly identical terms to describe Athelwold (lines 87-88), are neither infrequent in ME popular romance nor unexpected. Yet, if the poet-narrator is not, as we have also argued, particularly (or at all) concerned with chivalry or knighthood, then wherefore include a scene in which the hero is dubbed before being made king (lines 2315-19)? Why is Havelok's dubbing associated with making him a monarch? We believe the connection between heroism and this new *ordo* is so deeply-rooted in medieval romance that, though few ME romances include detailed accountings of knighting ceremonies (Ackerman 286), being a knight and being dubbed into knighthood remained important, which is why "virtually all the romance heroes are dubbed" (Ackerman 310) even if they are unknightly. Furthermore, we contend that being able to fight on horseback, which Havelok does proficiently but only after

being dubbed, and upholding the values associated with the chivalric order, help establish Havelok as a hero and a good king.

When medieval audiences faced popular heroes, like Havelok, they were before a "newly constructed hero" through whom medieval romances of England "developed a self-consciously localized ethos of lordship and kindship" (Ashe, "The Hero" 146). The exercise of good kingship is at the centre of the ME *Havelok the Dane*, which is also why others have argued that Havelok can be read as "a walking metaphor for kingship" (Herzman, et al 75). Indeed, throughout the romance and much like Athelwold before him, Havelok turns into an idealised personification of the best virtues of a monarch. His identity as a foreigner, a Dane, does not diminish his status as the rightful and most adequate ruler of England, a position that is secured through his legitimate marriage to the sole English heir, Goldeboru. The union between the two royal heirs is in fact one of the key reasons behind Havelok's successful ascension to the English crown and the people's acceptance of his authority. Despite all his positive traits, Havelok can only become king in England because he has a lawful claim to it, a detail that distinguishes him from other figures, such as the historical Danish king Cnut.[8]

By portraying an exemplary Danish ruler, a *rex pacificus*, whose pious, valiant and peaceful nature aims to contradict depictions of the Danes (or Vikings) as violent intruders and raiders, Havelok's character becomes a means through which the ancestors of the Anglo-Scandinavian population of Lincolshire and East Anglia can be positively represented. As a text that allows "for a variety of ways of understanding the relationship between England and Denmark and the long history of Anglo-Danish interaction in the pre-Conquest period" (E. Parker 446), *Havelok the Dane* contributes to the creation of an imagined community wherein those whose ancestry is not exclusively Anglo-Saxon can become part of the "English national stock, of the nation" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 154). Havelok and Goldeboru's union, which also symbolises an alliance between Denmark and England, is thereby crucial to assure a valid intermarriage between the Danish and the English. From this alliance ensues a period of wealth and peace that derives precisely from the enforcement of good laws. Together the main couple have fifteen children who, the audience is told, all become kings and queens (lines 2980-82), suggesting that a new Anglo-Danish lineage has been inaugurated,[9] one of which those whose ancestors came from Denmark may be proud of.

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[8] It should be noted that after the death of Edmund Ironside, Aethelred's oldest son and legitimate heir, Cnut married Emma of Normandy, Aethelred's widow, and became king of England, despite the fact that Aethelred had two other legitimate male heirs, Alfred and Edward.

[9] This idea is further underscored by the marriage of Havelok's adoptive sisters to English men and his brothers' social elevation.

Notwithstanding, despite the overall positive image of the Danes in this ME popular romance, Denmark is still represented as a more violent community than that of England. This fact is particularly noticeable in the narrative's two main antagonists, Godrich, the Earl of Cornwall, and Godard. While both are depicted as traitors and usurpers, the latter is more frequently described in harsher terms[10] and shown to be capable of greater brutality, an idea especially highlighted in the scene wherein the poet-narrator describes the gruesome murder of Havelok's biological sisters (lines 465-72). Gordard's sadistic actions are met with an equally vicious penalty that serves to underline the brutal nature of Danish laws and distance the actions of the two peoples. Employing torture and excessive violence to punish Havelok's main opponent helps signal a difference from the more restrained justice enacted by Goldeboru and the English, thus also participating in the construction of an image "of the Anglo-Saxon past as a Golden Age of the Law" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 94). In addition, the use of torture and its rejection can be seen as part of the discourses of the nation – emphasising what behaviour is deemed appropriate and what is not – and as indicators of the cultural and ethnical other (Tracy 190).

On the issue of otherness, Michael Uebel claims that "imagining otherness necessarily involves constructing the borderlands, the boundary spaces that contain – in the double sense, to enclose and to include – what is antithetical to the self" (Uebel 265). In *Havelok the Dane* that space is Denmark and the people who inhabit it. While England and Denmark should not be read as complete opposites, since Birkabeyn's reign is meant to be interpreted as a mirror of Athelwold's, the text connects these two geographical spaces with very separate identities, reaffirming the English community's pre-eminence and unity. Place and space are thus relevant aspects in the narrative, on the one hand, because there is a conscious attempt to associate Havelok with a specific territory, which can be seen as England in broader terms and Lincolnshire and East Anglia in narrower ones. On the other hand, the identification of rather precise towns, such as London, York, Lincoln and Grimsby, bestows upon the text a sense of authenticity since it provides material connections between the imagined world of romance and the landscape by merging the narrative itself with a topography the audience will recognise (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 60), which in turn helps make the past seem more tangible. Hence, the land provides a figure of permanence, since the poet-narrator implies that it remains the same, becoming a stable framework of "transhistorical value" (Ashe, *Fiction* 63) that can be explored. What is more, England is identified in *Havelok the Dane* as more than a

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[10] Compare, for example, the list of terms used the address the two on page 153.

geographical location, it is a nation ruled by one king from "Rokesburw al into Devere" (line 139).

Issues regarding nation and nationality in the Middle Ages are difficult to solve. There are several studies pointing in very different and even opposing directions and a definitive, consensual theory seems hard to reach. However, this thesis does not aim to prove there was a well-defined and demarcated English nation in the medieval period. Instead, what we have sought to point out is that in the ME popular romance *Havelok the Dane*, in particular, discourses of the nation are visible. First, because the English land inhabited by the main characters is always identified as one cohesive kingdom, England. Second, in this carefully delimitated space, from Roxburgh to Dover, one language is spoken, English. This is a relevant issue since writing in English at the end of the thirteenth century can be seen as a statement about belonging (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 11). Given the fact that the texts in MS. Laud Misc. 108 manuscript "are localized physically, spiritually, and politically [in England], elaborating English settings, customs, landmarks, shrines, political events, (…) [the use of] the English language itself" (Bell and Couch 15) implies the choice of language was not coincidental and signifies a deliberate attempt to link English identity to the English language. Third, there is a body of legal practices, ancient and good, that originates in Anglo-Saxon England and is followed and accepted by the population that lives in this realm, a fact which also serves to bind this community together. Fourth, this land is ruled by one legitimate monarch: Havelok, who rightfully succeeds Athelwold. Fifth, we could further argue that there is a common economy, an idea suggested by references to production, distribution and trade of goods and services. Thereby, when reading or listening to *Havelok the Dane*, medieval (and contemporary) audiences were (are) presented with a unified kingdom under one ruler with an economic system, one language, one law. Yet, we must not fail to recall that the medieval nation depicted in this poem is not – nor could it be equated to – a modern state, but "a community of the realm, *communitas regni*" wherein "the symbolizing potential of the king, (…) allows leveling discourses and an expressive vocabulary of unity, cohesion, and stability to be imagined (…)" (Heng, "Romance of England" 139), distinguishing it from later conceptions of nation.

In this thesis we have argued that medieval romance (and possibly literature on the whole) has an active role in the fashioning of culture by creating and generating meaning in conscious and unconscious ways (Ashe, *Fiction* 2). As a result, because they are fictionalisations of the past, romances in ME are vital to the construction of the new vision the English community began to shape not only *of* themselves but also *to* themselves. Authors like

Laura Ashe suggest that this process gained greater *momentum* when feelings of separation from the continent began to emerge more evidently from the late twelfth century to the early thirteenth century (*Fiction and History* 95). What is more, this process involved both inclusion and exclusion which, according to Turville-Petre, is common since the definition of nation is never solely about identifying what is part of the nation but also what is not (*England the Nation* 1). Because it is not bound by the same limits of historiography that we find in chronicles, for instance, romance became a fertile ground for the nation to be imagined and verbalised, effectively opening a new literary discursive space within which it was possible to discuss and conceive an English nation in the Middle Ages. This is not to say that the concept of nation was familiar or even recognisable by the medieval population living in England and possibly reading and/or listening to *Havelok the Dane*, among others, being read out loud or performed, but that the seeds of "the discourse of the nation" (Speed 145) had been planted in the imaginary worlds of romance. Indeed, the practice of reading in public itself could "become a deep affirmation of the group's sense of self and togetherness (…) united in a feeling of sorrow or exhilaration" (Coleman 29).

All things considered, in spite of the ease with which the poet-narrator presents the united England the characters inhabit, the main male hero of *Havelok the Dane* reflects the complexities of English identity in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Since he neither fully belongs to England nor to Denmark, he is in a position to create a new space wherein those of Anglo-Scandinavian could find a position in the land they inhabit but do not initially come from without necessarily relinquishing or denying their Scandinavian heritage. A "cultural hybrid-figure" (Rouse, *Anglo-Saxon England* 105), Havelok lies at the crossroads and because of it he can be used to illustrate how those with different cultural, historical and linguistic legacies were integrated into and helped build the English community. Therefore, at the end of the poem, Havelok and Goldeboru usher a new era where Danes and English live at peace, providing an imaginary depiction of England as a unified multicultural community whose greatness would persist for generations to come.

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