

Imagined Hearths: Representations of the Family in Late Medieval Popular Romance and their Codices

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29 April 2021

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Section 1. Abstract

Medieval household miscellanies, belonging to people of bourgeois, gentry, or mercantile status, reveal a vision of the family unit in the late Middle Ages. Popular romances contained within these household miscellanies tell stories of noble men and noble women who embark on adventures and ultimately achieve an ideal happy ending. The fulfillment of the hero's journey in medieval popular romance implies the redemption of his family unit and a return to stability. Due to the nature of varying performances of traditional familial roles, medieval romances reveal more than one redemption narrative, including the overcoming of or the return to family members, and the fulfillment of the family unit's needs. This thesis aims to discuss the presence and significance of *eritage* along the hero's journey and the challenges he must face to reclaim it.

Section 2. Introduction

The household miscellany or anthology, a book of relatively simple illumination, was a common household object for medieval English people belonging to the bourgeois, gentry, and mercantile class of the late 13th and early 14th centuries. One such example is the Auchinleck manuscript. The particularly elaborate richness of its illumination and the estimated size of the compendium¹ leads scholars to continually speculate as to the identity of its owners (and their certain abundance of wealth) but it is almost unanimously agreed by scholars that it belonged to a bourgeois family in the 1330s (Stein, 6). Many miscellanies like the Auchinleck survive to us today, though each compilation of texts is slightly different. Not every miscellany contains popular romances, nor do the same popular romances appear in every miscellany. For household

¹ From the Auchinleck [Website](#): "With 43 texts surviving, this means that around 17 items have been lost (over one quarter of Auchinleck's texts)." The manuscript is not only large in size, with folios measuring roughly 250 X 190 mm, but contains a larger than average collection of texts.

miscellanies and anthologies, the “diversity of their contents seems to cater to the reading needs of a range of household members, including their children and servants in both gentry and mercantile households, and apprentices in the latter as well” (Riddy, 237). One can imagine an adult reading aloud in a performative manner a saint’s life, a romance, or a chronicle to a roomful of their household’s members. The notion that the reading of a book like the Auchinleck satisfied the instructive needs of a family inspires more questions. How did the ways in which the family was represented in literature, and especially in popular romance, clarify, question, or enforce the ideals associated with the medieval English family? Furthermore, since these romances were communicated within a genre marked by diverse conventions and purposes, did the family unit bear a universal significance to its readers?

The fulfillment of the hero’s journey in medieval popular romance is synonymous with the return to a stable family unit. The narrative trajectory generally follows an inverse bell-curve, where the stable family unit marks the beginning and the end, while it is at its most unstable in the middle. When the noble men and sometimes noblewomen embark on adventures and eventually achieve an ideal resolution, the legitimacy of their status at birth, how they depart from their families and estates, and the suspension of their familial identity all contribute to the resolution of their conflicts. Since the creation of newer generations within a family inspires conflict as well as opportunity within the fantastical realm of medieval popular romance, the hero’s journey may include the narrative of overcoming, returning to, or fulfilling the role of an absent family member by the end of the romance. However, due to the nature of varying performances of traditional familial roles throughout the genre of popular romance, there is more than one redemption narrative. Just as it reflects the many myths and stories available to medieval people at this time, the variety of ways in which characters fulfill or neglect their place

in the family unit reflects a heterogeneity of social and cultural orders upon which their family was founded. With that in mind, why would readers of the Auchinleck be drawn to narratives in which the social and cultural order of their family was threatened with instability?

The answer lies in the safety and fantasy of the romance genre. Andrea Hopkins characterizes popular romance as “the escape from the confusing and belittling humiliation of modern life” (Hopkins, 1). Hopkins focuses on the idealism of love that is so prevalent in medieval romance, along with the miraculous flexibility romance affords its world and characters. As Hopkins describes it, shame can be forgiven just as much as perfection can be lost (Hopkins, 8). In a strange way, the imperfection of the popular romance worlds reassured medieval audiences of their own imperfect life. Readers understood the fundamental twofold assumptions of the genre: first, readers must suspend their disbelief, and second, there is ultimately a happy resolution. In a literary, imaginary space widely understood to hold only happy endings, the sociocultural ideals for the family can be called into the liminal, adventuring space enjoyed by the characters of the romance without fear of permanent destruction. The notion that social negotiation was present in late medieval bourgeois households is not novel. Glenn Burger and Rory Critten asserted in a collection of essays they published in 2020 that “late medieval bourgeois households could be a site of individual negotiation as well as of social discipline, of creative volubility, and improvised exchange as well as regulated interaction” (Burger & Critten, 2). Even if it was not the intention of the producers and composers of medieval miscellanies to participate in social and cultural narration, the romances contain evidence of such participation. Roberta Krueger states that the many copies of popular romances which survive today reflect the “protean ability of romance narratives to adapt to the new contexts in which they found themselves transposed” (Krueger, 4). In court as well as the manor-

house and the city dwelling, the popular romance narrative found its audience. Not one single issue pervades the genre, and its ability to adapt its characteristic elements, tropes, and story lines to the beliefs and myths of the contexts in which individual romances were created adds a certain fluidity to the genre which defies classification.

Scholars have classified and categorized medieval popular romances according to various themes, and the dimensions of the genre are partially encompassed with each approach. For example, one approach attempts to define romance through its distinction from the *chanson de geste* literary tradition.² To most scholars, whereas in romance, romantic desire is the prime mover of the narrative, a desire to achieve honor and fulfil destiny tends to move the story in the *chanson de geste*. Moreover, new values, such as the refinement of combat law, courtly intercourse, and service to women all regulate the hero's attitude and behavior; in essence, romance celebrates "courtoisie" (Hopkins, 7). One can further group romance based on regional subject matter; most romances which are discussed in the context of England contain the *matière*, or matter of either England or France. Romances of England include *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, and *Bevis of Hamton*, which contain tropes and elements alluding to Anglo-Saxon-era realities. The matter of France includes Anglo-Norman stories with strong, culturally French chivalric values, such as *Sir Degaré* and *Amis and Amiloun*. Another categorizing appellation for popular romances is the penitential, which refers to romances such as *Sir Gowther* and *Guy de Warwick*, both of which follow an individual on an adventure with the explicit purpose of doing penance for atonement. Despite these categories, as Hopkins purports, "Middle English romances developed in England in a distinct and individual way, involving an

² *Chanson de Geste* describes Old French epic poems of the 11th to the 13th centuries, e.g., the Song of Roland. These are often associated with Charlemagne.

emergent sense of nationality in the 13th century” (Hopkins, 11). While this thesis does not discuss in depth how English national identity manifests in romances, it asserts that the family unit within each individual romance is equally reflective of nascent beliefs and practices of late medieval England. Therefore, this thesis will explore the function and portrayal of family in romance by approaching popular romances as products of cultural moments.

It is essential to clarify what is meant by *popular* romance in this thesis. What makes popular romance different from other genres of medieval English literature is its capacity to reflect ideologies and narrate culture as it was perceived by members of the emerging middle class in late medieval England. This is a relatively new approach since the distinguishing qualities of popular romance have fluctuated over time according to academic and public opinion. In the past, the intellectual status, in conjunction with the sophistication of its readers, has dictated the interpretation of popular romance. It has been “treated as products of a class of social aspirants who wish to be entertained with what they consider to be the same fair, but in English, as their betters” (Riddy quoting Barron 1987, 199). McDonald states that viewing the aesthetics of popular romance as products which issued from the “great mass” has been dismissed in favor of seeing them as inheritors of the ideologies of the elites (McDonald, 12). Crucially, she clarifies that “popular romance can and does replicate dominant ideologies,” and elite art “likewise does so all the time” (McDonald, 12). In the context of defining popular culture, McDonald addresses the relevant component: ideology. John Storey, a historian of popular culture, elaborates upon this component by listing the most widely accepted interpretations of *ideology*. Each definition interacts with different dimensions of culture. The first one the simplest: “ideology is a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people” (Storey, 2). The following two definitions engage with the manifestations of the first

one. Ideology can also be “a certain masking, distortion, or concealment, indicative of how texts and practices present distorted images of reality” (Storey, 3). A third definition follows the ideological forms which are present in popular culture; ideology “draws attention to the way texts always present a particular view of the world” (Storey 4). This definition assumes that the paradigm of the powerful of the society is intentionally controlling the lower rungs of the societal pyramid. To observe popular romance as a set of texts which are products of the ideological forms extant in medieval England in the 13th and 14th centuries allows us to observe social sentiments and cultural visions which otherwise would have been overlooked. Though Storey’s writing concerns mainly a post-modern popular culture, the rhetoric and ideas are transferable to the present discussions of popular romance. As Storey claims, “the texts and practices of popular culture are seen as forms of public fantasy ... a collective dream world” (Storey, 9). Instead of joining the debate over whether or not popular romance should be considered “high art,” it is productive to examine its dimensions as it would have been received by its readers. Such efforts are underway by scholars like Myra Seamon who, in examining the renovation of the medieval household through what is visible via manuscripts, identifies the home represented in *Sir Corneus* as a “chastity-testing object,” with the ability to reveal unfaithful wives, or the husband’s inability to do so (Seamon, 88). Popular romances similarly provide ample opportunity to explore what their contents represented to late medieval readers.

The dimension of the family unit in romance must be discussed in a way that decodes its abstraction. In the endeavor of grouping romances, certain scholars have used the family as a thematic criterion by which romances are classified, opting to compare representations of the family unit against core sets of literary motifs and elements. However, the issue with attempting to classify certain popular romances under the subheading of family romance is that it pushes the

pervasive aspects of the representations of the family in popular romance to the periphery of the discussion. For the intents and purposes of this thesis, *King Horn* and *Sir Degaré* would be classified as family romances, even though that would not align with the classifications defined by, for example, Geraldine Heng. Heng describes the new motifs and elements brought to romance by the presence of the family, such as “melodrama” and “affect,” which accompany plots that revolve more around women and children. Such elements can be found in the Constance romances, as Heng argues, but not as explicitly in *King Horn* and *Sir Degaré*. However, the idea of the family unit is — even when missing melodrama and affect — omnipresent in popular romance.

The examinations of texts in this thesis follows the narrative arc of the romance, commencing with an examination of the conditions and parts of each romance’s beginning. Examining the foundation of the hero’s family at the beginning of the story (e.g., the protagonist’s parents) illuminates the way its destabilization impacts the hero’s journey and the resolution. Moving into the middle of the narrative arc, the thesis examines the productive separation and distancing of the hero from their familial identity. Following this analysis, this thesis examines the ways in which the hero returns to their family and is met with opposition or open arms. The obstacles and parameters of the hero’s journey, which outline what the hero will need to do to achieve his happy resolution and thereby redeem the stability of his family, informs how his return to the family unit manifests. The happy resolution is achieved when the social order in which the family unit first operated is once more stable. However, since neither the resolution nor the path to it is monolithic, this thesis must compare and interpret how each family is redeemed. In the end, this thesis will discuss the representations of the family unit in popular romance and what it might mean to its medieval readers as a product of popular culture.

The paradigm of the versatile family unit is likely not one the medieval reader would have consciously used to interpret popular romances. But, by analyzing the family units and their redemptions as portrayed in medieval popular romances, this thesis intends to explain how the redemption of the family was a necessary aspect of the hero's journey,³ thereby deepening our understanding of the medieval ideology of the family and the impact such depictions might have had on readers of the genre.

Section 3. Families and their *Eritage*

In a late medieval English society where property laws were built upon primogeniture, the medieval family, both aristocrat and gentry alike, was concerned with the succession of their estate. The continuity of the family lineage parallels, at least for rulers and members of the aristocracy, the gain or loss of the power their family had wielded over time. Illegitimate births, suspended marriages, disparities in socio-economic status, and political disputes all hide within genealogical trees. These difficulties may impact the state of a family unit as a result, rendering it unstable. An unstable family unit spells disaster, born in the form of enduring shame, political or social decline, or the loss of property. This anxiety is most visible in romances whose conflicts entail consequences on enormous regional scales. For instance, Felicity Riddy recalls the anxiety of King Arthur when he's informed Mordred has usurped his throne (Riddy, 246). However, this concern is similarly reflected in popular romance and particularly in those which are concerned with the failure of the male line in the hero's family. Crisis in male succession is a central topic

³ "Heritage" linguistically precedes "hero," which reaches English first in the 1660s, according to the Cambridge dictionary. The archetypal form of the hero is used in this thesis, but due to the anachronistic aspect of this heuristic, it's unlikely late medieval readers would have conceived of "hero" the same way.

in Alcuin Blamires's essay on *Sir Gowther*, as it is in Andrea Hopkins's chapter about the same romance in her seminal monograph.

The historical context of the average late medieval family helps to explain this pronounced concern. Riddy describes the transformation that the gentry as a class underwent during this period; "Between the late 12th and late 13th centuries, knighthood became increasingly exclusive and expensive to maintain Many of the men who had earlier been knights were by the fourteenth century relegated to the lesser ranks of esquire and gentleman." (Riddy, 237). By the end of the 15th century, between 1000 and 2000 households of vastly differing means in the greater London region aspired to live in the style of the "great household" (Burger, 5). This suggests that, over time, medieval families of the gentry, mercantile, and bourgeois classes had become increasingly detached from the real-life consequences of the large-scale estates the nobility possessed — many of which appear in popular romance. The members of the average late medieval household — and readers of popular romance — would likely not have experiential knowledge of losing or claiming said estates. However, while the average late medieval family's inheritance may not have reflected those depicted in popular romances, they would have been familiar with the concept of familial inheritance on a smaller scale. This familiarity would have permitted emotional and situational identification with the hero and his family that transcended the economic status of the readers. Indeed, the simple act of reclaiming one's inheritance pervades popular romance. However, even more narrative trajectories branch off of this one. In *King Horn*, an essential part of the culmination of Horn's heroic development is his reclamation of his homeland and title through the expulsion of the Saracen invaders who had first driven him out, whereas in *Sir Gowther*, Sir Gowther's family never once loses proprietorship of the duchy over which they ruled. As a narrative technique, the reclamation of

one's inheritance actively and excitingly advances the story. It gives the hero motivation and positions him as a dispenser of justice when he physically reclaims his estate. As a motif of popular romance, the reclamation of one's inheritance emblemizes the medieval concept of *eritage*. Across contexts, *eritage* acts as a familiar mode of understanding for the medieval reader, supplementing their conception of the social norms and orders familiar to popular romance's readership.

Eritage

Due to regional linguistic differences, *eritage* does not have a singular meaning. Instead, it aligns more with the diverse representations of the family unit than one dictionary definition. Its various meanings connect the jump between inherited property and the spiritual bond to one's family unit, which reflects its core attribute as a bridge from one generation to the next. The Middle English Dictionary supplies three definitions of "heritage," and includes all of its orthographic iterations. The most common use relies heavily upon "heritage" in its legal capacity: "something legally inherited or inheritable; inherited or inheritable property, right, office, sovereignty, etc.; a legal inheritance" (MED). It stands to be the most recent development of the meaning of "eritage," since only 15 of its 40 appearances are recorded as being prior to 1400 CE. The second most common emphasizes the succession of things as the most prominent aspect of heritage; "the fact or right of inheriting; hereditary succession ... (b) hereditary possession or tenure; by hereditary tenure, as an inheritance" (MED). The third most common use of "heritage" emphasizes its spiritual nature, defining it as "(a) a spiritual inheritance or bequest; an allotted place in heaven or hell ... (b) one's occupation or station in life" (MED). This use boasts 24 appearances, 12 of which come from texts proceeding 1400 CE, and include two which appear in 1200 and 1230. It is arguably one of the oldest definitions of *eritage*, but

despite its relatively low number of recorded appearances, the fact that it exists contemporary with the other two definitions demonstrates its continued relevance. As discussed previously, succession overlaps both the meanings of *eritage* and themes in popular romance. The notion that to inherit something is to follow legal procedure provides the language to meet the situations in popular romance when legal procedure is not followed. When the hero is not able to inherit his *eritage*, it is viewed as an injustice. The righting of that injustice characterizes the hero's journey toward redemption. In *King Horn*, "heritage" appears when Horn addresses his host king, "Thu kep hure a stunde, / The while that I funde/In to min *heritage*, / And to mi baronage" (1291-1294, my emphasis). In order to wed Rymenhild, the king's daughter, he must elevate his station, which he will do by reclaiming his heritage. However, Horn specifies that he plans to return to his barony. It is unclear whether or not he perceives his barony to be an entity distinct from his heritage, but nonetheless, his *eritage* is bound to his family's land. The reclamation of his estate is essential to the satisfaction of his path toward wedding Rymenhild. In other words, once this injustice is resolved, he may wed. In *Sir Degaré*, heritage is once again mentioned, separate from the land to which the speaker alludes:

Yif ani man were of armes so bold
 That with the King justu wold,
 He sscholde have in marriage
 His dowter and his *heritage*,
 That is kingdom god and fair, (439-443, my emphasis).

The marriage act includes the king's *eritage* as a consequence, which activates all three definitions of the concept. The worthy suitor is legally granted the property of the king (the

kingdom), thus articulating the succession of governance from one monarch to the next. The fact that the suitor must bear sufficient arms is a function of the socio-economic requirement to be a member of the warrior class. This function fails, however, because Degaré is raised by a merchant and then by a clerk, rather than a knight. He gains his armor and weapons not as a mark of his warrior status, but instead as gifts, extraneous to knighthood. Moreover, Degaré isn't aware until after the marriage that this land is in fact his own, since his mother is in fact the king's daughter. In both examples, when *eritage* is present, it articulates a transition of property, power, and title. We should remember that succession was a nerve-wracking process for medieval elites and probably for the lower classes. These divergences from typical medieval visions of marriage reflect this concern through their narrations of the immediate culture.

Eritage when presented as a marital piece represents the potential viability of that marriage socially and economically — the land and status gained — but it also represents the continued attention and care given to that land and status. This is the third dimension of *eritage* as it appears in popular romance. Estates and lands are spoken of in popular romance as things which ideally should be cared for and looked after. It appears in *Havelok the Dane*; “That hise children sulde tharne / Everemore that *eritage* / That his was, for hise utrage.” (2835-2838, my emphasis). The storyteller emphasizes that Havelok's children will continue to use his *eritage*, inferring that his succession will be stable from now on. The storyteller also emphasizes that the land exists for his use. Since he is a member of the nobility, the land is not only his economic birthright but his to oversee and to exploit. This sentiment is echoed in other romances as well, even in those which don't feature the word “heritage,” such as the tale of *Sir Gowther*. Referring to their duchy, Gowther's parents emphasize their proprietorship; “Y do bot wast my tyme on the, / Eireles mon owre *londys bee*,” (58-60, my emphasis). The duke refers to the fact that he

and his wife remain heirless, making it seem as if the land itself has no heir. His complaint alludes as well to succession, becoming the subject of Gowther's mother's words the next time "lond" appears in the tale; "Tonyght we mon geyt a child / That schall owre *londus* weld." (80-82, my emphasis). Again, the child in question is imagined wielding their lands. This expression repeats throughout the romance, culminating finally when the storyteller closes the tale; "thus Syr Gwother coverys is *care*, / That fyrst was ryche and sython bare, / and effte was ryche ageyn," (745-7, my emphasis). There is no mention of land, but TEAMS editors Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury translate "care" as "estate." Parallel to the departure and the return to stability, the closing expresses this return in terms of the land's environmental state. The physicality of the estate cannot be understated. In fact, homesteads (of not just heroes, but of other characters as well) function as landmarks in their fictional landscapes. *Emaré*, which doesn't feature the word *eritage*, refers to the "hom" eight times, signifying a household, not a family. In *Amis and Amiloun*, "hom" appears 19 times, typically followed by the word "ogain" to express a direction the characters are heading. The phrase, "air of the lond" (594), features in this romance as well, giving further credence to the notion that members of the family unit conceive of themselves and their relation to one another in tandem with their inheritance of the physical estate. The consistent reference to the hero's usage and care of the land underscores this conception of the family unit as something that must continually be care for. Though these romances don't explicitly discuss or use "heritage," *eritage* is implicitly conceived throughout the texts as a representation of that which ideally should be cared for by the family unit. The events following the beginnings of popular romances work to develop what it means to "take care of the family" in a multitude of ways. However, the unifying trend entails the hero pursuing a journey which will resolve with the redemption of his family unit and a return (or creation) of stability. Each

popular romance engages differently with *eritage*, so it follows that this thesis must examine the beginning of popular romances in order to situate the narrative framework of the departure and the return to stability within the context *eritage*. In the interest of tracking how the stability of the family unit is impacted, the beginning of a popular romance presents the circumstances that characterize that family unit's stability as well as how those circumstances factor into its destabilization and the "anticipated yet malleable future" of the hero (Riddy, 242). The path of redemption for one hero cannot be ascribed to another. Their beginnings must be examined in order to discern why this is the case.

Beginnings

Heng suggests that the family is the first society into which the human subject enters, a "ready-made cluster of associations, memories, roles, and affects" (Heng, 208). Medieval romances often begin with the foundation of a family: a married couple. In a genre where desire galvanizes and drives the narrative forward, it's notable that its stories should begin with a fixed image of the future of our protagonist. In the context of the family unit, married couples imply the steadiness of not only social norms and values, but of the family's continuity itself. Riddy confirms that marriage is the prevailing direction toward which heroes are urged, as well as that which also characterizes the domestic sphere. The hero as a couple in the near future is expected and assumed; to contextualize a previous citation, these are the circumstances which define the hero's "anticipated yet malleable future" (Riddy, 242). In romances where the hero's story begins with their birth or family, their parents function as essential pieces in their journey. Moreover, it is their individual qualities and behavior toward one another (and the family unit) which differentiates one romance's beginning from the other. In *Sir Gowther*, Gowther's mother is married to a respected duke, while in *Sir Degaré*, Degaré's mother is unmarried. In both

romances, the hero's mothers are ravished by an otherworldly male figure (therein conceiving the hero), yet the circumstances of their family units are dissimilar. In the context of succession, the marriageable qualities of eligible bachelors and maidens often receive the limelight. Horn pleads that Rymenhild orchestrate a way to make him a knight, having reckoned that he is too low-born and low station to be a suitable husband; "Help me to knighte / be al thine mighte / to my lord the king" (440). This is what Riddy describes as "personableness" or a couple being the right fit for one another (Riddy, 244). What is present at the beginning of popular romances, however, is not always "the right fit." In *Bevis of Hamton*, Bevis's mother betrays her noble (and old) husband in order to be able to be with a partner who will satisfy her desires. *Lay le Freine* premise is predicated upon Le Freine's mother hiding her daughter, a twin, because she must save face after making an accusatory remark against another mother of twins. While typically unextreme, the parents of the heroes in popular romance boast a remarkably unreliable consistency toward portraying stable, ideal married couples. In the romances where they are idyllically married and behave ideally toward one another, third party forces arrive from beyond their control and impact their family unit's stability. In romances where the ideal popular romance family appears as a triad, such as the Holy Family as it's described by Heng — "an adult son who dies voluntarily in cooperation with his divine father, while the mother-son dyad ... is little troubled by the prohibitive presence and censor of an earthly father" (Heng, 202) — this triad, and picture of family stability, is quick to devolve. These destabilizations establish the grounds upon which the hero must prove himself and particularize the lines along which the hero later reclaims his *eritage*.

In the tales of Sir Gowther and Sir Degaré, both romances involve fiendish figures⁴ who ravish the mother of the heroes and cause instability. Both mothers make decisions to conceal the fact that they've been ravished and will conceive. Moreover, in both cases, the birth of the hero circumvents any existing marital process that the romance portrays. In the case of Sir Degaré, the fact that the mother is raped by a fairy lord without first unhorsing her father in order to win her hand disturbs the social order of this fictional community. Without husband or suitor in sight, the mother must conceive of her baby in secret and hide him away by sending him to a wealthy merchant willing to raise the child. The deception works, but the lesson of the romance here is plain to see; what is hidden will always come to light. This beginning configuration interacts with one of the major mobilizing forces in popular romance — the righting of injustices. In *Sir Degaré*, the concealment of the true circumstances of Degaré's birth is an injustice that will be unveiled later on, but the separation from his *eritage* occurs during the beginning of the romance. The same concealment happens in the tale of Sir Gowther. By disguising itself as her husband, the fiend ravishes Sir Gowther's mother, and once it reveals itself to her and foretells of her child's strength and devilish predilections, she runs to her husband. Convincing him to have sex with her then to create an heir who will rule their lands, he acquiesces, and believes that the baby when it's born is their own. Once again, the mother acts with the family's reputation and stability in mind, yet despite how she handles it, the baby proves to be a monstrous and violent child. In *Sir Gowther* and as in *Sir Degaré*, the fear that knowledge of the true circumstances of the baby's conception will become public is what causes the mothers to deceive their husbands (or male authority figures); "Y hope was Godus sond / Then wyll that stynt all owr stryfe." (Gowther, 88). The fact that it isn't just a husband being deceived, but one's father, confirms that

⁴ Their appearances and character are discussed in more detail on page 33.

the decisions they make are in the interest of preserving the stability of their family unit. In both tales, the mother is (mostly) innocent, and though they act with a political or social acumen appropriate to their aristocratic station, their decisions exhibit how even acting with the family's interests in mind can be, in the long run, destabilizing. Though she exists in the beginning for only a few lines, Horn's mother displays a similar acumen by hiding herself in a cave when invaders raid her lands and murder her husband, King Murry. Once again, the misery she experiences at the thought of losing Horn reflects her alignment with this dimension of benevolent motherhood.

Not every mother in popular romance is the picture of innocence; nor is every father. In *Emaré* and *Bevis of Hamton*, one parent elicits the destabilizing force. Emaré's mother, Evayne, died at a young age, leaving the figurative hole in the family unit waiting to be filled. Without Evayne to nurse her, the emperor places her in the custody of a wet nurse by the name of Arlo. Arlo raises her for an undescribed length of time and sends her to her father when he summons her years later. When they meet, he discovers that she has grown into a young maiden. He is so enamored by her that he wishes to wed her, even managing to strongarm the pope into dispensing a papal bull to allow for it (Emaré, 234). Where Sir Degaré's mother acted in the interest of the family unit, Emaré's father considers only his desires. However, Emaré rebuffs him:

Yyf hyt so betydde that ye me wedde

And we shulde play togedur in bedde,

Bothe we were forlorne!

The worde shulde sprynge fer and wyde (Emaré, 253-56).

Furious and hotheaded, her father exiles her, swearing that she should be “deed” (Emaré 268). The importance of the papal bull in the beginning of *Emaré* cannot be understated. If she had acquiesced, she would have married her father, perhaps even leading to the birth of future heirs. This would have been a perversion of the ideal family unit, which is why according to medieval audiences it is untenable. Although she would have fulfilled the empty hole her mother had left, marrying her father would be a taboo that could not be considered conducive to the redemption of her family, nor any social norms. The papal bull, however, stresses the issue of *eritage*. With Emaré exiled at the end of the beginning, her father is heirless and too old to conceive of more children. Yet while this may have held some bearing of significance, the inclusion of an admittedly scandalous, viable-and-taboo solution to the instability generated by the death of Evayne highlights a curiosity within the medieval person’s imagination. The licentious (and perhaps paranoid) father departs, however, from the licentious mother figure in the manner in which they’re treated in the resolution of the romances (see section 5). *Bevis of Hamton* shows us yet another manifestation of the problematic parent in romance.

Bevis’s father is the picture of nobility and strength, but the trait which spells his downfall is his old age. Though he’s battle-hardened enough to fight hundreds of foes, his wife is unsatisfied by him in the bedroom. Thus, Bevis’s mother conceives of a plan to lure Bevis’s father into his hunting grounds, where he’ll be ambushed by her former lover, the emperor of Germany. The emperor is totalizing in the destruction of Bevis’s family. His father meets his end after fighting valiantly against hundreds of German knights, until their numbers overwhelm him. The true eradication of Bevis’s family is confirmed when his father offers up all of his lands and his money, even his title — his family’s *eritage* — if the emperor agrees to leave him, his wife, and Bevis alone; “Merci, sire, ase thow art fre, / Al that ichave, I graunte thee” (Bevis, 262-3).

The emperor, who devised this plan in order to have the baron's wife, denies him and kills him. Once more, not only has an injustice been committed, but the hole that must be filled is Bevis's entire family, save himself. Bevis's *eritage* has been taken, and since his mother effectively disowns him, his destiny becomes to build a new family. For Bevis, the building of a new family is crucial to the reclamation of stability and the redemption of his family unit (and until he marries Josiane, he is the sole member). *Bevis* demonstrates how a third party can be overtly involved in the destabilization of the family unit, in contrast to the indirect provocations wrought by third parties in *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Gowther* when their mothers are ravished by supernatural fiends. In *King Horn*, the destruction of the family unit derives entirely from outside forces. By line 40, King Murry is murdered by Saracen raiders, who kidnap Horn and invade the kingdom. Again, the injustice is not subtly committed, and thus Horn's path is laid before his feet; he must reclaim his *eritage* and fulfill the role of his father by becoming king over the land once more.

Section 4. Constructive suspension of familial identity

Following the destabilization of his family unit, the hero of medieval romance is detached from the structure that tied them to his *eritage*. His familial identity suddenly renders him vulnerable. Alone and with the redemption of his family unit at stake, to share the truth of his birth and origin may create more obstacles for him to overcome. Thus, he hides his identity from his new hosts. This doesn't happen in every romance, however, since some heroes share their noble lineage openly. Overcoming obstacles as a result of this information can be conducive rather than destructive to the family unit's redemption. On occasion, the obstacles the hero must overcome are not the result of his own design, since the choice to withhold his familial identity is not made by him but by his parents. The suspension of his familial identity is relevant because it

is in part wrought by a convention of romance: *aventure*. When the hero — being set adrift, exiled, or thrust into a quest — is detached from his family unit, the vicissitudes of fate and the movers of the universe are what allows for him to grow and prove himself in courtesy and chivalry. Under such unpredictable circumstances and with the need to prove himself on his own terms, it is not uncommon for questing knights to omit their names or to disguise their identities. By detaching himself from any reputation or inherited resources (material or otherwise), the hero must operate under the customs and command of his host, thereby establishing a foothold for himself in the community on authentic terms. His lack of familial identity becomes apparent when marriage or courtship ensues, particularly when the beloved is the daughter of the king or emperor who hosts him. The audience understands that he is of good character, but without his familial identity — and his *eritage* — to show for it, he must prove his moral standing through other means. The organic acquisition of household stations, knighthood, titles, and land serves as an equalizing agent between the hero and his beloved, ultimately proving constructive to the redemption of his family unit. The fate of the family rides on the hero, who functions as its representative. When the hero is detached from the economic and social statuses of his origin, the way he behaves reflects his family's ethical and moral quality — even though none of his deeds are done in their name. It's notable that this puts him at a social and economic disadvantage. If Horn shared his “noble bearing” with Rymenhild from the start, he may not have had to compensate for his lack of prospects. On the other hand, this “not knowing” sets the stage for key sequences of events to occur, all of which result in the hero triumphing on a global scale. The hero's ties to his family are either concealed or retained, depending on the romance, and create circumstances that are ultimately conducive to the redemption of the family unit.

Hidden Identity

Though *aventure* functions as a metaphysical driving force in popular romance, heroes demonstrate their agency by deciding what they disclose about themselves or their past to those around them. Their agency is visible when they begin to engage with their beloved in courtly romance, behaving prudently while still conveying their passion through careful wordplay and avowals. Before this even happens, however, the heroes must present themselves before their hosts. At this juncture, three possibilities arise. Firstly, the heroes hide their familial identity intentionally. This might happen by simply omitting their origins, such as what happens with Horn. Secondly, the heroes may not be aware of their true familial identity and are thus just as ignorant as those they introduce themselves to. Thirdly, the heroes share their familial identity. In all of these cases, the conditions in which the family unit moves toward instability at the beginning of the romance affects how the hero reveals or conceals his familial identity.

In *King Horn*, Horn's dislocation from his family and his *eritage* informs his behavior during his period in exile. The invaders thrust Horn and twelve of his companions into a boat designed to sink at sea. Contrary to this scheme, they wash up on the coast of the land of Westernesse and are brought before the king, Aylamar. When the king asks who they are and from where they come, Horn speaks for his kin: "We beoth of Suddenne, / Icome of gode kenne, / Of Cristene blode, / And kynges swthe gode." (Horn, 179-82). Later, when the king asks what Horn's name is, Horn responds cryptically: "Horn ich am ihote, / Icomen ut of the bote, / Fram the se side" (Horn, 206-08). Though he does admit where they came from, Horn neglects to associate more with his own name beyond his recent debarking from the boat. The humorous exposition tagging his introduction, added as though it were honorific, stops comically short of any relation to his noble family. It appears to be enough for King Aylamar, fascinated by Horn's "fairness" and leadership, to integrate him into his household and instruct Aethelbrus, the

steward, to educate Horn and his companions in courtliness. By omitting his familial identity, Horn receives King Aylamar's kindness as a stranger in need of hospitality. This adds an element of mystery to Horn's character, but ultimately bases his accomplishments and love-connection with Rymenhild solely in his "good character" rather than his *eritage*.

The omission of familial identity produces a similar effect in *Emaré*, though instead of keeping her name, as Horn does, Emaré adopts the pseudonym, "Egare" (Emaré, 360). When her father casts her out into the sea aboard a tiny boat, he means for her to be lost at sea, aligning his intention with that of the invaders in *King Horn*. Weathering the sea, she nevertheless arrives safe at the kingdom of Galys, where the knight Sir Kadore rescues her from her boat and takes her to his castle. The text emphasizes the immediacy of Emaré's choice to change her name: "She chaunged hyt ther anone, and sayde she hette Egare" (Emaré, 359-60). Again, her composure and fairness, as well as her predicament, is enough for Sir Kadore to extend his household's hospitality toward her. Once she is recovered, Sir Kadore hosts a feast attended by the king⁵. When the king speaks to Sir Kadore, inquiring after her identity, Sir Kadore says; "Hyt ys an erles thoughtur of ferre londe, / That seemly ys to sene" (Emaré, 422-3). His words are an observation and border on hearsay, but Emaré's demonstrated fairness and courtly composure seems enough to convince the king that she is of noble birth. Sir Kadore adds that Emaré taught his children courtesy and sewed for his house, but it is unclear whether or not this detail cemented any preconceived notions the king had of her credibility. Despite the king's mother's warnings, he marries Emaré without truly knowing her familial identity. Although the proposal takes place off-stage, one might interpret the "gam and gle" shared between them on their

⁵ Due to the preponderance of Sir Kadore's presence and the way Emaré is led to a chamber to be taken care of before meeting the king, it's indicative that this castle on the seashore belongs to Sir Kadore. The king's presence at his castle may be explained by the presence of the king's itinerant court, which Sir Kadore happens to be hosting.

wedding night as euphemistic as well as genuine (Emaré, 474). But, as in most romances, the truth doesn't remain hidden for long. This is most apparent in romances in which the hero's familial identity is kept secret since his birth.

Sir Degaré and *Lay le Freine* are two romances whose hero and heroine, respectively, are unaware of their true familial identity from the moment they are born. This results in an important narrative tool: neither knows who their parents are. Thus, the moment surrounding the discovery of their identities becomes charged with both suspense and emotion. In *Sir Degaré*, his mother leaves him a letter with the instructions to give all the women in the kingdom a test. Given gloves by his mother's proxy, the clerk, Degaré is to have them try them on to see if they fit: "That bi the gloven he sscholde iwite / Wich were his moder and who," (Degaré, 311-2). If they fit, he's not to marry that woman (because she would be his mother). It is conventional within popular romance that the hero, being a desirable and worthy bachelor, will find a marriage partner by the end of the romance. When Degaré nearly commits the Oedipal act of marrying his mother, the consequences of having his familial identity kept from him manifest. However, their reunion becomes a means to resolving the instability incited in the beginning of the romance. Degaré must disprove his mother's own marriageability to himself in order to confirm or deny her identity as his mother, and by extension, his identity as her son. Degaré's identity is not brought up again until he jousts with his grandfather, the king, to whom Degaré is unaware he is related and moreover whose kingdom he does not realize he will inherit. The contest to win his mother's hand in marriage by jousting with his grandfather is both a terrible mistake and a fortunate happenstance. It brings to the surface the scandal of Degaré's birth while bringing together geographically disparate members of the family unit. Furthermore, each action Degaré takes proves his good character. The fact that he marries his mother (without consummating the

marriage) is excused almost as soon as it comes to light; she explains, “‘Ich am his moder and ek his wive!’ ‘Leve moder,’ seide Sire Degarre,” and then asks her where in the kingdom he could find his father (Degaré, 695-6). The romance is quick to demonstrate how Sir Degaré acted upon all that he knew as best he could, and thus having learned new information, his new path becomes clear. When familial identity is kept from the hero, his prudence is often emphasized, thereby removing any moral ambiguity from his actions.

Lay le Freine shares several narrative similarities with the beginning of *Sir Degaré* but differs when Le Freine achieves maidenhood. Le Freine is courted by Sir Guroun, given up as a baby to a convent by her mother to avert any scandal that should befall her and her family. Neither of them has any knowledge of her birth or parentage, yet despite Le Freine’s relatively low social standing, she runs away with Sir Guroun to his castle, “right as sche hadde ben his wedded wiif.” (Le Freine, 310). The abbess, when she learns of this, mourns, lamenting the social imprudence of the situation (Le Freine, 302). Since her love with Sir Guroun is elicited, a marriage is arranged between Sir Guroun and a fair maiden of noble birth, who happened to be Le Freine’s sister, Le Codre. In the final lines of the romance, Le Freine demonstrates thoughtful obedience when she lays the baudekine her mother gave her as a baby across the marriage bed of her lover and her sister. Her mother, in witnessing this unselfish act, takes notice and after inquiring after where Le Freine obtained such a baudekine, realizes that Le Freine is in fact her daughter. Again, as with *Sir Degaré*, any potential shame or harsh judgement is mediated and diminished following the discovery. After Le Freine’s mother explains to her husband what happened, he kisses his lost daughter’s hand and encourages the bishop to annul the marriage between Le Codre and Sir Guroun. Though Le Freine’s amorous connection to Sir Guroun is a

potential source of shame, her choices in the moment when it matters the most once again demonstrates her good character.

The hero of the romance of *Bevis of Hamtoun* shares his familial identity with his host as soon as he arrives in King Ermin's court, and as a result, there is no doubt about how Bevis's family comes to be destabilized. Due to the romance's epic length and the poetic device of repetition, his extensive speech explaining how he came to be in King Ermin's lands may function as a performative tool for storytelling as well as serve to recognize Bevis's *eritage* in a public setting.

“For Gode,” a seide,’ ich hatte Bef;
 Iborne ich was in Ingelonde,
 At Hamtoun, be the se stronde.
 Me fader was erl thar a while,
 Me moder him let sle with gile,” (Bevis, 542-6)

Beginning with himself and gradually expanding outwards, Bevis gives his name, his country and estate of origin, then details his father's demise at his mother's design. Bevis promises to revenge himself upon his mother and her lover, the emperor of Germany. In response, the king offers him his daughter, Josiane's, hand in marriage and all of his lands if Bevis agrees to convert to Islam. Bevis refuses, and the king keeps him in his retainer of knights instead. From this point onward, Bevis is firmly Christian, behaving with violent martial efficiency and denying any attempts even from Josiane to convert to Islam in order to wed her. As a representative of his family unit, Bevis behaves with a religious and courtly prudence appropriate to an earl of his station. This is significant, because while his mother's actions caused the murder

of his father and his exile, therein destroying the family unit, Bevis's actions are conducive to its construction. This will come to fruition later on when Bevis marries Josiane (who converts to Christianity for him) and she gives birth to two sons. From the beginning to the resolution, Bevis's choices revolve around his fierce strength in battle and his estrangement from his home and family. Therefore, his choice to reveal his familial identity is not a claim that would create obstacles, but rather an affirmation that his *eritage* had been taken from him. By extension, it boldly affirms his intention to reclaim his *eritage* and redeem his family among King Ermin's court, centering it before readers as the prime subject matter of the romance.

Amis and Amiloun: The Outlier

While the beginning of *Amis and Amiloun* departs from the common structure of the other romances discussed in this essay, the redemption of the family unit is still present, albeit under different emphasis. Amis and Amiloun are so alike that they can switch places at one point in the romance without anyone noticing, and appearing before the duke, their fairness and noble comportment inspires him to request that they become a part of his household. Their families prosper as a result. Their parents "gave her childer her blisceing" and express their gladness at this fact (*Amis and Amiloun*, 157). Instead of losing stability, Amis and Amiloun's families begin the romance in an advantageous position. The heroes themselves are given into the care of the emperor, to be raised and groomed into courtly knights until they must return to their estates, or the duke bequeaths a new title to them.⁶ As a result, Amis and Amiloun gain a social mobility that not only affords them greater reputation, but also places Amis in proximity to Belisaunt, the duke's daughter. The romance's narrative conflict stems from Amis's amorous connection with

⁶ Noble families sent their male children to be raised under the care of greater nobles as a common practice in the Middle Ages. The presence of this practice in *Amis and Amiloun* portrays a more realistic reason as to why the heroes would find themselves in a court far from their home.

her. Crucially, the anxiety over moral character and the circumstances of the construction of the family unit can still be felt. Before Belisaunt approaches Amis, Amis and Amiloun had been given esteemed assignments in the emperor's castle's staff. When Amis and Belisaunt begin to court, the steward suspects that Amis is concealing the fact that he's sleeping with Belisaunt. The steward's suspicions translate into the duke's fury and anxiety at the possibility of Amis sleeping with Belisaunt; "and he hath as a vile traitour / Mi douhter forlain;" (Amis and Amiloun, 824-5). If Belisaunt should come to be with child, the scandal would be akin to that at the beginning of *Sir Degaré*, *Lay le Freine*, and *Sir Gowther*. In other words, the moment of destabilization doesn't occur at the beginning of the romance, but in the middle when Amis and Amiloun are in the care of the duke.

While Amis and Amiloun's family units are not destabilized, the pressure placed upon them derives from Amiloun's commitment to his *eritage*. When Amiloun's parents die, he must leave the care of the duke and return to his homeland to secure his estate, thus leaving Amis alone and vulnerable to the wicked machinations of the steward. Amiloun will stay there, wed, and only return when Amis is accused of sleeping with Belisaunt and needs his help. The ensuing sequence of events spirals out of their decision to switch places so that Amiloun may fight on Amis's behalf, unbeknownst to everyone and coloring their actions with moral ambiguity. Rather than respond to a destabilizing external force or the actions of their parents, Amis and Amiloun are the arbiters of their own predicament and do not necessarily take responsibility for their actions.

The trial by combat from which all of their ailments proceed illuminates the reason for this romance's divergence from the typical beginning of the popular romance, particularly those concerning the family unit. Led by the letter rather than the spirit of the law, when Amis denies

the accusation thrown by the steward, the duke states, “Withouten fail, / It schal be proved in batail / And sen bituen hem to.” (Amis and Amiloun, 861-3). Unlike typical trial by combat, Amis is not rightful, so the romance makes it clear that it would be a miracle if he prevailed. In this respect, this fight is more akin to the trial by faith endured by Horn and Emaré when they are cast out into the stormy sea. To survive is a triumph of life, but also of their faith in God and God’s faith in them, thereby assigning a certain amount of religious righteousness to their person. This elevation of morality shifts the blame away from Amis and Amiloun, ensuring they maintain moral reputations. However, this doesn’t exclude the sequences of events that befall them after the trial. *Amis and Amiloun* is often labeled as a hagiographic romance because the events and obstacles which befall them mimic those that appear in saints’ lives. This is especially demonstrated when Amis’s children miraculously become revived after he kills them in order to cure Amiloun’s leprosy. An angel tells Amis that on Christmas, he must slay his children, and “alien his brother with the blode, / Thurch Godes grace, that is so gode, / His wo schuld wende oway” (Amis and Amiloun, 2206-8). Since Amis commits this egregious act through God’s instruction, his actions transcend secular morals and demonstrate his religious devotion to Amiloun. Consequently, Amis and Amiloun’s familial redemption aligns with a “higher” ethic, rather than the secular redemption common to popular romance. In this way, *Amis and Amiloun* is similar to the tale of *Sir Gowther*. Yet where Sir Gowther is clearly penitent, foregrounding his later moral achievement and consequential redemption, Amis and Amiloun’s redemption is somewhat morally ambivalent. Though the text treats them as good characters, it’s unclear whether or not the text’s audiences would find their actions commendable, especially with regard to the family unit.

Through these examinations of hidden identity and demonstrations of good character, the narratives of *Horn*, *Degare*, *Lay le Freine*, *Emare*, *Gowther*, *Amis and Amiloun*, and *Bevis of Hamton* intensify the relevance of anxiety and thus deep relevance surrounding succession and inheritance. Once the heroes and heroine prove themselves to be an ideal knight or maiden, they simultaneously represent a family unit strong enough to persist under the conventions of late medieval society. When the hero is witnessed by allies and foes alike, he is actualized by the public sphere and establish themselves on their own terms. In other words, his connections, reputation, and material holdings are not predicated upon his family unit nor his *eritage*. The heroes are not ever truly severed from their family units, however. Instead of their closeness to their family, it is the distance from their family unit that defines the parameters of their journey. What comes from this distance is a generative process that parallels the hero's own individual growth: courtship and marriage. In order to wed their beloved, however, certain needs inhibiting their own stability as representatives of their family unit— including members of their family — must be overcome or fulfilled.

Section 5. On Measuring the Family's Redemption

Familial redemption must be measured by taking several components of the hero's return into account: their engagement and reconnection with the family unit, the maturation of the hero, the reclamation of his *eritage*, and the secured generation of the family in the form of marriage or siring children. However, the acts which precede the family's redemption may indicate an ending whose ambiguous elements offer fruitful insight and reflect various manifestations of the family unit.

First the Sword, then the Embrace

In *King Horn*, Horn's last great threat to his marriage to Rymenhild and the reclamation of his kingdom comes from his own countryman, Fikenhild, he "that was the wurste moder child" (Horn, 652). As soon as Horn begins to court Rymenhild, Fikenhild grows envious; it is he who told King Aylamar that Horn was in his daughter's bower, thereby leading to Horn's expulsion and seven-year long period away from Rymenhild. Their conflict culminates when Fikenhild steals Rymenhild away while Horn rids his homeland of the occupying invaders. In this instance, the hero reunites with his mother *before* the resolution of the romance. On one hand, he has shown himself to be a strong representative of the family, an icon of chivalry and courtesy, and has righted the injustice which destabilized his family in the beginning of the romance. On the other hand, *King Horn* portrays Horn's betrothal to Rymenhild as representative of her connection to his family unit. Her abduction similarly reflects how she gained the role and identity as an extension of Horn's family unit in the middle of the romance. Since Rymenhild is therefore a member of Horn's family, the stability of the family unit is once again under threat. Fikenhild's identity as Horn's kinsman, whose bond rests not in direct family lines but in a shared geographic origin, highlights a socio-political aspect of Horn's path to his family's redemption. Horn is ostensibly a prince, but until he rids his homeland of invaders, he has no land, countrymen, nor *eritage* to support him — nor does he have claim to his title besides his own word. Fikenhild should be loyal to him as a vassal would be, yet because they are raised together within the King of Westernesse's court, their station as wards in exile equalizes them. Even at the end when Fikenhild abducts Rymenhild, other nobles fear attacking him because of the "strong castel he let sette, / Mid see him biflette" (Horn, 1409-10). Fikenhild is a formidable opponent because he poses a legitimate threat to Horn's reclamation of his *eritage* and his reunion with Rymenhild — the precise conditions needed to redeem his family unit. The totality

with which Horn defeats Fikenhild reflects the gravity of this feud as an ultimate conflict; “Whanne hi weren aslaghe / Fikenhild hi dude todraghe” (Horn, 1505-6); Horn effectively tears Fikenhild apart, erasing his personhood. The ring which Rymenhild bestowed upon Horn earlier in the story, symbolizing their love connection and giving Horn invulnerability when he thinks of her, allows Horn to succeed in rescuing Rymenhild without a scratch. Where Fikenhild is broken and torn apart, Horn is completely intact and unmarred — a physical representation of his redeemed family unit.

Where the demise of Horn’s father leaves shoes that Horn must reclaim and step into, *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Degaré* present fathers who actively incite conflict with their sons. Gowther’s father is monstrous; “a felturd fende” (Gowther, 74). The text gives further description, identifying Gowther’s fiendish father as a devil, that “sarvyd never of odyr thing / But for to tempe wemen yon. / To deyle with hom was wothe” (Gowther, 100-2). Gowther’s identity as a penitential knight permits further differentiation from Degaré’s father. Where Gowther does penance for the sins he commits while he is subject to his father’s will, it’s unclear whether Degaré inherited his father’s nature or not. Hopkins asserts that Gowther is “born to be a splendid destroyer of the holy church, possibly even the Antichrist,” doing the will of his father until he seeks forgiveness for his sins (Hopkins, 170). It follows that his father’s identity as a devil not only describes not just his beastly form or behavior but also represents his diametric opposition to Gowther’s quest. In *Degaré*, Degaré’s father’s appearance and description alludes to folkloric and otherworldly inspirations. He is noble and wondrous, despite his magical origins; “Ther nas non in al the Kynges londe / More apert man than was he” (Degaré, 96-7). His identity as a fairy knight gives him an air of mischief and power, drawing attention to how he is awe-

inspiring rather than revolting⁷. This remains true when Degaré fights him, and when he returns with his son to Degaré's mother. Unlike Degaré, however, Gowther does not fight his father in any physical manner. Rather than desist in all violence, Gowther redirects his martial ability toward Muslim invaders threatening his host's keep. Under these conditions, his violence serves to demonstrate his reformation of character into a good knight.⁸ In both romances, Degaré and Gowther combat their fathers' will, externalizing the contrast between them. In *Sir Gowther*, the diametric opposition is obvious because of the moral juxtaposition: Gowther's disobedience of his father's will by accomplishing Christian deeds represents the supersession of his father, thereby permitting Gowther to take up his mantle as a lord in Christian society.

In *Sir Degaré*, the diametric opposition is not so clear. Rather than seek to do away with him, Degaré intends to find his father and reconnect with him. There is no assumption from the outset that Degaré will have to fight his father, but crucially, there is no assumption made to the contrary. The open-endedness of this task is evident in the sword Degaré is given by his mother right before he sets out to find his father; "Brod and long and hevi hit wes: / In that kyngdom no swich nes" (Degaré, 709-10). His mother states that it was his father's sword, and when Gowther takes it in his hands, he exclaims that whoever owned it, "he was a man!" (Degaré, 712). Gowther's choice of words alludes to instructions his father gives his mother regarding the sword; "And bad ich sholde take hit the forthan / Yif thou livedest and were a man" (Degaré, 705-6). The mighty nature of the sword itself affirms the owner's character as mighty, noble, and iconic, but it also levies a challenge toward Degaré. Is he as mighty, noble, and iconic as his father? Is he so doughty a "man?" When he meets his father at last, neither recognize one

⁷ His behavior and rhetoric are reminiscent of the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo*.

⁸ Gowther also fights against his father's will metaphorically by relying upon the help of the dog who feeds him in the first days after he begins his penance, and the emperor's daughter later on.

another. To his father, Degaré appears to be a "Velaun, ... In mi forest to chase mi dere" (Degaré, 1004-5). In response to Degaré's pleas that he doesn't seek battle, his father asserts that if he seeks battle, then "here thou hast thi per ifounde:" he is Degaré's match (Degaré, 1112). Battle occurs promptly, and the two are evenly matched. It is not until both shatter their lances against one another and draw their swords that Degaré's father calls for a pause. Having recognized his sword by its missing tip, he produces the tip from his pouch, thus confirming that he is without a doubt Degaré's father. Degaré pleads for his forgiveness and invites him to return to his castle. While the events in the battle confirm that the sword is representative of Degaré's assertion of his personhood and ability as a knight, the battle is also a reiteration of Degaré's role as a redemptive force. For the duration of their opposition to one another (and likely for the rest of the story in the memory of the reader), their differences in behavior, creed, and appearance are emphasized. It was his father's actions in the beginning of the romance which precipitated Degaré's quest to find his mother and then to find his father. Degaré not only proves that he *is* man enough to use his father's sword; he has surpassed his father because he is not a fairy knight himself and still held his own⁹. If the hero must confront the parent to reclaim his *eritage*, then the parent can no longer fulfil their role as an ameliorative and authority figure within the family unit. Until the hero takes on this role, stability cannot be returned to the family unit. It should be remembered that without Degaré, his family unit would remain dislocated and the opportunity for his father and mother to be redeemed would not exist.

The same is true for Emaré in her romance. In *Emaré*, the heroine reunites with her father, but only after he goes on pilgrimage to do penance for the sins he committed against her.

⁹ It should be noted that Degaré jousts with his grandfather without knowing they're related. He unseats his grandfather, and while he cleaves to rules of chivalry and does not attack him when he's down, his grandfather attacks him when his back is turned. Thus, Degaré is rendered by contrast a better knight.

Such as with *Horn*, Emaré first reunites with her husband, the king of Galys, who comes to Rome to atone for exiling her at the behest of his mother. Both her husband and her father intend to confess out of their own contrition and not because of anyone else's persuasion. Rather than Emaré return to her home, her family comes to her. Emaré's resolution demonstrates how even though members heroine's family originally opposed Emaré, it doesn't exclude them from reuniting with her. Their contrition, which means Emaré has no need to confront them, further highlights her reunion with them as the appropriate means of redeeming her family unit. Her father and her husband are truly sorry that they exiled her, so it fortunate that they should seek penance in the same city where Emaré has fled. The resolution of her romance is filled with an emotion and exultation at the picture of her family members being reunited, akin to that which is felt in *Degaré*¹⁰: "Ther was a joyfull metynge / Of the Emperour and of the Kynge, / And also of Emaré;" (Emare, 1021-3). Additionally, Emaré sends her son, Segramour, out to greet them and convey the message that they should come speak with her. Until the very last moment when Emaré reveals her identity, they seem to not conceive of the possibility that she could be there in Rome, saying, "Sone, why umbraydest me of bale, / And thou may se no bot?" (Emaré, 1010-1). The moment directly preceding their reunion is stretched in length, while the reunion itself lasts only six lines. Such brevity emphasizes the orderly, intact quality of Emare's family unit and its redemption; again, without the heroine's impetus, it would not exist.

The hero does not pursue the specific goal of reunifying with his family. In some romances, the parent may inadvertently stand in contention to the hero. In *Lay le Freine*, Le Freine neither knows who her family is nor attempts to reunite with them. Instead, fortune places

¹⁰ Both *Degaré* and *Emaré* resolve with nearly identical family units: a grandfather, a son-in-law, a daughter, and a son. The only difference is in *Emaré* where Segramour has no beloved (at least not yet).

her into proximity with them. When a marriage is arranged between Sir Guroun and Le Codre, it is clear that God alone knows their true identity: “That hye so ware nist non, / For soth y say, bot God alon” (Lay le Freine, 333-4). After the single act of laying her baudekine upon the marriage bed, Le Freine inadvertently reveals her identity to her mother, demonstrates a certain moral character, and sets the stage for her mother to admit the truth to her family. As with *Emaré*, Le Freine’s mother no longer stands in contention to Le Freine’s reclamation of her *eritage* when her true identity is discovered. Le Freine’s mother is contrite when she fetches her husband, “and sche told him al her wo,” (Le Freine, 390). It is Le Freine’s acceptance and obedience that leads to her reunion with her family, and while she is mostly passive in this endeavor, her moral character remains critical for the redemption of her family. Le Freine is “so fair and hende” and acts with no malice (Le Freine, 343). Though her choice to run away with Sir Guroun might inspire embarrassment or shame upon her family, Le Freine is presented as a lover behaving like a spouse and therefore ought to be forgiven: “And thus sche lad with him hir liif / Right as sche hadde ben his wedded wiif” (Le Freine, 309-10). From the perspective of redemption, Le Freine must be accepted back into her family and marry Sir Guroun in order to correct the injustice her mother committed sending her away at birth. If this condition isn’t met, the injustice perpetuates and disallows a return to stability. *Lay le Freine*, while presenting a predominantly passive heroine, includes an active mother figure. Le Freine’s mother *chooses* to send her daughter away and *chooses* to admit the truth when she recognizes Le Freine. Though this romance is not the only one to contain parents who actively decide to not oppose their children, *Le Freine* is important because the parent in question is both the mother (instead of the father) and retains more agency than Le Freine, the heroine. With this in perspective, *Le Freine* portrays a picture of ideal maidenhood defined by obedience and devotion, while simultaneously portraying a picture

of motherhood defined by ambiguous morality *and* an active role in the redemption of the family unit.

Marriage and Fulfilling the Family Unit

The hero's return facilitates the conditions required to actualize the redemption of his family unit, and these conditions, which vary between romances, imply stability. If a parent is absent by the end of the romance, such as in *Emaré*, the hero steps into the role left behind by the absent parent. In the event that a hero has no family members belonging to the progenitor generation, his return to the family unit results in a family unit of his own creation, such as in *Bevis of Hamton*. The solution to the destabilization of the family unit involves not only confronting and reuniting with family members, but the hero marrying and building a family of his own. As the hero is engaged to his beloved, he reclaims his *eritage*, ensures the continuity of his family, and thus stabilizes his family unit.

The resolutions in *Bevis of Hamton* and *Emare* demonstrate in particular the importance of the hero's marriage. Where *Emare* has a father and a husband with which to reunite, *Bevis* lacks any parents which to reunite. In order to fill the spaces his parents left behind, and thus fulfil the needs of his family unit, *Bevis* must marry and have children. The end of his romance occurs only when the continuity of his family unit is assured. When the king arranges a marriage with one of *Bevis*'s sons, Miles, the violent conflict between his vassals and *Bevis* ends; "And pes and love was maked thare / Betwene Beves and King Edgare" (*Bevis*, 4559-60). *Bevis*'s ending structure lists the final whereabouts of *Bevis*'s family and allies, following the ending

structure of *Horn*'s — except Bevis does not act as kingmaker. Instead, his son Miles takes on that role, giving his earldom to Sabere, Bevis's mentor, after Miles is given the throne of Mombraunt: "And his erldom in Hamteschire / A yaf to his em Sabere" (Bevis, 4575-6). The rest of Bevis's allies and family disperse to Ermonie, the home of Josiane, and Aumberthe, a land Bevis visited during his travels. Once Bevis returns to Mombraunt, only then is Josiane described as his "quene" (Bevis, 4587). The final lines function as a narrative device, signaling that the romance has resolved and only appearing once Bevis and Josiane's sons are grown and married. This formal organization of *Bevis* emphasizes the vitality of the stable family unit Bevis has wrought, therein compensating for the destruction his mother caused.

In *Emaré*, the parent whose actions caused the heroine's exile is reconciled with her instead of being replaced. This results in three generations of the family being present at the end of the romance. For all intents and purposes, their reunion renders their family unit stable once more. However, there are new family members present in this picture of stability. Just like Horn and Bevis, Emaré has expanded the family unit through her marriage to the king of Galys and the birth of her son, Segramour. It is almost entirely due to the instructions she gave her son that both her husband and her father are reunited with her. The text emphasizes the attention paid to Segramour during the reunion between the male characters: "The Emperours hert anamered gretlye / Of the chylde that rode hym by / Wyth so lovely chere" (Emaré, 997-9). Segramour is cheery, fair, and behaves himself nobly, and along with his bids to have them follow him, the origins of his appearance and behavior implicitly recenters the audience's attention upon his mother. While the reclamation of Emaré's *eritage* points to her role within the domestic sphere as the caretaker of the family, her apparent expertise in courtesy and sewing have clear applications outside of the household and marital life. She teaches her son and other children

how to behave with courtesy, sews for both her house and the merchant who takes her in, and she is obedient but does not submit to social taboos. Most importantly, her actions facilitate the reconnection of her family members. The presence of her son, husband, and father in the same space at the end is a visual signifier of Emare's role as a nexus for her family unit. It is through her and her efforts that her family unit is reunited, stabilized, and redeemed.

Section 6. Conclusion

In popular romance, the resolution revolves around the hero. This happy resolution includes several trends that, while not appearing in every romance, define the conditions and setting of the ending. Firstly, family members or allies of the hero will likely share in the hero's positive resolution. Secondly, the hero will almost always reconnect with his family (even if he did battle with or opposed them previously). Thirdly, if the source of the family's instability was a family member, as long as they demonstrated a strong moral character later on, they almost always share in the hero's happiness. The widespread impact of the redemption of hero's family unit is clear, as many characters benefit from the happy resolution.

For the late medieval reader, the impact may also have been felt. If Degaré could grow up separated from his mother and father, and still return stability to his family upon their reunion, then so could the reader's own family achieve stability. If the hero failed, it would entail not only his ruin, but the collapse of his family. Though romance conventionally lacks tragic endings, this alternative to the hero's success still exists. For families who read popular romances communally, before the household, this presented a familiar quandary. Even if most families were not in a state of perpetual collapse, the representation of the family in popular romance evoked their fears, concerns, and hopes for the fate of their own families. These romances were popular not just because of their capacity to teach, entertain, and engage in cultural moments, but

because the happy resolutions offered emotional consolation and relief from the threat of familial decline.

The reclamation of the hero's *eritage* in popular romance provides similar assurances, as he now has the capability to ensure his family's longevity. When the family is destabilized in the beginning of the romance, its continuity is called into question, thus highlighting the temporality of the family unit. The return to stability at the end is therefore not only demonstrative of equilibrium, but of the family's sustainability and perseverance over time. This perseverance manifests through each successive generation and their reclamation of their *eritage*.

The focus on family generation in popular romance also gives credence and calls attention to the individuals within the family unit. Everyone is vulnerable, yet at the same time, the actions from every family member creates ripples. Mothers can destabilize their families just as much as they can act in their family's interests. Fathers can oppose their sons on the battlefield just as much as their absence can entice the hero to fill their boots. Family units are vulnerable from within and without. It can be so easily destabilized, and the hero is essential to its recovery. Since the family unit groups its members together, bringing them into sustained proximity with one another, it both breeds and discourages conflict. Most notably, parents, who are the supposed caretakers of the family unit, cannot be solely relied upon to redeem the family. The hero must answer to this task. When reading these romances, one observes an immense feeling of hopefulness toward children and the restorative power they retain, as agents within the maintenance of one's familial ties generation after generation.

The capability to ensure the transfer of the family's essence to the succeeding generation, or *eritage*, necessarily conceives of the family unit as one piece of a project extending across time. It is rooted in one time and place, since destabilization threatens to bring the family unit to

an end there and then, where the stabilization of the family unit avoids this termination. It is this capability that is in flux and is at stake whenever the family is destabilized. Popular romances portray the heroes who redeem their family unit as socially mature and morally good, which lends the idea that such traits characterize the ideal family member (and by extension, the family's persistence). The hero cannot simply re-acquire the means and title he once held by the grace of his familial identity; his accrued status, connections, and means must reflect an inner nobility as well.

This concern with the ideals of the family unit (while it cannot be divorced from its historical context without qualification) belies a more commonplace esteem toward the late medieval family. Popular romance portrays vulnerable families, subject to incursion from abroad and mistakes from within. This portrayal treads universal lines: family issues are not always pretty, and their inner turmoil may become quite messy; the absence of family members requires reckoning with their absence and may accelerate the maturation of their children. The beginnings of the romances discussed in this thesis, while incorporating fantastical elements, almost certainly resembled a few unlikely real-world situations. On the other hand, the endings trend toward a similar resolution, complete with reunion and marriage — however, there is no universal representation of the family, nor its redemption, in popular romance. Instead, the plethora of manifestations composes an archetypal entity. The family unit in popular romance functions as the *every-family*, whose uniting factor is the hope that any family may develop and rediscover the capability to achieve the happy resolution depicted in the romance.

While this thesis develops a structural examination of families in popular romance, it does not examine family units detached or apart from that of the hero's. Furthermore, the family in popular romance may still be represented without following the structure this thesis proposes.

The hero's family does not exist in a vacuum, which begs future development of extra-structural representations of family. This especially becomes relevant when family conflicts arise in side-characters or characters peripherally related to the hero. In *Emaré*, her mother-in-law persuades Emaré's husband to exile her, implying not only the mother-in-law's rejection of Emaré, but reveals an interesting power dynamic between her and her son. The families of side-characters are diverse, particularly when only one or two members are present to represent their family. On occasion, they may appear to be foils for the hero and his family, yet the extent to which this is possible is undetermined. Side-families beg further attention when they present a stable unit and the hero's family does not. In the romances discussed in this thesis, the "other family" is typically composed of a father and a daughter, whom the hero will eventually join with in marriage. Such is the case in *Gowther*, *Horn*, *Amis and Amiloun*, *Degare* (though his beloved's family is deceased when he meets her), and *Emare* (though the genders are inverted). Further study is warranted to determine how the representations of this "other family" may or may not impact the representation of the hero's family.

The "other family" is not the only element of popular romance requiring further study. The romances discussed in this thesis primarily originate from late medieval England. The representations of family in popular romances which originate in France, Germany, and other regions beg attention as well. The intersection of genre and region particularizes each romance's meaning according to the context in which it was created or derived, yet certain narratives are transregional. *Lay le Freine* derives from the Anglo-Norman romance of the same name, written by Marie de France in the 12th century. The late medieval English context implies one meaning for the representation of family in popular romance; in late medieval France (or other regions which consumed popular romance), the context implies a different meaning.

The representations of the family in popular romance reflect only one genre out of the many contained in medieval household miscellanies. Late medieval families consumed chronicles, hagiographies, instructions, and lyric poetry in tandem with popular romance. Thus, studying the ideology of the family as it appears in the late medieval miscellanies would be incomplete without affording these other genres of literature the same examination. Furthermore, codicological and literary studies of these miscellanies would both benefit from an interdisciplinary exploration of the representation of family. Technical observations of these codices must be revisited and added to while bearing in mind the demonstrated relationship between popular romance and the family unit. These studies will be crucial to understanding how the ideology of family manifested in each codex and functioned as one part of a larger body of cultural imagination.

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