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This dissertation argues that the chivalric code and resulting “ethos” of chivalry creates a physical, religious, and social burden upon the medieval knights tasked with its application and adherence. The immediate result of this chivalric burden is the inability of knights to live up to the chivalric code’s exacting physical standards, entropic ecclesiastical expectations, and social obligations. The medieval knight then appears in medieval texts as both the paragon of chivalric perfection and the exempla of perpetual failure. In order to combat the burden of chivalry, most knights, fictional or historical, create a code of their own—one based not upon physical, religious, or social idealism, but instead upon the realities of their experiences. They develop a system of triage in which oaths are fulfilled by order of perceived importance; they alleviate their personal burdens through the creation of brotherhood oaths—effectively reallocating burden amongst themselves, and they often reciprocate unattainable idealism with violence and monstrous behavior. Regardless of chivalric burden’s impact on the knights in medieval romance, *lais*, manuals, and biography, the idealized code of chivalry staunchly remains in our twenty-first-century conceptions of masculinity. The century, the authors, and the audience may change, but the burden remains the same. The weight of chivalric burden comes from society, but does not limit itself to stringent social expectations. The eyes of all the estates are on the knights, each with their own idea of what honor, prowess, *largesse*, *gentillesse*, and courtesy look like. The knight must carefully navigate the pitfalls and paradoxes of his honorable and weighty burden for God, lord, and country all while being held to a higher physical, religious, and social standard than others. An impossible task.

BEARING THE WEIGHT OF HONOR: KNIGHTLY NAVIGATION OF CHIVALRY'S
PHYSICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND SOCIAL BURDEN

by

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Dr. Amy Vines
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DEDICATION

For Todd, Chloe, Cameron, Carson, Joshua, and Mabrey #greenesunited

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation argues that the chivalric code and resulting “ethos” of chivalry creates a physical, religious, and social burden upon the medieval knights tasked with its application and adherence.¹ The immediate result of this chivalric burden is the inability of knights to live up to the chivalric code’s exacting physical standards, entropic ecclesiastical expectations, and social obligations. The medieval knight then appears in medieval texts as both the paragon of chivalric perfection and the exempla of perpetual failure. In order to combat the burden of chivalry, most fictional knights create a code of their own, one based not upon physical, religious, or social idealism, but instead upon the realities of their experiences. They develop a system of triage in which oaths are fulfilled by order of perceived importance; they alleviate their personal burdens through the creation of brotherhood oaths—effectively reallocating burden amongst themselves, and they often reciprocate unattainable idealism with violence and monstrous behavior.

Regardless of chivalric burden’s impact on the knights in medieval romance, *lais*, manuals, and biography, the idealized code of chivalry staunchly remains in our twenty-first-century conceptions of masculinity. The chivalric code finds its way into twenty-first century rhetoric associated with politics, religion, and social justice movements—merely a small sampling of platforms chivalry plays a part in shoring up. Examples range from former

¹ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Connecticut, Yale University Press, 1984), 16. “[C]hivalry may be described as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together” (16). See also Keen: “[Chivalry] sometimes, especially in early texts, it means no more than a body of heavily armed horsemen . . . sometimes chivalry is spoken of as an order, as if knighthood ought to be compared to an order of religion: sometimes it is spoken of as an estate, a social class- the warrior class whose martial function . . . was to defend the patria and the Church. Sometimes it is used to encapsulate a code of values apposite to this order or estate” (2).

President's reliance on Crusade-esque fearmongering and martial dog-whistles² and social media campaigns creating a cultural and religious battlefield wherein outside forces threaten the American identity primed to respond to chivalric "calls to arms."³ Media outlets of all political bents perpetuate these medieval and martial allusions using chivalric terms like "sworn oath" and "fealty" signaling a seemingly urgent need to create an unwinnable and violently antagonistic binary.⁴ The tangled web of religion and politics splinters outward touching social and cultural movements ready to respond to this skewed version of chivalry— one often promoting class-divisions, gender inequality, violence, and rigid definitions of masculinity.⁵ This is not to say that

² Donald J. Trump, "Before my election, religious believers were under assault like never before. You all know that. . . But the day I took office, I got sworn in, the federal government's war on religion came to a very abrupt end." "Opening Remarks at Evangelicals for Trump Coalition," *All Things Considered*, (5 January 2020) <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/05/793827578/president-launches-evangelicals-for-trump-coalition> Last accessed: 3 November 2021.

³ Donald J. Trump, (@realDonaldTrump), 20 December 2019: In response to a *Christianity Today* article critical of his presidency Trump tweeted: "[The editor of *CT*]wants to take your religion & your guns, No President has done more for the Evangelical community, and it's not even close." A small sampling from @realDonaldTrump's now banned Twitter account demonstrating his posturing as victorious defender of this particular chivalric Americanism: 30 November 2020: "I'm not fighting for me, I'm fighting for the 74,000,000 million people . . . who voted for me!"; 11 December 2020: "I just want to stop the world from killing itself!"; 24 December 2020: "I saved at least 8 Republican Senators, including Mitch, from losing in the last Rigged (for President) Election"; 26 December 2020: "Courts are bad, the FBI and "Justice" didn't do their job, and the United States Election System looks like that of a third world country. Freedom of the press has been gone for a long time, it is Fake News, and now we have Big Tech (with Section 230) to deal with...."; 26 December 2020: "Show courage, and do what's right!!";

⁴ Maggie Haberman, "The Daily," *WAMU*, (1 March 2019) refers to Michael Cohen's testimony before Congress regarding (then)President Donald Trump, remarking that his testimony was particularly striking because it differed so greatly from the "portrait of fealty" Cohen "exhibited in the past" to Trump. See also: Mark Mazetti and Maggie Haberman, "Trump vs. Cohen: The Breakup of a New York Relationship," in *The New York Post*, (27 February 2019): calling Cohen's relationship with Trump "akin to a cult"⁴ and one that began "with an oath of fealty." See also: Paul Schwartzman, "Michael Cohen's Secret Agenda," in *The Washington Post*, (9 February 2019) and: Eliot A. Cohen, "Honor and Dishonor," in *The Atlantic*, (28 February 2019).

⁵ Patrik Hermannsson, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020) differentiate between "alt-right" and "alt-lite" movements finding "race forms the basis of [the alt-right's] worldview" whereas "the alt-lite perceives the liberal consensus as a threat to traditional Western culture and so is in favor of a Western chauvinist nationalism" (2). Hermannsson et al emphasize the role chivalry plays in alt-lite masculine identity: women are framed as "reproductive and nurturing" thus framing men as "protectors of the population," women who fall outside of their nurturing, reproductive and submissive roles are met with "seething resentment . . . misogynistic harassment" and denigration all in the name of maintaining chivalric masculinity. Cord J. Whitaker writes extensively about the co-opting of chivalry and medieval symbols by the alt-right; white supremacists, and Christian Nationalists. In an article for *Politico* (29 October 2020) entitled "The Secret Power of White Supremacists and How Anti-Racists Can Take It Back" Whitaker suggests "Black Lives Mater

Presidents, pundits, and pulpits are somehow responsible for creating a burdensome chivalric Gollum, far from it. They are simply part of a centuries long list of opportunists who have effectively harnessed the influential power of the chivalric code and used it to promote a particular brand of political, religious, and social masculinity. These twenty-first century adaptations of the chivalric code place the burden of chivalry squarely on the shoulders of men while conflating their political power, wealth, reputation, and often times: eternal life to their adherence and application of this particularized definition of chivalry. The chivalric code and constructed adaptations of how chivalry functions in a Post-Modern society inform and influence a specifically American militant masculinity and the ideal of chivalry borders on hegemonic in the American South and the evangelical church. The physical, religious, and social burden of chivalry moves stealthily out of the pages of history and into the pulpits, politics, and psychology of the twenty-first century. Chivalry's malleability and its foundational "unwinnable" nature created a landscape fraught with failure in the Middle Ages. This landscape did not fade into the mists of time like Arthurian legends; it remains fraught, violent, capricious and burdensomely "unwinnable" even today. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus mainly on the medieval rather than the modern in order to spotlight chivalry's inherent physical, religious, and social

protesters should consider co-opting the language and trappings of chivalry and knighthood that motivate so many racists." See also: Cord J. Whitaker, "Medieval Chivalry, the Crusades, and the Modern Far-Right (National Humanities Center: Wellesley College, 1 October 2019). <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/education-material/medieval-chivalry-the-crusades-and-the-modern-far-right>. Last accessed: 3 November 2021. Misogynistic and antagonistic social media movements *MGTOW* (*Men Going Their Own Way*) and *TRP* (*The Red Pill*) consider chivalry to have been corrupted by women and prompt comments like "For articles and chicks to come out and call acts of chivalry a form of sexism shows they don't want to be treated well" (StoicCrane). Or the article "Chivalry: What It Was, What It Became, Why It is Dead" (valvadi) which determines "Chivalric knights were the true alphas of their time. The code provided them with their focus and their mission in life which did not revolve around women! It revolved around the knight being the best he could be, for himself and his liege. This is something that falls perfectly in line with TRP [The Red Pill] because it is a sexual strategy helping men become better *for themselves*, not for the women around them." According to these groups the perfect chivalric masculinity results in strength, honor, and sexual dominance. Those who are not sexually dominant are corrupted by the feminization of chivalry.

burden—burden that shames, erases, emasculates, damns, and deceives men trying desperately to balance its multivalent specifics.

It is not as if chivalry as a “hard life” has not been written about profusely through the decades. I realize that I am in company much more learned than I when it comes to examining the paradoxes that are the physical, religious, and social tenets of chivalry. Additionally, I approach my work with an acknowledgment that scholars must be aware of the creeping influence of “presentism” on their scholarship. Presentism, in the context of the work I am doing here asks the following question: Did medieval knights see the physical, religious, and social expectations of chivalry as burdensome or do I interpret them as such due to both hindsight; modern conceptions of masculinity framed by politics, religion, toxicity and my own modern sensibilities? My research leads me to believe that an underlying current of “distress” did exist among medieval knights (or their literary representations). This current of distress specifically relates to the untenable nature of the chivalric code. However, I cannot go so far as to say they would call this “distress” a burden. Something can be “burdensome” without being labeled a “burden.” The reality of chivalric burden, for the purposes of my research, comes from Geoffroi de Charny’s *Livre de Chevalerie* where he describes the roles and expectations of knighthood as “an honorable and weighty burden to bear” and then broadly outlines the physical, religious, and social implications of this honorable burden:

[M]en prefer to listen to them above all others, for they can talk of great, important, and honorable affairs, and it seems to everyone that they should and can speak of such matters. Thus, they are closely observed as examples of good manners and good behavior . . . in no way can anything dishonorable be perceived nor said concerning them; for there will be greater talk and notoriety about their shortcomings than there would be concerning someone without such a great reputation.⁶

⁶ Geoffroi de Charny, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny*, eds. Richard W. Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press: 1996), 109.

The weight of chivalric burden comes from society, but does not limit itself to stringent social expectations. Geoffroi makes it clear that the eyes of all the estates are on the knights, each with their own idea of what honor, prowess, *largesse*, *gentillesse*, and courtesy look like. The knight must carefully navigate the pitfalls and paradoxes of his honorable and weighty burden for God, lord, and country all while being held to a higher physical, religious, and social standard than others. An impossible task.

I am not alone in my belief that conceptions and constructions of chivalry complicate the concept of fealty/loyalty, service, violence, and faith. However, no one has considered these complications to be burdens—burdens carried through the Middle Ages and into the twenty-first century. Maurice Keen devotes an entire monograph on the subject of chivalry in his aptly titled book: *Chivalry* (1984). In the “Introduction” Keen emphasizes the disconnect between literary depictions of chivalry and the reality faced by knights while at the same time refuting the idea of previous historians that romance is “essentially a literature of escape . . . scarcely a promising model for a social historian to make much of.”⁷ It is Keen’s defense of romance as an indicator of chivalric realities that foregrounds my use of romance, *lais*, and history to analyze chivalric burden. Keen determines that chivalry is a complex way of life; “like a living organism” and one that “spans three essential facets, the military, the noble, and the religious” (17). In the chapter “Pageantry, Tournies and Solemn Vows” Keen examines the taxes and fees attached to the tournaments in which knights were expected to participate in the sixteenth century and concludes that these financial requirements “became a burden” (209). He also touches on the social expectations of the observers and finds that the financial and social burden experienced by

⁷ Maurice Keen. 3.

knights at this time was a “response to popular demand” as a method of guaranteeing entertainment by men of “value” (209). However, burden features only briefly and only in reference to the sixteenth century. Richard Kaeuper examines the reality and practicality of chivalry throughout “Three Broad Chronological Phases” in *Medieval Chivalry* (2016). The central issue to determining the reality and practicality of chivalry, according to Kaeuper, revolves around seeking “to understand why chivalry was so important to influential medieval people . . . as a key buttress to society, even to civilization.”⁸ Kaeuper, like Keen, asserts that chivalry moves “beyond combat” and becomes a set of “[s]ocial markers essential to establishing status . . . [framing] not only war and peace, but status, acquisition and distribution of wealth, the practice of lay piety, the elevated and elevating nature of love, and ideal gender relationships, among much else” (5). Unlike Keen who returns to romance throughout his book, Kaeuper endeavors to divorce chivalry from romance attempting to find something he terms “authentically medieval chivalry” (5). While this “authentic” chivalry certainly encompasses the physical, religious, and social, Kaeuper does not attach burden *per se* to either the construction or the reality of chivalry.

Chivalry and its relationship to medieval cultural flashpoints add specificity to monographs like Keen’s and Kaeuper’s allowing them to examine chivalry’s relationship to individual aspects rather than tackling the ideal of chivalry on a holistic level. Jennifer R. Goodman’s *Chivalry and Exploration 1293-1630* (1998) asserts that imagination, including an imagined sense of chivalry, “play their part in shaping our ‘America.’”⁹ She finds that “[c]hivalry and exploration have been comrades since the days of Marco Polo, if not since the

⁸ Richard Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 3.

⁹ Jennifer R. Goodman, *Chivalry and Exploration 1293-1630* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 2.

days of the First Crusade” (5). Additionally, she recognizes “exploration as a natural outgrowth of the medieval ‘cult of knight-errantry.’” (6). Preceding *Medieval Chivalry*, Richard Kaeuper also looks at the concept of knight-errantry as well as chivalry’s connection with violence in his book *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (1999). Kaeuper opines that as a historian (and ostensibly as a scholar) one should endeavor to look at chivalry “dispassionately” and “take care not to be blinded by the light reflected off of shining armour.”¹⁰ Much like my thesis, Kaeuper cautions against a romanticized reading of chivalry, one that is “purely positive” (2). Rather than regard the knight’s inability to live up to the chivalric code as a source of burden that often manifests in hyper-violence, Kaeuper asserts that “problems of order” create knights who are a “particular source of violence” (7). Craig Taylor’s *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France During the Hundred Years War* (2013) particularizes the ethos of chivalry between 1337-1453 finding that the ideal of chivalry was held up as antidote and erstwhile balm to the “succession of stunning military disasters and the widespread collapse of public order . . . afflicting France and the French people.”¹¹ Like Kaeuper’s examination of the relationship between chivalry and violence, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France* equates chivalry with “the true distinction between courage, cowardice and rashness, the relative merits of mercy and anger, and the importance and value of prudence . . .” (x). Additionally, Taylor theorizes that chivalry, martial combat, culture, and masculinity must all “be measured and understood in relationship to social practice and behavior” (x). Chivalry for Taylor is less a

¹⁰ Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

¹¹ Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France During the Hundred Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ix.

burden and more the fulcrum of the Hundred Years War.¹² Regardless of what subject chivalry informs, the resulting relationship between chivalry and subject reveals a predisposition to holding chivalry in a place of preeminent influence. By proxy then, those who influence and perform chivalry occupy a fragile place of preeminence within culture and history.

Most recently Jones's and Coss's collection *A Companion to Chivalry* (2019) makes the heady claim: "A comprehensive study of every aspect of chivalry and chivalric culture."¹³ It examines chivalry as a "socio-cultural phenomenon that was heavily nuanced and that had many, sometimes rival, dimensions."¹⁴ Jones and Coss agree with Kaeuper and Taylor finding chivalry to be "essentially a cultural form that lauded violence and promoted the superiority of its adherents over those around them" (3). Within the anthology authors Albrecht Claussen and Peter Sposato touch on the performative nature of chivalry noting "chivalric deeds not only had to be done but also had to be seen to be done" (3). However, Claussen and Sposato use the optics of chivalry as a springboard for the discussion of heraldry rather than an examination of the social burden of chivalry. Ralph Moffat's chapter examines, like Keen, the financial cost related to tourneying, noting that "the ownership and wearing of complete harness was in many ways as defining an emblem of membership of the chivalric elite as heraldry, and in some cases as clear a means of identification" (4). Again, the financial, part of the physical burden sustained by knights in their attempt to replicate the social expectations of a people obsessed with chivalric performance is overlooked by Jones, Claussen, and Sposato who turn their focus onto problems of chivalric identity.

¹² See Also: Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹³ Google Books description as of 8 January 2020.

¹⁴ Robert Jones, "Introduction," in *A Companion to Chivalry*, ed. Robert W. Jones and Peter Coss (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019) 1.

Because this dissertation also suggests a connection between the burden of chivalry's impact on twenty-first-century physical, religious, and social ideals of masculinity, I will include a (far from exhaustive) review of the literature available surrounding twenty-first century conceptions of chivalric manhood. Author and counselor D. Michl Lowe's *Christian Chivalry: Living Honorably for Christ* (2018) insists that "men are lost in our culture today"¹⁵ to the point that masculinity itself has no meaning. Lowe asserts that "men are the aborted children of society and it is time for them to take a stand and become something more than just a joke" (6). Lowe's solution combines a curated and heavily edited chivalric code assumedly based on medieval chivalric manuals (17). Lowe lists the six priorities of the Christian chivalric code: God, Family, Others, Liberty, Self, Shield and Sword and while Lowe does give brief mention of the concept of *largesse* (generosity) he rarely ties his own Christian Chivalric Code into any primary source/s (17-18). Instead, he places the burden of Christian chivalry squarely on the shoulders of the very men he derides as "pitiful creatures" and conflates their eternal life to their adherence and application of this Christian chivalry. Similar to medieval chivalric manuals popularity with knights and aspiring knights, Lowe's book and its sequel *Men of Valor: Leading Men of Christian Honor* (2020) circulate as erstwhile "cultural studies guidebooks" or evangelical masculinity handbooks in Christian bookstores, websites, men only Bible Studies, and the like. Rick Kasparek's *Knight of the Grail Code* (2014), Zach Hunter's *Chivalry: the Quest for a Personal Code of Honor in an Unjust World* (2013), Daniel A. Biddle's *Knights of Christ: Living Today with the Virtues of Ancient Knighthood* (2012) all express similar attitudes to Lowe: the current state of masculinity and Christian identity have declined to the point of

¹⁵ D. Michl Lowe, *Christian Chivalry: Living Honorably for Christ* (Charleston: Ichthys Publications, 2018), 4.

laughability. Protection and restoration come through adopting their patented Christian chivalric code.¹⁶

Tison Pugh offers perhaps the most well-known examination of the mythology of white, southern masculinity in his *Queer Chivalry: Medievalism and the Myth of White Masculinity in Southern Literature* (2013). The opening gambit of Pugh's book declares that "Chivalry is a historical myth and a queer one at that."¹⁷ However Pugh contextualizes his statement admitting "a myth deflated is not a myth defeated" (2). What follows in Pugh's book is an examination of the medieval ethos of chivalry's influence on southern chivalric masculinity: "In regard to southern chivalric masculinity, the tropes of medieval romance define knightly masculinity . . . the knight proves his worthiness by fighting tournaments and slaying monsters . . . stress[ing] the ideals of courage, courtesy, loyalty, honor, etiquette, and mercy" (6). This medieval chivalric model results in the "malleable definition of ideal and virtuous masculinity" used to fuel "the U.S. South's conflicting turn to chivalric medievalism as regressive and progressive, depending on the circumstances of its enactment" (7). It is in this diametrically oppositional relationship between chivalric myth and southern history that Pugh positions his argument: chivalry is, at its heart, performative and its performativity reveals its instability and queer undertones. He posits:

¹⁶ Daniel Biddle, "Preface," in *Knights of Christ* (Bloomington: Thomas Nelson Press, 2012). "This book describes twenty-four virtues that will protect your life from frivolous and void living and fill it with power, meaning, and faith. They will protect you against troubles—troubles that you can bring on yourself by not living according to the twenty-four virtues of knighthood" (xi). Zach Hunter, *Chivalry: The Quest for a Personal Code of Honor in an Unjust World*, (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013). Hunter asserts that we are a "generation of spiritual anorexics" (x) who are in need of "a code I've crafted from ten of the principles the knights lived by . . . *Chivalry* is about how we should *be*. . . the transformation that takes place internally as we open up every area of our lives to be conformed to something that is not of this world . . . This is where we will lose ourselves and find a code that is higher and longer lasting than any pledge we may make" (xii). Biddle and Hunter do not discuss chivalry in historical context nor do they offer documentation of where they acquired their understanding of the operative tenets of chivalry. This in and of itself is problematic.

¹⁷ Tison Pugh, *Queer Chivalry: Medievalism and the Myth of White Masculinity in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 1.

“The turn to chivalry and medievalism queerly reveals what the ideological superstructure behind white southern masculinity would hide—its inherent vulnerability” (10). This very vulnerability reveals the echoes of chivalry’s physical, religious, and social burden ringing throughout the twenty-first century.¹⁸

Positioned as a bridge between the evangelical and normative chivalric masculinity Pugh queers, is Brad Miner’s *The Compleat Gentleman: The Modern Man’s Guide to Chivalry* (3rd edition 2021). In the introduction to the latest edition of his book Miner emphasizes “Chivalry is first and foremost the worldview of fighting men, and I am convinced that the decline of the gentlemanly ideal has occurred at least in part because men really are flabby—physically and spiritually” (i). Miner continues, introducing social “flabbiness” to his already delineated physical and religious masculine flab: “[E]ven in 2009 [the second edition of Miner’s manual], although political correctness was already rampant, I for one could not have predicted—could not have imagined—that in 2020 the media and certain groups of Americans would be obsessing about ‘toxic masculinity.’ The reader is assured . . . I have changed my view of the gentleman and chivalry not one whit” (iii). Miner places much of the blame for the disintegration of chivalry, martial masculinity, and male self-esteem on women who do not “respect” men and academia.

¹⁸ See Also: Gail Sigal, “Academic Autobiography, Medieval Studies, and the American Medieval,” in *American/Medieval: Nature and Mind in Cultural Transfer*, ed. Gillian R. Overing and Ulrike Wiethaus (Gottigen: V&R Press, 2016): “[I]t struck me that there might be something about the perception of history in the south that made the world of Arthur that much more appealing and evocative than in the north” (167). Like Pugh, Sigal suggests that the south “created a myth of itself, a narrative in which everyone partook of a peaceful and thriving chivalric culture” only to be destabilized by reminders of the burdensome realities of those who disputed this mythology (170). Or Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Chivalry,” in *The Mind of the Masterclass: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholder’s Worldview*, ed. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): Fox-Genovese finds an immediate link between medieval and southern conceptions of chivalry and chivalric identities: “The chivalry of the Middle Ages, as Richard Kaeuper demonstrates, rested upon—and uneasily bridged—contradictory allegiances to Christianity and to violence, producing tensions that persisted in Southerners’ attempts to defend their ideal of chivalry in their unique modern slave society” (329). She examines the influence of medieval romance on southern chivalric masculinity but stops short at condemning the process or finding it burdensome. Instead, she turns her focus on the evolution of “womanly” chivalry as a pretense to reinforce the image of the slave-holder as “the chivalric gentleman” (337).

Chivalry: A Gynocentric Tradition (2019) a collection of essays by men's rights activists Peter Wright and Paul Elam spends most of its textual currency on outlining the de-masculinizing influence of women. Wright and Elam's collection asserts that gynocentrism or something "focused on women; concerned only with women; male sacrifice for the benefit of women" begins in the Middle Ages: "Male disposability strictly 'for the benefit of women' comes in strongly only after the advent of the 12th century gender revolution in Europe—a revolution that delivered us terms like gallantry, chivalry, chivalric love, courtesy, romance and so on . . .". Additionally, Wright and Elam claim that the military code of chivalry "mated with the fancies of courtly love to produce a bastard child which we will here call chivalric love (today we simply label it 'chivalry')." I include Wright's and Elam's collection to demonstrate the malleability of chivalry. The multivalent nature of chivalry renders it highly commodifiable and exceptionally subjective. Elam and Wright describe the purpose of their collection of essays as an alternative lens through which chivalry can be viewed. The alternative view they describe sounds similar to what this dissertation would call "burden": "rote expectation of male sacrifice, possibility of danger or injury, impacts on mental health, potential for exploitation and abuse . . ." But, where this dissertation examines the chivalric code and finds burden, Elam and Wright find blame—specifically blame of women.¹⁹

Medieval literature still holds academic and cultural relevance, and the chivalric code features prevalently in twenty-first century political, religious, and academic publications. The

¹⁹ Prolifically self-published under the moniker Academic Century Press, Wright and Elam's other books include: *Gynocentrism: From Feudalism to the Modern Disney Princess* (Wright, 2014); *A Brief History of the Men's Rights Movement From 1865 to the present* (Wright, 2017); *Feminism: And the Creation of a Female Aristocracy* (Wright, 2018); and *Men.Women.Relationships: Surviving the Plague of Modern Masculinity* (Elam, 2019); *Gynarchy: Otherwise Known As Petticoat Government* (Wright, 2017); and *Go Your Own Way: Understanding MGTOW* (Elam, 2014). Elam and Wright feature prominently within the meninist movement and on men's rights platforms like Reddit's r/MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way) which has 144k members with an average of 1.8k actively online at any one time.

chivalric code remains malleable even in the twenty-first century: in the hands of the historian, it can be linked to violence, imagination, exploration, and moral compass. In the hands of the literary analyst, it can reveal the knight's struggle with self-identification and societal expectations. In the hands of the politician the chivalric code can become twisted and used as a means to ensnare and ensure fealty at any cost. To the evangelical church it can become a commodified pulpit capitalizing on fearmongering and thinly veiled misogyny. Burden is the common link between the myriad permutations of the chivalric code. Physical, religious, and social burden borne as a symbol of honor but destined to destroy the bearer.

Awash in advice on how and why to perform chivalrically from politicians, church leaders, and cultural critics, twenty-first century men face the same conundrum experienced by medieval knights: How to navigate the impossible expectations of the chivalric code? Chivalric conduct manuals describe knighthood and its attendant expectations as a combination of the temporal and the spiritual strengths witnessed by society.²⁰ These manuals place weighty significance on the spiritual, physical and social benefits of chivalry with Maurice Keen finding that since these manuals were written specifically for the instruction of knights they, in effect, “attempt to treat . . . chivalry as a way of life in its own right” (6). This way of life, according to the manuals and also narrators of French and English romance, lead to an understanding of chivalry as a tripartite model of religious purity, physical perfection, and social behavior all reproduced and reified by a society enamored by chivalric performance. While manuals such as

²⁰ Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, trans. Noel Fallows (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013). Fallows: “Llull consistently makes a correlation between what he calls the temporal knight and the spiritual knight” (5). And also: “As Llull states in another treatise: ‘Every science requires words by which it can be best presented.’ This approach is complemented by physical actions . . . where in addition to passing an examination and swearing an oath the knight is kissed and slapped by the agents of his investiture so that he will remember the significance of the event” (5).

Raoul de Hodenc's *Roman des eles*, the anonymously penned *Ordene de chevalrie*, Ramon Llull's *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, and Geoffroi de Charny's *Livre de Chevalerie* or *The Book of Chivalry* laud this model and narrators of romance reproduce it time and time again, the actions and attitudes of the knight's themselves in these romances coupled with the cautionary moments found buried in these same manuals often point toward a chivalric identity destined to destroy the knight rather than benefit him. Rather than consistently fail to uphold an idealized paradox of physical, religious, and social perfection in an imperfect society, knights create a code of their own based upon experience and practical knowledge of their multivalent roles. Geoffroi de Charny in his *Le Livre de Chevalrie (The Book of Chivalry)* calls chivalry an "honorable and weighty burden to bear!" He then warns knights: "he who bears such a burden should fear lest it fall . . . he has devoted himself to bearing this responsibility on his shoulders, and in one brief moment he may fall and lose everything . . ." (109).

This dissertation's depiction of the chivalric code as physically, religiously, and socially burdensome to knights takes as its "urtexts" the chivalric manuals prevalent in the Late Middle Ages. Chivalric manuals were often written to help knights navigate and manage their place in society while at the same time govern their own behavior and attitudes. Some take the form of textbooks or instruction manuals, others form lists with points and sub-points, while still others use narrative to engage the reader while they are instructed. Regardless of literary form, the chivalric manual both instructs the knight regarding the societal and religious expectations of behavior and forewarns against stepping outside of the chivalric frame-work. While there are multiple manuals, this essay utilizes the four mentioned above whose literary style all vary in

order to show that despite narrative difference or authorial point of view the chivalric code presents an unmanageable “ethos” of burden.²¹

Raoul de Hodenc’s *Roman des Eles* or *The Romance of the Wings* (ca. late twelfth century) describes knights born aloft by wings of liberality and courtesy with the seven feathers of largesse/liberality and the seven feathers of courtesy guiding their flight upward, placing them, as it were, both closer to God and also over their fellow man.²² The anonymous author of *L’Ordene de chevalrie* or *The Order of Knighthood* (ca. 1220) tells the story of the fictional Hue of Tabarie, a crusading knight captured by Saladin who can only win his freedom after he shows the Muslim conqueror how Christian knights are made. The narrator takes the reader through all of the physical steps of the knighting ceremony while also attaching deep spiritual significance to each. Finally, the narrator underscores the entire process with Hue’s eventual freedom from captivity and Saladin’s conversion in effect cementing the social importance of the chivalric code of knighthood to Christian superiority.

Ramon Llull goes even further than the narrator of the *Ordene de chevalrie* creating a mythology behind knighthood that begins with an invocation to Christ, moves swiftly to a comparison of celestial planetary order to the dominance of knights “over the people,” and then creates a mythology surrounding the Order of Chivalry where “the noblest beast” (the horse/*cavall*) was “assigned to the noblest man, and the noblest arms most suited to combat and protection from wounds and death were subsequently picked and chosen from among all the

²¹ Keen, 16.

²² *Le Roman des eles* by Raoul de Hodenc and *L’Ordene de Chevalerie*, ed and trans. Keith Busby (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983). The seven feathers of largesse or liberality are: give to the rich and to the poor alike; spend without care for the landed wealth; give what is promised; give promptly; give liberally; give fine feasts. The seven feathers of courtesy are to honor and guard the Holy Church; avoid pride; refrain from boasting; enjoy good entertainment; avoid envy; avoid slander; be a lover (18).

arms, and those arms were given to and bestowed upon the knight.”²³ According to Lull, any man who wished to join the Order of Chivalry must match the nobility, courage, and good breeding of the noblest man who originated the Order of Chivalry. If this nascent knight failed to measure up to his forefather in any way “he will be contrary to the Order of Chivalry and to its beginnings” and even more troubling, he will be considered an enemy based on his shortcomings because “The Order of Chivalry should not receive its enemies into its honours, nor those who are contrary to its beginnings”(40). Lull takes a somewhat heavier handed approach to the physical, religious and social significance of chivalric knighthood as he invokes “Honourable, glorious God” before describing the most perfect physical and courteous specimen of manhood as the originator of the Order of Chivalry. Lull’s chivalric system relies on cultural reification or a form of social capital that is reproduced by and in culture,²⁴ by having those already inculcated into the Order evaluate each hopeful addition and determine whether they are brother or enemy based on their ability to match the mythic standards.

Geoffroi de Charny writes a more pragmatic dissertation on chivalry in his *Livre de Chevalerie*, attempting to strike a balance between the religious, physical, and social idealism present in other manuals and romances. However, his centrist position on knightly behavior ends with his stance on “prowess” described by Richard Kaeuper as “the entire cluster of warrior virtues: great skill, strength, and hardiness in using arms on horseback or on foot as well as the courage and determination that must inform success at arms.”²⁵ Here Geoffroi, even as he

²³ Lull,40.

²⁴ See David Gartman, *Culture, Class, and Critical Theory: Between Bourdieu and the Frankfurt School* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 13. “Although Marx develops the concept of reification to understand the capitalist economy, it carries cultural connotations as well. After all, it describes the *appearance*, or representation in consciousness, of social relations *as if* they were things” (emphasis Gartman 13.)

²⁵ Richard Kaeuper, “The Practicality of Charny’s Book,” in *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 32.

attempts pragmatism in regards to the religious significance of chivalry, lauds the physical perfection of the chivalric knight and socially reproduces the expectation of perfection as these knights demonstrate their skill, strength, and hardiness of arms in tournaments, jousts, and melees finding “*qui plus fait, mieux vault*” or “he who does more is worth more” (32). “*Qui plus fait, mieux vault*” leaves little room for the knight who struggles in any of the areas of prowess and devalues a knight’s worth if he fails in a seemingly constant acquisition of chivalric merit badges.

Ramon Llull determines that knights who qualify for the Order of Chivalry receive the benefits of “honour and the life of service that devolve upon the friends of chivalry” (41). He adds “the nobler your lineage, the more obliged you are to be good and agreeable to God and the people” (41). Geoffroi De Charny finds the benefit of honor and Godly grace in both literal and performance-based martial violence: “We shall first speak of a class of men-at-arms who are worthy of praise in terms of the kinds of pursuit of arms they are willing to undertake” (85. 3). These men are “physically strong and skillful (agile) . . . [and] are so eager to perform deeds of arms at jousts” that they seek them out wherever they can and credit “the grace of God” when they succeed (85.3; 87.3). However, Geoffroi does not stop at jousts but instead ranks the prowess and therefore the honor of the knight who participates in tournaments, local wars and finally credits knights with “Deeds of Arms in War” as “the Most Honourable” (89.7). This final stage is the most important because it combines jousting, tourneying, and waging local, smaller wars and “For this reason you should love, value, praise, and honour all those whom God by his grace has granted several good days on the battlefield . . .”(91. 19-21). This intersection of the idealized, unattainable physical, religious, and social expectations placed upon the shoulders of knights creates what this dissertation refers to as “the burden of chivalry.” However, rather than

travel line by line through romance and history matching the deeds of knights to the appropriate category in the most relevant manual, I use the manuals to contextualize key moments within the literature. Admittedly this method utilizes editorial discretion since manuals may differ with one another. Frankly, chivalric manuals differ with themselves sometimes. Rather than destabilize the weight of their scholarship, the paradoxes found within and between chivalric manuals add to the importance of an examination of chivalric burden. If the manuals meant to instruct knights about the physical, religious, and social expectations attached to their rank are contradictory, how can knights be assured their performances are chivalric? To function in a constant state of uncertainty, knowing one's service, soul, and social standing, all hinge on the capricious approval of society creates a culture of burden destined to damage the men who endure it.

An "Introduction"; four chapters and an epilogue outline and analyze the physical, religious, and social burden of chivalry; knightly attempts to mediate these burdens, and finally a brief look at chivalric burden's legacy. Juxtaposing the experience of medieval knights found in romance, *lais* and biographical accounts against chivalric manuals reveals a stark contrast between the intention of chivalric codes and their application. Secondary sources such as Maurice Keen's *Chivalry* and Richard Kaeuper's *Medieval Chivalry* contextualize the changing and still abiding "ethos" of the chivalric code across the medieval period. This dissertation defines the medieval period, also known as the Middle Ages, as 500 CE through 1500 CE, but will focus mainly on texts from the end of the High Middle Ages and those written in the Late Middle Ages: 1100 AD – 1500 AD.

The reasoning behind the choice to limit the number of texts from which I select source material is both practical and strategic. Practically, an attempt to examine roughly 1,000 years of literature devoted to the developing burden of chivalry within the Middle Ages would most

likely produce a text too broad, too shallow, and too long to contribute to the ongoing discussion surrounding the impact of the chivalric code upon those whose job it is to uphold it.

Strategically, the eleventh century ushers in advancements in military technique as well as equipment and places a new physical and economic requirement on the men sworn to serve their lords: a burden of skill, training, and financial assets. In due course biographical accounts of knights' military, religious, and social experiences follow these advancements, documenting the process by which knights begin to forge an identity as an estate "set apart from other men."²⁶ This common bond forged through military physicality, religious undertones, and social status comes to be known as chivalry. The romance and lays which follow, along with chivalric manuals, show increasing expectations of physical, religious, and social perfection by members of medieval society on this knightly brotherhood. Therefore, the eleventh through the sixteenth century offer myriad textual representations of the "kaleidoscopic paradoxes, contradictions and inherent tensions" comprising the chivalric code, the burdens the code creates, the methods attempted by knights to alleviate these burdens, and the twenty-first-century inheritance of chivalric burden.²⁷

The "Introduction" and three chapters relating specifically to physical, religious, and social burden make up part one of the dissertation. Chapter One encompasses the introductory material while Chapter Two examines shame in conjunction with the physical burden of chivalry. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide* and *Yvain the Knight with the Lion*, both Erec and Yvain seek escape from their shame. Accused of *recreance* and *uxoriousness*, both men experience the identity annihilating shame brought about by the flagging opinion of their peers.

²⁶ Keen, *Chivalry*, 26.

²⁷ Noel Fallows, "Introduction: Chivalry According to Ramon Llull," in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, trans. Noel Fallows (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2013), 16.

Erec chooses deflection of the shame. His efforts to erase the shame attached to his physical chivalric reputation render him figuratively invisible (by disappearing from the gaze of his men) as well as literally invisible (by dying). Although he resurrects, he never addresses the shame brought about by the piercing gaze of his knights. Yvain chooses to evade the shame brought about by his lack of chivalry to his wife. Yvain internalizes the public shame he experiences and rather than deflect by demonstration of prowess outside of his accusers' lines of sight, Yvain evades through madness, calculated anonymity, misdirected confession, blackmail, and trickery. In doing so he alienates himself, not from the world as Erec does, but from his wife. Although the narrator attempts to convince the reader that all is well once again in their marriage, what Yvain and his wife possess is a fragile detent. Deflection and evasion of shame bring about the physical burden of chivalry felt by those knights who seek to restore their chivalric identity and their place within chivalry's orders. In a chivalric culture, where violence is a codified honorific, a knight's chivalric identity and place within society centers around their status and honor. The physical burden of chivalry continually beleaguers knights like Yvain and Erec who try, and fail, to uphold the chivalric code's rigors of prowess, honor, largesse, gentillesse, courtly love, and devotion only to find themselves coming up shamefully short

Nowhere is the religious burden experienced by knights felt more fully than in the *Ordene de Chevalerie* and Ramon Llull's *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*. Because of chivalry's multifaceted and burdensome relationship with religion, Chapter Three divides into two parts. Part One uses the *Ordene de Chevalerie* as well as William Marshal's biography (ca. 1225-1250), *Chanson de geste The Song of Roland* (ca. 1100), Galehaut's experiences in *The Prose Vulgate* (ca. 1210-30), and Gawain's concerns over a life dedicated to chivalric violence found in both the *Prose Vulgate* and the *Awndrys of Arthyr* (ca. late thirteenth century) to

contextualize chivalry's use of violence and the church's complicated response. How does a religion whose primary tenets advocate the peace of Christ demonstrated in the New Testament also advocate chivalric knights as the martial arm of the church—to the point where these men are pre-pardoned for violence committed in the furtherance of Christianity? The church's paradoxical relationship with the violence the Chivalric Code requires causes extreme burden to the knights tasked with its actual application. Are they sinners or are they saintly warriors? Are they truly pardoned or must they seek ever-increasing methods of penitence and atonement? Does their performance on earth in the name of chivalry guarantee them a heavenly afterlife? All of these questions and more trouble and burden knights throughout histories and romance. The second part of Chapter Two examines Malory's treatment of Sir Lancelot in *Morte Darthur* and uses Ramon Llull's *The Book of the Order of Chivalry* to scrutinize the influence of religious chivalry on to culture reflected through literature. The knight Lancelot acts as a perfect foil to Llull's ecclesiastical expectations of religious perfection. Humankind's inability to follow religious moral codes is hardly a shocking revelation and thus the purpose of this section is not to restate the obvious. Rather than focus on Lancelot's and Guinevere's sexual relationship as the crux of his religious chivalric burden, Malory's text reveals a far deeper problem of chivalry within Lancelot. His burden does not stem from his inability to follow a moral chivalric code; it exists because Guinevere is his god. The chivalric code, as it was understood by the time Malory writes the *Morte*, intricately intertwines secular chivalric service to King, lord, and country with the embodiment of devotion and dedication to Christ. Lancelot's chivalric *modus operandi* and his embodied worship are only for Guinevere; he merely performs religious chivalry—he does not embody it. Therefore, his religious burden comes from his being, as Llull puts it, “outside the Order of Chivalry.”

Chapter Four shifts chivalric burden into the social landscape experienced by knights. Oaths of fealty and service mimic ecclesiastical vows; nearly mandatory participation in tourneying and jousting exhibitions incur extreme financial burden; displays of lineage and social worth equate to reputational value in the eyes of medieval estates. The social burden of chivalry acts as the warp through which the weft of physical and religious burden is woven. At its heart chivalry is performative and without witnesses, proof of chivalry is impossible. Therefore, the value of chivalry and the success of chivalric performance remains subjective. The knight intent on upholding the expectations of chivalry must succeed in front of an audience; his failure to do so is public. Failures conducted privately also tend to be confessed publicly to either other knights or members of the knight's social circle. The very title "knight" hinges upon the public's willingness to accept him as such. This chapter examines the social burden of chivalry experienced by Lanval in Marie de France's *lais* of the same name (ca. 1170-1215) and Lybeaus in the fourteenth-century romance *Lybeaus Desconus*. Lanval experiences the social burden of chivalry as a force so great it nearly crushes him until he rejects his chivalric identity and fealty to Arthur for love. Unlike Lanval who acknowledges chivalry's social expectations and attempts to satisfy them, Lybeaus handles his social burden with spectacular ignorance placing all and sundry in far more danger than need be. *Lanval* and *Lybeaus Desconus* also demonstrate the importance of the chivalric education system as well as the consequences that befall a knight whose lord makes poor choices. Each knight experiences a shift in burden through supernatural intervention. Lanval receives freedom from burden through the patronage and love of a beautiful faery queen and his decision to disappear into her world. Lybeaus, on the other hand, is never freed from social burden, but a kiss from a dragon-cum-noble turns him from a brash and boorish burden-denying savage into a socially responsible neophyte knight far more

prepared to navigate the courtly expectations of chivalric behavior. Lybeaus and Lanval reveal that the social burden of chivalry can only be removed with supernatural intervention and a retreat from chivalric society. Lanval chooses to remove himself from society's gaze while Lybeaus chooses to meet society's gaze with newfound humility and nobility.

Part Two of this dissertation examines steps taken by knights to ease the burdens of chivalry. Rather than consistently fail to uphold an idealized paradox of physical, religious, and social perfection in an imperfect society, knights create a code of their own based upon experience and practical knowledge of their multivalent roles. Chapter Five looks at the role "brotherhood oaths" play in the disbursement of burden to individual knights by their compatriots. Brotherhood trouthes create spaces for honesty and candor; knights are able to express emotions of fear, anxiety, and objection. The oath of fealty sworn to their lords allows for very little emotive honesty. Brotherhood trouthes enable knights to share obligation which is especially significant when facing conflicting vows of fealty and service. However, these same oaths can lead to a knight's undoing. Spaces of honesty provide moments where the trouth of brotherhood supersedes an oath of fealty. Service to the brother becomes more important than service to the lord. Also, trouthes enacted as a chivalric "easement" may cause one brother comfort while putting the other brother at moral or physical risk. Finally, elevating the brotherhood over fealty places the knights squarely in the arena of "malfeasance" or the "knight who aids the people rather than his lord . . . [and therefore] by ceasing to love the office of knighthood, unmakes Chivalry itself."²⁸ An analysis of brotherhood trouthes sworn by Arcite and Palamon in Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" as well as trouthes sworn by *Amis and Amiloun*

²⁸ Lull, 46, 48.

found in the romance of the same name reveals the insidious impact of chivalric burden: brotherhood trouthes may offer a temporary easement of physical, religious, and/or social burden but the burden cannot ever be alleviated altogether. The burdens are only deferred and often, as Palimon, Arcite, Amis, and Amiloun discover, are compounded by their very attempt at deferral.

Compounding burden through deferral opens avenues of discussion about the twenty-first century legacy or inheritance of chivalry. Chapter Six, the “Epilogue” moves my research into the twenty-first century. Beginning with a discussion of outlier and monster knights within this chapter focuses on knights who externalize burden to the point of monster status and how twenty-first century masculinity movements, specifically those linked to the evangelical church commodify this particular form of chivalric monstrosity. The “Epilogue” circles back to the “Introduction” of this dissertation placing medieval conceptions of chivalric masculinity squarely within a modern framework. Nowhere near exhaustive, the “Epilogue” only begins to explore the burden of chivalry past the borders of medieval text and academic analysis and reveal its burdensome place within some popular forms of socially constructed twenty-first-century masculinity.

CHAPTER II: “AND I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE STAYED . . . AND IF YOU ALL COULD GO AWAY THEN I WILL TRY”: CHIVALRIC SHAME, PHYSICAL BURDEN, AND RESTORATIVE CONFESSION²⁹

In Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival and Titurel*, the knight Parzival defends and explains his relentless pursuit of combat: “If chivalry can win the body’s fame and, nevertheless, the soul’s Paradise, with shield and also with spear, then chivalry was always my desire. I fought wherever I found fighting . . . If God knows how to assess fighting, He ought to summon me there . . . My hand will not forbear from battle.”³⁰ Chivalric literature of all genres penned in the Middle Ages acknowledges, if not glorifies, chivalry’s physical expectations. The physical expectations attached to chivalry are, admittedly, intense and often manifest themselves in ritualized violence bounded by rules of conduct, however violence for violence’s sake stands outside of chivalry.³¹

The opportunities to physically sacrifice their body in the name of chivalry vary: a knight must be ready for single combat, skirmish, organized tourneying, battles against incomparable odds, lone combat facing bloodthirsty giants, and more. Regardless of venue, odds, or preparedness one constant remains— chivalry demands physical sacrifice. Sir Thomas Malory compares two knights on the battlefield as a meeting between wild animals and describes the decimation of their armor in minute detail: “[T]hey . . . drew their swordys and ran togydys

²⁹ The Twilight Sad, “VTr,” James Graham, Andy MacFarlane, Brendan Jay Smith, Johnathan Docherty (Rock Action Records, 2019). Lyrics used with permission.

³⁰ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival and Titurel*, trans. Cyril Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 199.472.

³¹ Albrecht Classen, “Introduction: Violence in the Shadows of the Court,” in *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Routledge: 2004), 16. “Uncontrolled violence quickly spirals into something monstrous, inviting each side to take a higher degree of revenge for acts of violence, and the resulting blood feud, to mention one specific form of medieval and also modern violence, eventually will engulf both sides and destroy the entire community.”

lyke two fers lyons and eythir gaff other suche two buffettys upon their helmys that they releas bakwarde . . . [they] hew grete pecis of othyrs harneyse and their shyldys, that a grete parte felle in the fylde.”³² Rather than produce knights who are seemingly unstoppable fighting machines, Malory, a knight himself, describes the physical toll chivalry takes on their bodies in order to create a more compelling story: “[T]hey foughte tyl it was past none . . . and thēne they stode wagyng, scateryng pontyng, blowyng and bledyng, that al that behelde them for the moost party wepte for pyte” (58). Biographies and histories also laud prowess and the elite physical skills necessary to perform chivalry. William Marshal’s biographer recounts King Richard rushing headlong into battle describing the monarch’s zeal in terms as equally leonine as Malory: “[H]e went charging as the ravening, famished lion falls upon its prey, its mind fixed on nothing but the catch.”³³ At the tournament of Epernon the Marshal and his friend St. Peter de Préaux charge against the Burgundians and the resulting melee feels nearly as epic as Malory’s romance: “There was no shilly-shallying: as soon as they were in the field lances were levelled . . . horses charged, lances shattered, shields split and saddles emptied . . . you’d have heard the clash of swords, hammering, parrying, and ringing blows on helms . . .” (80). John Barbour’s biography of Robert the Bruce makes the heady claim that no knight of medieval romance can come close to the exploits of Robert the Bruce: “Tharfor sa hard myscheiff him fell,/ That Ik herd nevir in romance tell/ Off man sa hard frayit as wes he,/ That eftirwart com to sic bounte.”³⁴ Physical

³² Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer. *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, Book VII, Capitulum xvij, 239. Last accessed 21 February 2020. Further along in this section Malory also compares the knights to “two borys” and “two rammys.” He also describes the state of their armour at the end of the fight: “And theire armoure was so forhewyn that men might se their naked sydys, and in other placis they were naked; but ever the nakyd placis they dud defende.” In a different passage Malory’s narrator graphically depicts the state of King Arthur after his battle with King Ban: “And Arthur was so bloody that by his shelde ther might no man know hym/ for all was blood and braynes on his swerd . . .” (Book I; Capitulum xvj, 58).

³³ *The History of William Marshal*, ed. Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2016), 142.

³⁴ John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. W.M. Mackenzie (EBook #44292) II. 45-8.

performance in battle links inextricably with honor and prowess, the cornerstones of chivalry. Knights are aware of this linkage every time they saddle up and rush into the fray.

One must be careful not to mistake the physically violent displays of prowess exhibited by knights as their physical burden. The physicality of knighthood comes “with the territory” one might say. John Gower ruminates on the physical expectations of knighthood and determines that the knights of the past “took up arms not for fame, / But for the sake of justice . . . If one would enjoy honor, let him earn honor, / And bear the task his burden urges him.”³⁵ The amorphous and socially subjected “earning of honor” sets knights up for dishonor and shame if they fail either in the eyes of society or their brothers-in-arms, thus creating the physical burden of chivalry since the knight must strive to reclaim honor through increased physical violence and brutality, often internally directed, in addition to their already physically demanding jobs.

Gower references achieving honor through the bearing of burden. Twenty-first century understanding of “honor,” as an individual or an action by an individual respected and held in high esteem differs from medieval conceptions of honor.³⁶ In the twelfth century and throughout the Middle Ages honor was predicated on sophisticated displays of physical chivalry. Richard Kaeuper summarizes medieval codes of honor in his monograph *Medieval Chivalry*: “honor [means] status and precedence (a desired place in the ‘pecking order’), vigorously asserted and even more vigorously defended against any perceived slight.”³⁷ Anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers describes honor as directly related to physical strength and martial skill rather than deeds

³⁵ John Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, trans. Robert J. Meindl (*The Gower Project Translation*) Book V; Chapter I, 13-14, 23-4. Last Accessed 24 October 2021.

³⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*. Last accessed 20 February 2020. “Great respect, esteem, or reverence received, gained, or enjoyed by a person or thing.”

³⁷ Richard Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 39.

codified as “respectful” or “worthy of esteem.”³⁸ Honor is an outcome based on the ability to enforce one’s will physically. Honor combines literal acts of prowess with its execution. William Ian Miller adds that, in the Middle Ages, “Honor is above all the keen sensitivity to the experience of humility and shame, a sensitivity manifested by the desire to be envied by others and the propensity to envy the successes of others.”³⁹ The outcome of this equation elevates the victorious and casts the vanquished into shame. According to Pitt-Rivers “on the field of honour, might is right” (24-5). The antithesis of this medieval truism provides the basis of the physical burden of chivalry. To lose; to fail; to be vanquished is to be dishonored. Dishonor shames the knight, demoting him in the proverbial pecking order. Shame renders a knight deficient or defective in the eyes of his peers and the public he serves. It also brings about mockery and rejection from one’s social group. Once a knight appears to those around him as shamefully deficient in honor or defective in prowess the road back to chivalric identity can be at best arduous and at worst deadly. Often attempted through the shouldering of physical burden comprised of codified violence towards others and a nearly suicidal disregard for self-preservation, Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* and *Erec and Enide* suggest an alternative or at least a method of off-setting physical burden: confession. Although humiliating, public confession plays a “role in the restoration of social peace” and establishes “concord between angrily quarreling neighbors and feuding families.”⁴⁰ This chapter uses parallel readings

³⁸ J.A. Pitt-Rivers, “Honour and Social Status,” in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J. G. Peristiany, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1965), 24-5. “Respect and precedence are paid to those who claim it and are sufficiently powerful to enforce their claim. Just as possession is said to be nine-tenths of the law, so the de facto achievement of honour depends upon the ability to silence anyone who would dispute the title” (24).

³⁹ William Ian Miller, *Humiliation: and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1995), 84.

⁴⁰ Peter Biller, “Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction,” in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and AJ Minnis, (York: York Medieval Press, 1998), 29.

of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* and *Erec and Enide* along with an examination of how their titular character's failure to uphold the chivalric code leads to shame, physical burden, and self-harm. Additionally, this chapter examines the role confession plays in the potential peaceful, and far less burdensome, restoration of chivalric identity. Foregrounding a precise reading of each text and how Yvain and Erec's responses to shame add to their physical burden of chivalry, is a brief summary illuminating how shame informs the plot and actions of each knight as well as how shame (and responses to shame) impacts the body itself.

Yvain and Erec, both considered models of chivalry prior to marriage, have much in common: Yvain and Erec each find wives as a result of their chivalric search for vengeance; vengeance requiring intensely violent physical demonstrations against equally skilled opponents. Each knight then removes himself from the company and physical work of chivalry after marrying, no longer questing, tourneying, or participating in skirmish or battle, they are content to stay near their wives. Finally, knights in their retinue criticize their sedentary behavior. The lack of constant or consistent physical demonstration of chivalry devalues the two men in the eyes of their comrades forcing them to choose between the marital and the martial. The shame heaped upon Erec and Yvain creates the physical burden of chivalry, forcing physical responses from both knights that send them to death's door and beyond. The devaluation Erec and Yvain experience in the face of their brother's accusations leads to deeply embodied shame by both knights. While emotional, shame is also physically burdensome. Sara Ahmed describes this burden as "the physicality of shame." Ahmed explains that shame "conceals and reveals . . . the pain of shame is felt upon the skin surface, at the same time as it overwhelms and consumes the

subject . . .”⁴¹ In *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* Gawain initially shames Yvain, but the shame quickly multiplies. Consumed by shame, Yvain leaves his wife and re-enters the tournament circuit with Gawain in hopes of rectifying his chivalric reputation. Rather than restore his chivalric identity, however, Yvain’s shame increases when he forgets to return home in the allotted time.⁴² In Chrétien’s *Erec and Enide*, Erec finds out that his knights denigrate him because of his reduced presence at tournaments. While his men’s declining opinion of him is shameful in and of itself, the fact that Erec finds out about their castigations through his wife makes his shame unbearable.⁴³ In their efforts to satisfy the chivalrically encoded expectations of a knight to his betrothed as well as a knight to his brothers, lord, and people, Erec and Yvain fail on all accounts. Erec and Yvain experience a shame so intense it changes the course of their lives. The alleviation of this shame—the allegorical “road back to chivalry” as it were—begins with the physical act of contrite confession. A confession of chivalric shortcomings and allowing oneself to physically feel shame as a “lived and bodily experience”⁴⁴ compounds the physical burden of chivalry for these knights.

In addition to the physical burden brought about by their shame, Yvain and Erec also cannot suffer personal shame privately; their chivalric shame is public and as such their confessions need to be equally as public. The repercussions of Erec’s and Yvain’s shame occurs in front of and with others. Expanding on the Lacanian mirror stage, Francis Broucek locates the

⁴¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2014), 103, 104.

⁴² Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1987).

⁴³ Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2000).

⁴⁴ Ahmed, 105.

origin of shame in reflective self-awareness or the understanding that others are observing us and that we can try to see ourselves through their eyes:

If one must view oneself and be viewed by others as an object, then what kind of object one is becomes a matter of some importance. Since it is very difficult (largely impossible) to directly assess oneself as an object, one tries to view oneself through the mirroring gaze of the important others in one's lifespace.⁴⁵

Shame's relationship to the physical burden of chivalry links directly to Broucek's theory of reflective self-awareness. Knights attempting to view themselves through both the lens of chivalry and the expectations of lord, Lord, and community cannot avoid shame. To those observing and assessing the chivalric performances of these knights, they are monolithic objects representing a chivalric ideal. Once a knight realizes their status as an idealized chivalric representative, Broucek finds "Being seen and knowing in what light one is being seen take on an enormously magnified importance after the acquisition of objective self-awareness."⁴⁶ Failing to uphold the objectified image of chivalry—either in reality or in one's imagined idea of others' perceptions—brings about degenerative shame. Shame exposes literal and figurative failures of Yvain and Erec, makes their failures public through the accusations of their comrades, and demands public performance of restitution or penance through confession and an increase in the physical performance of chivalry. Derrida likens shame to nudity: "A reflected shame, the mirror

⁴⁵ Francis Broucek, *Shame and the Self* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), 42. Lacanian "Mirror Stage" refers to a lecture delivered by Jacques Lacan to the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris in 1936 which then turned into the essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I'" in 1949. Lacan posits that the creation of the Imaginary begins with the infant's recognition of itself in the mirror. "The baby forgets how weak it is and identifies jubilantly with the reflected form. The human self thus comes into being through a fundamentally aesthetic recognition." The pitfall arrives when the image does not match the reality: "The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in contrasting size . . ." [Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, eds. Johnson, McGowan, Finkle et al (New York City, W.W. Norton and Company, 2010) 1165].

⁴⁶ Broucek, 42.

of shame ashamed of itself . . . At the optical center of this refection would appear this thing . . . that is called nudity.”⁴⁷ Shame exposes the knight for what he really is: human, just like those he serves and protects. Far from unifying (because all knights fall short of the exhaustive expectations of the chivalric code), the exposure of a knight’s humanity casts him out of the protective shield of chivalry and places him under additional scrutiny by those with whom he served and serves. Failure, shame, and even confession strips him of any of the prowess and honor earned by previous physical exploits, demonstrations and victories. Chivalry’s expectations remain for Yvain and Erec, as does the social spotlight constantly illuminating their every move, but the addition of shame, confession, and restitution through physical conquest compounds and creates an inescapable physical burden of chivalry. A physical burden without balance and without bounds.

Yvain and Erec perceive that they wrong their brothers, their lords, the people they serve, and their wives; in effect they feel that they wrong chivalry itself. Other than confession there are limited responses to shame available to the two knights: evade through denial; deflect through bravado.⁴⁸ Evasion and deflection rely on alternative emotions to overshadow the knight’s feeling of shame. Elaborating on Lacan and Sartre’s work with shame and human self-awareness, Adamson and Clark write that “Emotions are a form of magic, a cunning way of shirking *engagement* in the world, of escaping freedom and consciousness, the onerous but morally necessary responsibilities of humankind.”⁴⁹ Engagement in the world precisely describes the chivalric code’s onus, therefore to be shamed and then deflect one’s role in the shameful

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Signature Derrida*, ed. Jay Williams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 384.

⁴⁸ Anne McTaggart, *Shame and Guilt in Chaucer* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 6.

⁴⁹ Joseph Adamson and Hilary Anne Clarke, eds, *Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame, and Writing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 8.

behavior (no matter how well-intended the shameful behavior may have been) places a knight in direct opposition to chivalry. A knight cannot rehabilitate his chivalric reputation without first experiencing, embodying, and emoting his shame. Michael Lewis in his monograph *Shame: The Exposed Self* describes two possible impacts that the evasion and deflection of shame can have on an individual. First the consequence of shame evaded: “unacknowledged shame causes behavior that we cannot readily account for, and therefore leads us into trouble . . .”⁵⁰ In *Yvain the Knight of the Lion*, Yvain evades his shame through madness, anonymity, and blackmail, behavior completely counterintuitive to the once lauded flower of chivalry. The public confession and apology he owes his wife never comes, instead, he expects her to equate his physical acts of chivalry to restitution for his disavowal after his madness. In *Erec and Enide*, Erec chooses to deflect shame through obstinate bravado and a symbolic blinding of the eyes which judge his chivalric worth. Erec models Lewis’s second consequence of shame bypassed or deflected: “individuals who are unwilling to experience shame through the mechanism of focusing on their action rather than on their entire self . . . they practice specific, as opposed to global attribution” (121). Rather than address his comrade’s accusations, Erec focuses on deflecting through action—slashing and burning his way through Christendom with his wife in tow in an effort to restore his chivalric honor. Both men take on the physical burden of chivalry, putting their bodies and lives at risk in an effort to erase the stain of shame and dishonor from their chivalric identities.

Yvain the Knight of the Lion and *Erec and Enide* each begin with a vignette designed to pave the way for the titular character’s larger conflicts. While Erec features immediately in his

⁵⁰ Michael Lewis. *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 120.

romance, *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* opens with Yvain's cousin Calogrenant's and the young knight's dishonoring failures which prompt his public confession of shame. The restorative nature of confession as an alternative to shouldering physical burden is so overtly outlined in Calogrenant's tale it bears a brief examination. *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* opens with a dark mood and a private conversation between elite knights. Calogrenant, Donidel, Kay, Sagremor, Yvain, and Gawain stand gossiping in a hallway, hidden from view. Calogrenant begins a story that, according to the narrator "was not to his credit, but rather to his shame" (5). Immediately the reader becomes aware of a confessional moment between Calogrenant and his fellow knights. Failure of a knight to perform chivalrously estranges him from his brotherhood and shames chivalry as a whole, therefore Calogrenant seems compelled to humiliate himself in front of these men in order to begin his chivalric restoration.⁵¹ Calogrenant first details the ways in which he sought to successfully perform chivalry: "making my way in search of adventures"; "fully armed as a knight should be"; "in spite of the trouble I followed the road and path" (7). In the presence of Guinevere and his comrades he takes great pains to contextualize his first mention of fear: "I came to a clearing, where there were some wild bulls at large . . . if the truth be known, I drew back in fear, for there is no beast so fierce and dangerous as a bull" (8). Calogrenant expertly draws in his audience by admitting to a very plausible, logical, and wise fear: wild bulls are unpredictable and scary; they function outside of the realm of codified combat tactics. He admits to a fear that any of the other knights might also have and certainly one Guinevere would

⁵¹ *L'Ordene de Chevalerie* discusses shame brought about by physical failure, specifically sexual sin, but the punitive results lead the reader to believe that beyond sexual sin, a knight's physical performance should always bring about glory to God through the glory of chivalry. If a knight fails physically, he is shamed; loses honor, and becomes hated by God; "Ki doré sont environ/ Ke dou tout metes vo corage/ A servir Dieu tôt vostre eage . . ." (196-8). See also Richard Kaeuper, "Phase One: Knighthood Becoming Chivalry," in *Medieval Chivalry*, 63-84. Or Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troye* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001), 129. "For the Arthurian world as Chrétien depicts it, shame is by far the most forceful and frequent sanction."

possess underscoring an understanding that fear, in and of itself, is neither shameful nor out of step with the chivalric code. He also reveals that impetuosity and eagerness to climb within the chivalric ranks cause him to destroy much of another, more seasoned, knight's lands. The older knight calls out Calogrenant's unchivalrous behavior: "Vassal, without provocation you have caused me shame and harm. If there was any quarrel between us you should first have challenged me, or at least sought justice before attacking me" (9). In seeking to uphold the chivalric code's physical requirements for young knights Calogrenant, instead, demonstrates exceptionally unchivalrous behavior and causes physical damage to another knight's land—actions allowing retributive justice. Within this cadre of older, more experienced knights, Calogrenant surrounds himself with comrades sympathetic to the rigors and pitfalls of nascent chivalry performed by young chevaliers.

The audience to whom Calogrenant relates his failings and shame is integral to the restorative properties of confession. Tertullian of Carthage (160 CE) outlines the physical and social toll public confession takes on an individual and reassures potential penitents of the respect, if not care, they will receive by their brethren: "[A]mong brethren and fellow-servants, where there is one hope, fear, joy, sorrow, suffering . . . why do you think these men are any[thing] different from yourself? Why do you flee, as of scoffers, those who share your misfortunes?"⁵² The right audience leads to what John Braithwaite terms "reintegrative shaming" or shaming that "maintain[s] bonds of respect or love, that sharply terminates disapproval with forgiveness."⁵³ Calogrenant, even in the narration of his blunders and subsequent defeat by the

⁵² Rikard Roitto, "Rituals of Reintegration," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, eds. Risto Uro, Juliette J. Day, Richard E. Demaris, and Rikard Roitto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 435.

⁵³ John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 12.

knight whose property he destroyed can take comfort in the knowledge that he confesses to a community who cares about him and who seeks his reintegration into the chivalry's brotherhood.

Calogrenant's immediate response to the shame he feels is to withdraw rather than confess. He weighs out his options and stymied by defeat he succumbs to the stasis created by his own shame. The other knight abandons him in the forest mud to make his own way home. Calogrenant's shame, still private at this moment of unhorsing, depletes all of his strength and will-power. Sparing no humiliation Calogrenant adds an additional layer of shameful behavior: cowardice, admitting "[H]ad I had the courage, I knew not what had become" of the other knight (9). Calogrenant, at this moment in the story, seems to be the antithesis of the chivalric knight. He willingly subjugates himself in front of the others but rather than receive ridicule and rejection the men to whom he confesses not only reintegrate him into their brotherhood, they spring to his defense. Yvain invokes the familial bond of chivalry crying "By my head you are my own cousin-german and we ought to love each other well" (10). Yvain then offers to "avenge [Calogrenant's] shame" effectively volunteering to shoulder Calogrenant's physical burden created by his affront to chivalry's code and his defeat by another knight. Arthur also instigates Calogrenant's reintegration swearing a tripartite oath on his father, his son, and his mother that "he would go to see that spring before a fortnight should have passed" (11). Only Kay, described as "bitter" and "babbl[ing]" by the narrator speaks against Calogrenant and Yvain, but he is silenced by Guinevere (10). Not only is the younger knight reintegrated into chivalry's brotherhood, moves to restore his reputation are made by others in his stead. Calogrenant's public confession effectively side-steps the physical burden failure and shame create for those bound by the chivalric code. This model of shame, confession, reintegration, and restoration directly opposes Yvain's decisions and actions later in the romance and Erec's in *Erec and*

Enide. Neither Yvain or Erec experience full reintegration to chivalric society or a full restoration of their chivalric reputation; instead, they are forced to continue to bear the physical burden of chivalry created by shame unconfessed.

Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide* (1170) begins with Arthur's questionable decision to reinstate the White Stag hunt. Even though the outcome of the hunt includes a potential political pitfall in the form of a kiss to the most beautiful woman in the kingdom. Arthur refuses to listen to Gawain's wise counsel regarding the subjective nature of beauty: "Sire you will derive neither thanks nor goodwill from this hunt. . . .there are here five hundred damsels of high birth . . . and there is none of them but has a bold and valiant knight for her lover who would be ready to contend . . . that she who is his lady is fairest and gentlest of them all" (2). Far from demonstrating the heady-heights of chivalric wisdom, Arthur's decision stems from pride rather than honour: "I will not desist . . . a king's word ought never to be gainsaid" (2-3). The narrator invokes the comparative nature of chivalry almost immediately, juxtaposing Arthur's short-sighted pride with Erec's laudable chivalric virtues: "Of all the knights that ever were there, never one received such praise; and he was so fair that nowhere in the world need one seek a fairer knight than he" (3). In addition to his outward beauty, Erec possesses all of the honorable interior characteristics mandated by chivalry: "He was very fair, brave, and courteous" (3). *Erec and Enide* places the model of chivalry directly at the reader's level. With a reading audience consisting heavily of nobility—the estate which includes knights—Erec's model of chivalry creates a greater sense of pressure than the relatively abstract, often problematic, and wholly unattainable model of Arthur's chivalry. Afterall—a reader may aspire to and attain the station of knighthood and all of the encoded chivalric expectations therein, but he will never be king. Richard Kaeuper calls this readership relationship the "social work" of chivalry "for it was

largely through a chivalric lens that the medieval lay, male elite viewed and made sense of the formative elements of their life.”⁵⁴ In the comparative world of chivalry where knight, aspiring knight, and nobleman must constantly gauge his perceived chivalric reputation by evaluating his performance against the performance of his peers, Arthur’s flawed monarchical form of chivalry pales in the face of Erec’s inner and outer chivalric performance. Erec, the man, becomes the chivalric standard to which others must strive to uphold within themselves. As Erec withstands the burdens of chivalry, so should the reader—but if Erec falters or falls beneath the burden of chivalry the consequential ripples of his shame extend from the pages of romance and influence very real perceptions and performance of chivalric masculinity. How Erec responds to the physical burden of chivalry and shameful accusations leveled against him by his comrades potentially becomes the standard by which his reader should respond in kind.

Erec and Enide continues with an extenuating shameful circumstance which demands a chivalric response. During the ill-advised White Stag Hunt, Erec accompanies Guinevere and her maid through the forest where they run into an armed knight, a damsel, and a dwarf. Traditionally in medieval romance the forest represents a space of carnivalesque potentiality, and as such the wicked knight allows his dwarf to strike the Queen’s maid and whip Erec across the face.⁵⁵ Behavior as unchivalrous as the dwarf’s would have been met with swift vengeance

⁵⁴ Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, 22.

⁵⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswalsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10. “Carnavalesque” refers to the Bahktinian idea that “Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibition.” The forest in medieval romance becomes this carnivalesque space where, according to Albrecht Classen in *The Forest in Medieval German Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015) it “also commands an agency by itself and can write itself with bloody letters onto the protagonist’s body or engulf them for a long time until the maturation point in their lives has been reached” (10). For expanded views on the forest in medieval romance see: Corinne J. Saunders. *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1993), ix, x: “The role of the forest extends far beyond its obvious associations with darkness and danger, incorporating the themes of adventure, love, and spiritual vision. . . As a primary romance landscape, the forest comes to function not just as a negative setting or darkly resonant symbol, but in a far more complex manner, as a

outside of the lawless forest, however in this arboreal alterity the knight and the dwarf remain unchallenged.⁵⁶ Armed with only his sword and pledged to protect Guinevere, Erec must bear the slight long enough to further arm himself and track down his nemesis. It is during Erec's quest for vengeance against the wicked knight that he meets his future wife Enide, thus setting the themes of shame and deflection in motion. Early in the romance the reader experiences Erec's relationship with the physical demands of chivalry: Erec's understanding of chivalric reputation compels him to seek out and challenge the unchivalrous knight responsible for his humiliation in the forest. The fact that Erec was also performing his chivalric duty by physically protecting Guinevere and succeeded in doing so pales in the face of his need for retribution.

When Erec arrives to the nearby town of Lalut to fight the arrogant knight he notices it is filled with folk readying themselves for a tournament. Erec reveals how concomitant his identity as a knight and chivalry are when he asks a townsman "whence came all the chivalry that was quartered in the town. For there was no street or house so poor and small but it was full of knights and ladies and squires" (9).⁵⁷ For Erec the identity and performance of knight are

focus of narrative resolution . . . essential to the progression and construction of the narrative" Or Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter. *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 52. Pearsall and Salter call the forest "a place of mystery, a place of testing, and always potentially evil."

⁵⁶ The narrator makes it clear that Erec's refusal to challenge the wicked knight is not shameful, rather it is smart: "He knew well that he could not have the satisfaction of striking the dwarf; for he saw the knight was armed, arrogant, and of evil intent, and he was afraid that he would soon kill him, should he strike the dwarf in his presence. Rashness is not bravery" (5). However, Hannah Priest in "Christ's Wounds and the Birth of Romance" in *Wounds in the Middle Ages*, eds. Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr (London: Routledge, 2014) questions how "a queen's handmaiden (arriving on foot) is able to defend herself from the dwarf's attack—receiving only a bruise to the hand—while one of Arthur's noblest knights (seated on his horse) is unable to do so?" She comes to the conclusion that the "differing marks received by the maiden and Erec" symbolize an iconographical representation of the scourging Christ and ties her theory into Erec's chivalric masculinity (140). Jerome Mandel in "Polymorphous Sexualities" in *The Body and Soul in Medieval Literature*, eds. Piero Boitani, Anna Torti (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1999) expands on Priest's theory finding that Erec's decision to accompany the women into the forest "complicates his sexual orientation in the romance" and it is the whip's marks across his face and neck that "mark the beginnings of his realignment with his culture's definition of manhood" (70).

⁵⁷ Richard Kaeuper in *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, comments on the conflation of the term "chivalry" with the knight himself citing three uses of the word, the second being "the term could mean a group of knights. In the simplest sense this may be the body of elite warriors present on some particular field of battle" (4).

interchangeable with chivalry: Knighthood is chivalry and chivalry is knighthood. Erec's seemingly innocuous statement foreshadows the complete devastation he feels when he is accused of departing from chivalry after marriage. The accusation not only refers to his chivalric performance, but also to his place within the order of knighthood and his identity.

Erec gains his wife as a result of the violent battle fought between he and Yder, the knight who lashed his face in the forest. Erec seeks to challenge Yder in a battle over a sparrow hawk where only the knight with the "mistress who is fair, prudent, and courteous" can lift the hawk from its perch and win the contest. Erec asks to "defend the hawk on behalf" of his host's daughter (9). After the ensuing battle and victory by Erec, he takes his host's daughter to be his wife.⁵⁸ The two travel to Arthur's court and there Erec joyfully jousts any available opponent at the Cardigan tournament marking his wedding to Enide. The narrator says he does so to "distinguish himself in order that his prowess might appear" (32). Arthur's entire court levels its collective gaze onto Erec, ready and willing to compare his performance to the other skilled knights competing in the tournament. Erec's success at the tournament is so resounding the crowds spoke of no one "save him" (32). In fact, the narrator atomizes Erec, reducing him to his physical attributes: His physical counterpart is Absalom; his language that of Solomon; his boldness like Samson's.⁵⁹ Big sandals for one twenty-five-year-old knight to fill. For Erec, these

⁵⁸ James R. Simpson, *Troubling Arthurian Histories: Court Culture, Performance and Scandal in Chrétien de Troyes's Erec and Enide* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 49-50. Simpson posits that Erec's wedding to Enide is, in itself, an attempt to deflect shame from Arthur. Arthur's capricious reinstatement of the hunt for the White Stag leaves him in the precarious position of kissing the prettiest woman in court. A touchy situation. Erec's "intervention [marrying the incomparable Enide and bringing her back to Arthur's court] is conditioned by a need to forestall disgrace for Arthur; the implication emerging that the announcement of his betrothal was perhaps scheduled as the centerpiece of the resolution of the hunt of the White Stag, with the court already having been forced to engage in stalling tactics through the setting up of Gauvain's privy council."

⁵⁹ *Douay Rheims*. 2 Samuel 14:25 "But in all Israel there was not a man so comely, and so exceedingly beautiful as Absalom: from the soul of the foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." Talmudic mythology along with the Quran cite the legend that Solomon spoke the language of the birds, however Chrétien very likely refers to Absalom's "language" as his direct conversation with God in 1 Kings 3. God, in order to show

biblical comparisons create an expectation of precision martial skill, unflinching strength, and a singleness of mind devoted to chivalric performance. What happens when Erec cannot balance all of these expectations? Not only his performance is criticized; his very identity as a chivalrous knight is called into question along with his masculinity. Erec faces the reality posited by Lacan centuries later: Erec's chivalric identity and all of its attendant expectations "belongs to the other as much as it belongs to" him.⁶⁰ Erec is aware of the gaze directed at him and the characteristics, reputation, and code that gaze assumes, but he has no control over how others "see" him. His interiority means little to nothing to those around him; he must continue to perform chivalry's physical responsibilities in the manner expected by those around him in order to maintain his chivalric status. The comparative culture of chivalry produces this gaze by its very nature; it is Erec's awareness of this gaze and its ramifications that set the stage for the crushing physical burden he must bear. Subjected to shame leveled by those who once feted and lauded his chivalric performance Erec must choose his response: evasion, deflection, or public confession.

Immediately following the tournament Erec wants only to take his new wife to his homeland. After Arthur's acquiescence, Erec and Enide travel to Carnant, the capital of his father, King Lac's, kingdom and it is here that Erec's behavior changes, leading those around him to question his commitment to chivalry: "Erec loved her [Enide] with such a tender love that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments, nor have any desire to joust" (34). Erec

his appreciation to Solomon for continuing to worship Him above all other gods asks Solomon what he would like. Solomon asks for "an understanding heart, to judge thy people, and discern between good and evil." God is so pleased with Solomon's request that He grants him "a wise and understanding heart, insomuch that there hath been no one like thee before nor shall arise after thee. Yea and the things also which thou didst not ask, I have given thee: to wit riches and glory . . ." (1 Kings 3: 9-28). Judges 13-16 chronicles the exploits of Samson, how he kills the lion with his bare hands, slays thirty men in Ascalon in order to make good on a wager, ties together the tails of thirty foxes and uses them to torch the fields and vineyards of the Philistines, slays a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass, and other demonstrations of prowess.

⁶⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960* (New York: Norton, 1992), 186.

no longer provides the optics of a physically chivalrous knight; he no longer actively seeks to maintain the chivalric identity others wish to see. This is not to say that he discontinues all acts of chivalry in favor of his wife's company. The narrator seems almost crestfallen that the same knight who refuses to physically act like one remains "as open-handed as ever to his knights with arms, dress, and money. There was not a tournament anywhere to which he did not send them well appareled and equipped" (34). Erec practices *largesse*, sparing no expense in championing his knights' attempts to improve their own chivalric reputations.⁶¹ Yet, these same knights whom he sponsors spread shameful rumors throughout the court calling Erec a "pity" and a "waste" because he will no longer participate in the tournament circuit. It is not enough for these young knights to have their chivalric aspirations funded by Erec, Erec must also add value to their reputations by continuing to perform the physical aspects of the chivalric code as well as the expected chivalric *largesse* and *gentillesse*.⁶² He must be seen performing chivalry so that they can see themselves through the rosy glow of his successes.

The performative nature of chivalry features prominently in *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* as well. Yvain, after publicly vowing to bring restoration to Calogrenant's chivalric reputation through reprising the battle with the knight who bested his cousin-german, gallops off to Broceliande killing the lord of the land and marrying his widow, Laudine. Arthur, too, leaves court to follow the path recounted by Calogrenant and the narrator reveals how, for most of the week, while Yvain entertains and supports his visiting comrades they were privately criticizing

⁶¹ *Oxford English Dictionary. OED online*. Last accessed 25 February 2020. "The willingness to spend freely; (the virtue of) generosity; liberality; munificence. Liberal bestowal of gifts . . . especially by a person in a high position on some special occasion. Also (occasionally): lavish or prodigal giving.

⁶² This is not the only time Chrétien's narrator stresses the reciprocal and transferable properties of chivalry. At the end of the tale after the "Joy of the Court" battle the narrator in order to draw attention to Erec's reclaimed chivalry, points out: "If a better man has defeated me, I shall be glad, I promise you; but if it has so fallen out that a baser man than I has worsted me, then I must feel great grief indeed" (81).

him to Arthur: “all begged urgently, and with all the insistence at their command, that they might take away my lord Yvain with them” (32). Gawain, referred to by the narrator as the “lord of knights” and “the sun . . . for chivalry is enhanced by him just as when the morning sun sheds its rays abroad and lights all places where it shines” moves the grousing out of the shadows, directly accusing Yvain of dereliction of his chivalric duties (31). With his chastisement Gawain calls into question Yvain’s commitment to chivalry and in essence his status as a knight: “What? Will you be one of those . . . who degenerate after marriage” (31). Gawain refers here to *uxoriousness*, or “doting submissive fondness of one’s wife.”⁶³ Like a skillfully planned martial assault Gawain attacks Yvain from all sides: the saints will curse Yvain if he “degenerates” after marriage; Laudine loves him because of his “worth and reputation;” the only way to keep Laudine’s love is to “slip off the bridle and halter and come to the tournament with me” (32). In one swift rhetorical parlay Gawain challenges Yvain’s ability to keep his wife faithful and Yvain’s role as both a knight and a man suggesting that his wife has bridled or “broken” and “tamed” him. These attacks on Yvain’s masculinity are also an attack on his chivalry; his identity as a knight is at risk. Gawain’s solution is for Yvain to leave Laudine and join him in “the lists” whatever the literal and figurative cost (32).⁶⁴ Gawain’s final dig burns like a solar flare through Yvain’s weakening sense of chivalric identity: “have a care that our comradeship shall not fail through any fault of yours, fair companion; for my part, you may count on me” (32). Gawain, the center of chivalry around which all other good knights orbit, levels the *coup de grace*, warning Yvain that anything other than chivalric performance and brotherhood loyalty will strain their friendship to the breaking point. In this moment Yvain becomes aware of his shame and

⁶³ *OED*. Last accessed 10 January 2020.

⁶⁴ “Now you must no longer hesitate to frequent the lists, to share in the onslaught, and to contend with force, whatever effort it may cost! Inaction produces indifference.”

recognizes the fact that he is the object upon which all other knights gaze and cast judgment. He sees himself as Gawain sees him.⁶⁵ After being shamed into action, Yvain tells his wife he must leave her to fulfill his chivalric duty. Still, he grieves leaving his wife—he is effectively ashamed of his shame for leaving. In an effort to emphasize how sorrowful his leaving makes her, Laudine gives Yvain an ultimatum: If he does not return with a year to the day her “love will change to hate” (33). Yvain abandons his duty to protect his wife, his people, and his land in order to perform chivalry at tournaments and jousts with his brothers-in-arms.

Erec’s experience with the chivalric repercussions of love and marriage bears a striking resemblance to Yvain’s. Erec’s knights carp so excessively amongst themselves about Erec’s flagging chivalric performance that Enide hears the rumors spread about her husband: “[H]er lord [Erec] had turned craven about arms and deeds of chivalry” (34). The word “craven” denigrates Erec’s physical performance as a chivalric knight since “craven” can mean “vanquished”⁶⁶ however, “craven” can also mean “cowardly, weak-hearted, and abjectly pusillanimous.”⁶⁷ The interpretation of the rumor Enide hears is that her husband has ceased to exist as a chivalrous knight and that his masculinity flags. The Old Testament hero becomes the effete “has-been.” The accusations leveled against her husband so distress Enide that she breaks down and tells Erec about them. Lying in bed she broaches the subject: “In this land they all say . . . that it is a great pity that you should renounce your arms; your reputation has suffered from it.

⁶⁵ See Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Look” in *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 20. “Shame of self; it is the *recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a *given* object” (emphasis Sartre). Or Helen Lewis. “Shame and the Narcissistic Personality” in *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald L. Nathanson (New York: The Guilford Press, 1987), 107.: “Because the self is the focus of awareness in shame, ‘identity’ imagery is usually evoked. At the same time that this identity imagery is registering as one’s own experience, there is also vivid imagery of the self in the other’s eyes. This creates a ‘doubleness of experience,’ which is a characteristic of shame . . .”

⁶⁶ *OED*. Last accessed 11 January 2020.

⁶⁷ *OED*. Last accessed 11 January 2020.

Everyone used to say . . . that in all the world there was no better or more gallant knight. Now they [call] you a recreant” (35). Shame requires a relationship between the self and the other. To feel shame, one must first care about how one is perceived by others. The fragile relationship between the knight and those whom he serves (and who in return level a steady and expectant gaze his way) already renders the knight vulnerable to shame. In Erec’s case his double exposure to shame: seeing himself both through his eyes and through the eyes of his men becomes triply exposed: he now imagines he can see himself through his wife’s eyes and that she, too, finds him lacking.

Erec’s response to chivalry’s comparative nature, gaze, and ensuing opportunities for perceived failures is to stoically flee with his confused wife. He takes no retinue, offers no explanations— aggressively seeking to remove himself from the criticisms of his comrades and the shame he feels. Yvain receives the same criticisms from his brothers, using Gawain as their spokesman, but rather than remove himself from their company like Erec, Yvain rejoins the other knights on the tournament circuit leaving Laudine alone. He promises to return in one year. As the reader might guess, Yvain and Gawain become an unstoppable force on the tournament circuit. Outwardly they are the perfect model of chivalric knighthood but more than twelve months pass before Yvain remembers his wife, Laudine. Herein lies the conundrum of chivalry that often results in shame and physical burden: to publicly succeed as a chivalric knight Yvain must quest, tourney, and joust.⁶⁸ To succeed as a chivalric knight Yvain must honor his

⁶⁸ The chivalric manual *L’Ordene de Chevalerie* focuses mainly on the spiritual symbolism of the knighting ceremony and the religious obligations of the knight. However, *The History of William the Marshal* describes in great detail the secular and physical obligations of chivalry in the twelfth century. In the section “The Greatest Tournament Ever Seen” Marshal’s biographer describes a tournament attended by three thousand knights, all attended by kings or counts. The tournament itself is a staggering physical display but the impetus behind the tournament becomes clear: “There was plenty to be learnt about fighting there . . . All were striving with might and main, seizing the chance to prove their prowess.” The narrator explains later in the same section that “there was a

commitment to his lord, his brothers, and his sworn identity as a knight.⁶⁹ Yet to succeed as a chivalric knight Yvain must also honor his commitment to his lady.⁷⁰ To succeed as a chivalric knight Yvain must not allow his love for his lady to overshadow his other chivalric duties.⁷¹ Yvain takes on the chivalric responsibilities of travel, constant demonstrations of martial skill, the expense of tourneying, and the angst of separation from his wife in order to avoid shame; ironically, this is the very act that brings about his dishonor, shame and physical burden.

When Yvain realizes the one-year deadline has come and gone his response is physical: he must actively hold back tears for fear of embarrassing himself in front of his comrades. Yvain's dereliction of duty to his wife and his broken promise cannot be kept secret. His wife's maid Lunete rides up and berates Yvain to Arthur, Gawain, and anyone else within earshot calling him "disloyal traitor, liar, hypocrite", deserter, "treacherous thief" and a murderer

tourney somewhere nearly every fortnight!" (78-9). Knights were expected to participate in these tournament opportunities to improve their fighting skills and their prowess.

⁶⁹ *L'Ordene de Chevalerie*, 394-401. "Cil se sont mis el repairier/ Si s'en viennent en lor contrée./ Et li prinches de Galylée/ S'en revint si faitierement./ Mais molt le poise de sa gent./ Si e nest plus dolans que nus./ Don't es ten son pais venus./ Lui ontime sans plus de gent." After teaching Saladin how to be a knight and collecting his ransom money Hugh is released by the Saracen King, however, he cannot free all of his brothers. The narrator describes Hugh's sorrow as real physical pain, grief and a feeling that was an irreparable tear or rending between Hugh and his yet imprisoned fellow knights. The chivalric code demands and creates a deep sense of loyalty between those who adhere to it; to the point that they cannot enjoy their own freedom without the freedom of their brothers.

⁷⁰ *L'Ordene de Chevalerie*, 209-218: "Deus trenchans ki nos font savoir/ C'aidés doit chevaliers avoir/ Droiture et loiauté ensamble./ Chou est a dire, che me samble./ K'il doit la povre gent garder/ Kei l riches nel puist foler./ Et le foible doit sous tenir/ Que li fors ne le puist honnir./ C'est oevre de miséricorde." Hue uses the symbolism of the sword to underscore the importance of a knight's duties to the people. The double-edged blade blends right and loyalty and should be used to protect the poor against the predations of the rich, uphold the feeble against shame, and exercise mercy. By marrying Laudine Yvain agrees to be the new protector of Brocéliande, but he abandons his duties to rejoin his brethren.

⁷¹ *L'Ordene de Chevalerie*, 267-274: "L'autre cose si est molt biele: Dame ne doit de Damoisele/ Pour nule rien fourconsillier;/ Mais s'eles ont de lui mestier/ l'ordene de chevalerie/ Aidier leur doit a son pooir/ Se il veut los et pris avoir;/ Car femmes doit on honorer/ Et pour lord rots grans fais porter." After Hugh de Tabrie completes the dressing ceremony of Saladin, he tells the Saracen King that there are three rules to which a knight should adhere. The second is that if a Dame or Damosel ever needs the assistant of a knight the knight should do his best to assist them in order to win their fame. Hugh adds that the worship of women is reason enough to do mighty deeds. However, the rest of the poetic manual focuses on deeds and chivalric performance meant to glorify God, protect the church, and protect the people. It is clear from Hugh's object lesson, that the chivalrous knight must not focus solely on Dames and Damosels.

because he has destroyed the trust and love existing between a husband and wife (35). In *Erec and Enide*, Erec's immediate response to shame is ire, passive aggression, and an obsessive need to deflect the shameful identity foisted upon him. In *Yvain the Knight of the Lion*, Yvain's initially internalizes Lunete's accusations by holding back his tears. Yvain cannot escape the shamefulness of his discourteous treatment toward his wife and people; Lunete's public accusation sees to that, but he can avoid the outward admission of fault his tears will bring. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains the paradox of shame felt by Yvain: "Shame is characterized by . . . its relation to the desire for pleasure as well as the need to avoid pain."⁷² Yvain takes pleasure in the displays of chivalry which win him honor on the tournament circuit; except that he gains honor through the shameful dereliction of his vows to his wife. He wants the pleasure and he needs to avoid the pain a public admission of shame will bring. To do so he first suppresses his physical response to Lunete's harsh words: tears, then he descends in to madness to evade the accountability shame requires. Yvain's suppression of tears also represents a missed opportunity for the confession required for chivalric restoration. Eleventh-century theologian Peter Abelard expands on Aurelius Ambrosius' (Archbishop of Milan, c.340-397) discussion of Jesus's disciple Peter's tears as a substitutionary confession in his *Expositio evangelii secundam Lucam*:

It should be known that sometimes by wholesome dispensation confession can be avoided, as we believe was true of Peter, whose tears over his denial we know, although we do not read of other satisfaction or of confession. When Ambrose . . . says of this very denial by Peter and of his weeping: 'I do not find what he said; I find that he wept. I read of his tears; I do not read of his satisfaction. Tears wipe away a wrong when it is disgraceful to confess with one's voice and weeping guarantees pardon and shame.'⁷³

⁷² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Reading Silvan Tompkins" in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tompkins Reader*, eds. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adame Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 22-3.

⁷³ Willemein Otten, "In Conscience's Court: Abelard's Ethics as a Science of the Self" in *Virtue and Ethics in the Twelfth Century*, eds. István P. Bejczy and Richard G. Newhauser (Boston: Brill, 2005), 53-74. 64. The "Peter" to which Peter Abelard refers is Jesus's disciple Peter who denies Christ three times "before the cock crows" in Luke 22:61-62: And the Lord turning looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord as he said: 'Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.' And Peter going out, wept bitterly."

Yvain's tears could have been the catalyst for restoration between himself, his wife, and chivalry. Rather than humble himself in public confession like Calogrenant or confess through his tears, Yvain chooses to evade shame and in doing so take on the physical burden of chivalry.

Benedictine and Bishop Peter Cellensis of Troyes (1115-1183) describes the traditional ecclesiastical antidote for shame his *Disciplina Claustrali*. For Bishop Peter, the impact of shame is intensely physical: "Shame amputates the intestines and genitals of confession."⁷⁴ Shame disturbs both the internal work of confession that feeds the soul and the generative work of confession that fuels the relationship between the penitent and the confessor.⁷⁵ The cure for an inclination to evade or deflect shame, according to Bishop Peter, is "Do not be ashamed to open up your shame. To whom? To the ridicule of someone who defames you in the streets? No, but to a doctor, a guardian, a consoler, a person who will keep it quiet and lament with you."⁷⁶ Bishop Peter underscores Tertullian's assurances that the audience chosen for confession ensures reintegration to one's community and a restoration of reputation.⁷⁷ Ironically, Yvain has already witnessed the impact a public confession of shame, humiliating as it was, had on a fellow knight. Calogrenant humiliates himself by confessing his shame to his fellow knights and in doing so is

⁷⁴ Peter of Celle, "On Conscience" in *Peter of Celle: Selected Works*, trans. Hugh Feiss (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1987), 178: "*Pudor namque amputate intestina et uerenda confessionis.*"

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 59. Foucault discusses the role confession plays in Westernized culture: "The confession became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society" (59). While Foucault focuses on sex as a "privileged theme of confession" the point he makes applies to the need for knights to confess their chivalric failings. Foucault finds that the more important the failing the more ritualized the confession (61). The relationship between penitent and confessor becomes ritualized and prescriptive "for one does not confess without the presence . . . of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile . . ." (62).

⁷⁶ Peter of Celle, 178. "*Non te pudeat pudorem aperire. Cui? Illusori per plateas te diffamanti? Non, sed medico, sed curator, sed condolenti, sed tacenti et tecum ingemiscenti. Ecce de pudore.*"

⁷⁷ Tertullian in Roitto, 435. "The body cannot rejoice at the suffering of a single of its members; the whole body must needs suffer along with it and help in its cure."

restored to the chivalric brotherhood of the Round Table. Michel Foucault considers this the product of confession functioning as a “ritual of discourse” wherein “the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone . . . produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him”⁷⁸ Yvain, however, chooses to evade his shame and as a result shoulders the physical burden of chivalry. He descends into madness, then attempts anonymous penitentiary violence in order to restore his chivalric identity and honor without ever having to address his wife Laudine directly.⁷⁹

Lunete’s accusations of dishonorable behavior elicit a physical response from Yvain that he cannot suppress. The narrator says he is “senseless and deprived of speech;” “oppressed;” and “tormented” (35). As he walks away from Gawain and the other knights, he experiences a mental break described by the narrator as a “storm” that “broke loose in his brain” (36).⁸⁰ Now the storm rages within him destroying both his chivalric identity and his physical identity.⁸¹ Yvain “tears his flesh” strips off his clothes and lives in the woods “like a madman or a savage” hunting and eating his kills raw, like an animal (36). He suffers memory loss and a complete loss of any

⁷⁸ Foucault, 61-2.

⁷⁹ Duggan, 118. Duggan posits Yvain’s choice to evade public confession of his shame by physically burdening himself is lauded as a positive reaction to his public shaming by Lunete: “Yvain’s shame is consequent upon an act of omission, his forgetting to return to Laudine by the time he promised . . . That shame cannot be avenged, so Yvain undergoes a series of adventures in each of which a threatened shame is overcome, resulting in honor and the reestablishment of a good reputation . . .”(118).

⁸⁰ Much like the storm that physically ripped through the landscape of Brocéliande when Yvain callously poured water onto the stone in the secret spring in order to restore Calogrenant’s chivalric identity.

⁸¹ A. H. Diverres, “Chivalry and Fin’ Amor in Le Chevalier au Lion” in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. W. Rothwell, W.R. J. Barron, David Blamires, Lewis Thorpe (New York: Manchester University Press, 1973), 91-116. A.H. Diverres would disagree with this essay’s assertion that Yvain’s madness is a direct response to his shameful chivalric failure and an attempt to avoid confronting this shame (as chivalry demands). He states in his essay “We can pass quickly over Yvain’s madness, since it has no direct bearing on Chrétien’s treatment of chivalry” (100). Diverres’s analysis of *Yvain the Knight with the Lion* is that it is an adventure recounted to show how Yvain achieves the status of “perfect knight” and that his madness should be relegated to the margins.

physical markers that identify him as either noble or chivalric.⁸² He evades his shame through madness, but in doing so he must also reduce himself to an animal state.⁸³

Eventually three women discover him naked, sleeping in the forest.⁸⁴ One of the women recognizes him due to a scar on his face and through the *deus ex machina* application of an ointment that cures “delirium of the head,” Yvain finds himself returning to sanity, naked, and alone in a strange forest (37). Like post-lapsarian Adam and Eve, Yvain’s first response is shame over his nakedness. However, unlike the biblical forbears, his shame moves beyond simple awareness of nudity— Yvain immediately reverts back to concerns of his adherence to chivalry’s mandates. He equates the horror of being recognized while naked in the woods with death and the complete undoing of his chivalric reputation. When the fault was moral (breaking his oath) Yvain swiftly goes mad thus losing chivalric identity while also creating for himself an erstwhile buffer of deniability based on his complete descent into insanity. However, now that the fault is physical (being caught and recognized naked in the forest— a sight most unbecoming to a knight of his stature) Yvain’s response is coldly calculated: he must restore his reputation or suffer the

⁸² Duggan, 118. Duggan asserts that while all of Chrétien’s romances are tales of shame and honor Yvain’s tale stands out because “the most intense shame is inflicted by the hero on himself after he is publicly accused.”

⁸³ For more on the madness of Yvain and the underlying theme of madness/folly present in *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* see: Marc M. Pelen, “Madness in Yvain Reconsidered,” *Comparative Literature and English*, The American University of Paris. *Neophilologus* 87: 361-369, 2003. Last accessed 31 January 2020. See also: William Farina, “The Fragile and Hard-Won Sanity of Yvain,” in *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance*, (North Carolina: McFarland and Company Incorporated, 2010), 134-142.

⁸⁴ *Douay-Rheims*. Yvain is in good company where nakedness and shame are concerned. Genesis 3:7-10 reveals the first instance of shame which happens to be associated with nakedness: “And the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons. And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God amidst the trees of paradise. And the Lord God called Adam, and said to him: Where art thou? And he said: I heard thy voice in paradise; and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” See also: Isaias 47:2-3 (prophesy of the destruction of Babylon): “Take a millstone and grind meal: uncover thy shame, strip thy shoulder, make bare thy legs, pass over the rivers. Thy nakedness shall be discovered, and thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and no man shall resist me.”

complete death of his chivalric identity (38).⁸⁵ Derrida examines the relationship between nakedness, shame, and an animal state in his essay “The Animal that Therefore I Am.” In his essay he explains that the concept of nakedness is foreign to an animal and therefore they exist in their naked state “without the slightest consciousness of being so.” The animal feels no shame.⁸⁶ It is only the human animal who feels shame at nakedness observed, even nakedness observed by another animal. It is the “view to seeing” what we might call “looking”; “staring”; “observing” where “something happens . . . that shouldn’t take place—like everything that happens in the end, a lapsus, a fall, a failing, a fault . . .”⁸⁷ Yvain is, in effect, shameless while in an animal state. Only when he returns to consciousness does he experience what Derrida describes as the affect of self-knowledge⁸⁸: “knowing himself would mean knowing himself to be ashamed.”⁸⁹ Yvain’s attempts to evade shame become his physical burden of chivalry.

Yvain’s evasions strip him of his armor, clothing, and chivalric identity while Erec’s deflections clothe him in chivalric signifiers. In the hopes of conflating the trappings of knighthood with actual chivalry, Erec dons his entire suit of armor attempting to deflect the shame he feels after learning that his men consider him to be a *recreant*.⁹⁰ Additionally, Erec abruptly terminates all communication with Enide, allows her to believe he plans to banish her, and publicly blames Enide for “keeping me waiting here too long” indicating to all within

⁸⁵ “[H]e is ashamed and concerned, because of his nakedness, and says that he is dead and utterly undone if anyone has come upon him there and recognized him.”

⁸⁶ Derrida, 384, 385. “Because it is naked, without existing in nakedness, the animal neither feels nor sees itself naked. And therefore, it isn’t naked” (385).

⁸⁷ Derrida, 384.

⁸⁸ Grammar rules mandate that this should be “effect” rather than “affect,” however Derrida uses the term “affect” to mean “the (conscious or unconscious) experience of existing in nakedness.”

⁸⁹ Derrida, 384.

⁹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary. OED Online*. Last accessed 26 February 2020. “Designating a person who admits to having been defeated or overcome; that yields or surrenders; defeated; cowardly, faint-hearted, craven, afraid.”

earshot that it is Enide's fault not his own *recreance* keeping him from his chivalric endeavors (37). Erec adds to his physical burden by refusing to address the rumors started by his knights, refusing his wife's counsel: instructing her "never to speak to me unless I address you first", and rejecting his father's offers of assistance (38). Symbolically, Erec does what Erikson describes in *Childhood and Society*, he tries to "force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world."⁹¹ He intentionally cuts himself off from his wife, his men, and his family in order to prove his honorable chivalric identity.

Alone and vulnerable Erec and Enide are set upon through every stage of their journey. Erec courts danger at every turn. The wounds and the bodies stack up as Erec's reckless disregard for his and Enide's safety increases.⁹² Even with his wounds poorly bandaged and in "dire need" of healing, Erec continues he and Enide's frantic push through the woods and wastelands in his attempt deflect shame and reclaim his chivalric identity (53). When Erec encounters Kay, his Round Table brother does not recognize him. Still, Kay makes an overture of peace crediting Erec's wounds as proof that he is a knight (54-55).⁹³ In his desire to deflect his shame, however, Erec cannot accept Kay's offer of rest (54-5).⁹⁴ Instead, he chooses to needle

⁹¹ Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986), 252-53.

⁹² Priest, 131. Priest's chapter "considers the resonances between the injured chivalric body in Erec and Enide and the iconography of the wounded Christ." Priest also credits *Erec and Enide* as the benchmark for all subsequent romances containing violence and conflates the terms "chivalry" and "masculinity": "It presents brutality and physicality as a given aspect of chivalric (masculine) identity, but one which must be controlled and legitimized through a series of both formal and informal codes of conduct." For more on wounds and healing in the Middle Ages see: Piers D. Mitchell, *Medicine in the Crusades: Warfare, Wounds, and the Medieval Surgeon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Or Wendy J. Turner and Sara M. Butler eds., *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Or, Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr, eds., *Wounds in the Middle Ages* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

⁹³ Kay to Erec: "Knight . . . I wish to know who you are and whence you come." Erec: "You must be mad to stop me thus." Kay: "Be not angry; I only ask for your good. I can see and make out clearly that you are wounded and hurt. If you will come along with me you shall have good lodging this night; I shall see that you are well cared for, honored and made comfortable . . ." Erec: "I will not go thither for anything."

⁹⁴ "If you will come along with me you shall have a good lodging this night; I shall see that you are well cared for, honoured and made comfortable: for you are in need of rest."

Kay until the brash knight acquiesces to a fight. The paradoxical relationships between chivalry and wounds exacerbates Erec's reaction to shame. The same wounds that signify his chivalric identity and masculinity also reveal his vulnerability and corporeal fragility. Erec deflects his shame through the accumulation of wounds, but the physical signs of his chivalric mastery also point to the very likely potential of his failure to survive.

The physical burden of chivalry, created by its encoded comparative culture; sustained by the parasitic public gaze leveled at knights attempting to uphold the code; maintained by tactics of evasion and deflection compels shamed knights to seek out violence at the expense of their lives. After regaining his sanity, Yvain, like Erec, obsessively courts violence to prove his eligibility within the chivalric ranks. Yvain's shame centers around his failure to uphold his vow to his wife, yet rather than return to her and seek reconciliation he chooses physical struggle in order to mark himself as chivalric to all those with whom he comes in contact. Other knights and townspeople witness Yvain's skill and bloodthirsty vigor with which he demolishes his foe. Although anonymous to those who gaze upon him, Yvain's chivalric reputation grows; he evades the shame of his unchivalrous behavior by creating an entirely new chivalric reputation. Those watching the melees unfold compare this anonymous knight to the *chanson de geste* hero of knighthood, Roland— demonstrating chivalry's insidious insistence upon comparison to both laud and vilify (40).

Yvain's violent quest eventually leads him back to the secret spring of Brocéliande. The nearness of his wife, and ostensibly his shame, causes Yvain to swoon and stab himself in the neck with his own sword. His involuntary wounding prompts ruminations on "the year during which he had overstayed his leave, and for which he had incurred his lady's hate." Rather than acknowledge that he further extended his absence through madness, questing, and reputation

gaining rather than restorative confession, Yvain contemplates suicide, the most physically evasive response to shame possible: “Alas! Why does this wretch not kill himself who has thus deprived himself of joy? Alas! Why do I not take my life? (43).” He finds “it is fitting to hate and blame and despise myself” (44). Alexander Murray in his examination of suicide in the Middle Ages describes the mindset of the majority of suicide cases he analyses: “[F]rom a physical point of view the worst that can happen to anyone is to die. Other misfortunes take away part; death takes all. A wish to die [results]from the strongest negative impulses from life: loss, incapability, failure, and pain.”⁹⁵ The physical burden of chivalry created by shameful loss, incapability, failure, and pain isolates Yvain, causing him to sink solemnly into suicidal ideation. In the nick of time Yvain hears the voice of a woman trapped inside the chapel near the secret spring. The voice comes from Lunete the same damsel who introduced Yvain to his wife and who publicly shames him in front of Arthur and Gawain. Accused of deceit for introducing Laudine to Yvain in the first place, Lunete is locked away outside of the city until a worthy knight can be found who will prove her innocence.

The rules of chivalry allow a trial by combat, and the three-to-one odds specified by Lunete are just the kind of self-destructive means Yvain needs to commit suicide by combat. Yvain swears to fight for the damsel as long as she keeps his name secret. Critics traditionally see Yvain’s insistence on anonymity as a demonstration of his commitment to chivalric restoration.⁹⁶ However, Yvain does not fully reject his name (he reveals it at a key moment in the

⁹⁵ Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: The Violent Against Themselves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

⁹⁶ For differing critical opinions see: Dennis Howard Green, *The Art of Recognition in Parzival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 300. “In Yvain the hero deliberately abandons the use of his name during the period of his guilt and penance.” M.T. Anderson. *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* (Massachusetts, Candlewick Press, 2017): “Yvain moves from being a self-involved seeker after his own fame and glory to being an anonymous knight who fights for the good of others” (Backmatter). Eugène Vance. *Merveulous Signals: Poetics and*

romance) he suppresses it and with this suppression he continues to evade the shame associated with it. At this point in the romance, he wants the physical burden of chivalry to crush and erase him from the public narrative and the public eye. If he dies nameless, the shame associated with the knight Yvain disappears forever. Anne McTaggart describes the relationship between the name and shame: “the pollution of one’s name or public self in shame is not only a fate worse than death, it also creates an imperative of purgation or purification through death.”⁹⁷ Benjamin Kilborne contextualizes the alternative to purgation or purification through death: anonymity—erasing the name associated with shame: “All forms of ‘not seeing’ hide the pain and conflict inherent in the self-consciousness of being ashamed . . .”⁹⁸ The circumlocution “*Chevalier au Lion*”, far from a demonstration of his return to chivalry, reveals Yvain’s choice to evade shame by succumbing to the physical burden of chivalry either through purgation, purification, or erasure.

Death, erasure, and anonymity appeal to Erec as well. While never blatantly mentioning suicide, Erec punishes his body, accruing wounds like chivalric badges of honor. When Erec and Enide are finally discovered by Gawain, Enide admits to Gawain that Erec “has hardly a limb without a wound” (57). Even those conditioned to equate corporeal harm with chivalric success are shocked at Erec’s state. Gawain holds back his emotional response: “I could have wept myself when I saw him so pale and wan” (57). Arthur and Guinevere’s hearts sink: “their joy turned to sadness” and Guinevere insists on binding Erec’s wounds with a magic plaster (57).

Sign Theory in the Middle Ages (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 137: “[T]he anonymous fame that Yvain earns for this emblem as a kind of credit that he accrues by his service until such time as he may rightly be absolved of his disservice to Laudine.”

⁹⁷ McTaggart, 29.

⁹⁸ Benjamin Kilborne, *Disappearing Persons: Shame and Appearance* (New York: The State University of New York Press, 2002), 70.

Arthur suggests they stay in the forest and let Erec heal for a fortnight, but Erec leaves at dawn. His relentless pursuit of deflection outweighing his body's need for restorative healing.

Erec's magic bandages are scarcely twenty-four hours old when he battles two giants in the woods in order to rescue another knight. Although Erec wins the battle it wreaks havoc on his body. By the time he gets back to where Enide waits for him the narrator describes his physical pain as mortal: "[H]is wounds broke open and burst the bandages . . . his body was bathed in blood, and his heart hardly had strength to beat . . . As he tried to straighten up, he lost his saddle and stirrups, falling, as if lifeless, in a faint" (62). With her husband's body prone on the ground Enide launches into a soliloquy blaming herself for his broken and sorry state. She goes through almost all the major tenets of chivalry, lauding his "beauty;" "prowess;" "wisdom;" "largesse" (63). Of note, however, is her omission of the physical requirements of chivalry. She does not praise him for his skill in battle, his strength, or his tournament scores. Rather, she chastises herself for ever bringing up the rumor about their shameful *recreant* relationship and his fall from masculine chivalric knighthood. When Enide says "A grievous mistake I made in uttering the word which has killed my lord—that fatal poisoned word . . . I alone must be blamed for this" she is sincere (63). She believes that she causes her husband's death. However, it is clear that Erec's need to deflect an accusation of shame pushes his body to its breaking point.

A passing Count places Erec's body on a litter and prepares his body for a funeral. He also forces Enide into marriage through abuse. The Count's physical abuse of Enide resurrects Erec whose first response is to repay violence with violence, beating the Count to death (63, 66). The resurrected Erec rekindles the affectionate relationship he once held with Enide, offering the roundly inadequate explanation of his unchivalrous treatment rather than a confession of his shameful response to her concern: "My proof of you has been complete . . . and I am certain and

rest assured that you love me with a perfect love (67). After weeks of the silent treatment, dogged trekking over hill and dale, and increasingly harrowing experiences with violence and death, Erec justifies his treatment of Enide by claiming that he was testing her intentions. The rumor she revealed to him out of love and concern so shamed and disturbed Erec's understanding of his identity that in that moment he decides his wife only loves him because of his chivalric prowess. As all of the dead Count's knights scramble about insisting a corpse slew their lord, Erec and Enide ride out into the moonlight (67).⁹⁹ Erec also finally allows himself to be cared for in a neighboring castle. His wounds are debrided, cleaned, and dressed, and finally he rests enough to let his injuries begin to heal.

Their trip home comprises more adventures, but, Erec suffers fewer injuries. When he inflicts injury on others, they all but thank him, gushing "[Y]ou have beaten me . . . And yet you may be of such degree and fame that only credit will redound to me . . ." (81). Where every battle Erec undertook prior to his death ends in bloodshed and physical suffering, any altercation he encounters after his resurrection ends in dialogue, knowledge sharing, reunions, and affections (86). The romance of *Erec and Enide* ends with Erec and Enide sharing the stage with King Arthur and Guinevere, as Arthur crowns him King of the Farther Welsh kingdoms. The narrator describes the coronation in glowing terms: "King Arthur . . . brought forth from his treasure two massive crowns of gold . . . all sparkling with carbuncles . . . Because of the radiance which they shed, all those who were in the palace were so dazzled that for a moment they could see nothing" (92). For the first time, Erec, along with his wife Enide, are hidden from the all-seeing, all-judging gaze. Erec's shame originates with the gaze of the people at his

⁹⁹ "Rapidly through the night they ride, and they are very glad that the moon shines bright."

wedding tournament in Cardigan and in his knights' gaze during their stay in Farther Wales. Here, at his public coronation, where he becomes a king in his own right, those who would shame him are blinded by the signifier of his new royal identity: the crown. When Erec learns of his knight's accusations it brings about a shame so deep that he wishes to blind everyone to it. His initial instinct is to deflect the gaze of shame by disappearing. After deflection creates a physical burden of chivalry so heavy that it leads to his death, he stands resurrected and allows his royalty to blind the eyes of those who may cast judgment upon him rendering him invisible. Erec chooses to address accusations of shame only with Enide, not with his men. Therefore, rather than a full restoration of his chivalric identity, he settles on temporary invisibility provided by more deflection: the distraction caused by his lavish coronation and his new title of King.

Erec the knight dies in an effort to deflect the stigma of shame, resurrecting as something new: a king. And while a king still encounters the gaze of his subjects and experiences the comparative nature of chivalry, he also stands outside of and above many of chivalry's encoded pitfalls. He no longer answers to his comrades, he commands them. Yvain also creates a new identity: *Chevalier au Lion* but like Erec his new identity does not alleviate the physical burden of chivalry. Yvain's refusal to confess his failings necessitates the prolonged violence and punishment of his body. The *Chevalier au Lion* chivalrously champions the cause of women in distress in a lame attempt to make up for leaving Laudine alone to fend for herself in Brocéliande. Prior to the scheduled battle for Lunete's honour, Yvain finds the time to also fight a giant. Not only does Yvain take on the physical burden of restoring Lunete's reputation and physical freedom, he also shoulders the burden of saving Gawain's nieces who have been captured and tortured by Harpin the giant (50). Yvain undertakes every physical risk he can find in order to restore his chivalric identity or die. In doing so Yvain hopes to exorcize the shame his

unchecked tourneying brought his way or be killed (50).¹⁰⁰ Harpin, his shoulder rent from his body and his liver impaled, dies at the hands of Yvain and his lion. No time to rest or reflect, Yvain rushes off to save Lunete from burning at the stake. He challenges Lunete's accusers and the oldest one, the seneschal, remarks on Yvain's willingness to take on such a burden for the young woman: "He is indeed mad who for thy words assumes so great a task" (53). The physical burden undertaken by Yvain, in the opinion of the seneschal, is far too great. He decides that Yvain must be mad or suicidal, declaring "the knight must be simple-minded who has come here to die for thee . . ." (53). The seneschal's assertions are not far from the truth.

Yvain battles the seneschal and his two sons, sustaining multiple injuries. By all appearances Yvain will be killed until, against the pre-determined rules of the trial-by-combat, his lion pounces into the chaos. The two narrowly defeat the seneschal and his two sons but not without sustaining "many a wound" (55). Like Erec, Yvain's compulsion is to publicly punish his body and accept as little assistance or comfort as possible. After his victory resulting in Lunete's acquittal the onlookers celebrate and fawn over him. With his chivalric reputation at its zenith, it seems all that remains is for Yvain to publicly confess his shame to his wife and wait for her response. Rather than use this opportunity to reveal his identity and perform restorative confession, Yvain continues to evade through further *aventure* and absence from his wife.¹⁰¹ He adventures, rescues, battles and outsmarts every foe he meets along his way, all the while absorbing insults, threats, and wounds as burdensome penance for all of his chivalric lapses.

¹⁰⁰ "One or the other must be cast down, either I or he, I know not which."

¹⁰¹ E.H. Ruck. *An Index of Themes and Motifs in Twelfth-Century French Romance* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1991), 166.: "The role of adventure in the romance is to prove and preserve the courtly virtues—refinement of the rules of combat, courteous social intercourse, the service of women; trial through adventure is the real meaning of the knight's ideal existence . . ." Or, Michael Nerlich. *Ideology of Adventure: Studies in Modern Consciousness, 1100-1750*. Volume One, trans. Ruth Crowley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 51. "What was really sought after [rather than *aventure*] was the opposite, a secure society, peace, and order . . ."

In the penultimate contest of the romance, Yvain, still known only as the *Chevalier au Lion*, fights against a disguised Gawain—each man championing rival sisters of Noire Espine. The narrator describes a death-match between two equals. The men brutally hammer away at one another until it seems each will kill the other. Still the physical burden of chivalry drives Yvain to obsessively press on even as the tides turn and the crowd wishes to sort the rift with diplomacy (73).¹⁰² With the night drawing in and imminent death for both men on the horizon, Yvain speaks first to Gawain telling him perhaps they should allow the night to “come between us” (73). Gawain comments on how well matched they are and in the process the two come to realize the true identity of the other. An appearance by the lion reveals that the *Chevalier au Lion* and Yvain are one and the same. Rather than revel in a reunion, Yvain finally turns his face toward home. Once again there is a critical penchant to read Yvain’s return to Laudine as proof that he finally feels a sense of redemption; a lifting via combat for other women, of the physical burden brought about by his shameful neglect of his wife. A.H. Diverres claims “It is only when he has won justice for the cause of the disinherited sister that he is satisfied” enough to return to Laudine.¹⁰³ However a closer look at the events leading up to Yvain’s return to the secret spring problematize this tidy dénouement: Gawain champions the older sister of Noire Espire. This sister connives to cheat her sibling out of her birthright. Gawain falls on the wrong side of honor defending a swindler, risking both his “sun of chivalry” reputation and the weight this reputation provides. Yvain represents the wronged sister, effectively falling on the “right” side of chivalry. Arthur’s mediation halts the bloodshed, but symbolically this battle to the [near]death between

¹⁰² The narrator describes the two knight’s adherence to their chivalric duty as “purchasing honor with agony.”

¹⁰³ A.H. Diverres, “Chivalry and Fin’Amor in Le Chevalier au Lion,” in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages in Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. W. Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 111.

the two comrades quites Gawain's accusations earlier in the romance. Gawain accuses Yvain of acting contrary to the chivalric code by shamefully wishing to stay with Laudine, but here Gawain acts contrary to the chivalric code by shamefully defending a liar and a cheat. The even match between the two knights proves their chivalric prowess to each other restoring the chivalric reputation between the estranged friends.¹⁰⁴ The Battle of Noire Espine is not the moment of redemption for Yvain's true shame: the breaking of his vow to Laudine. If it were then the physical burden of chivalry would function as an erstwhile barter or penitential trade system wherein the shamed knight must simply accrue a prescribed amount of violence, hardship, physical damage and alternative championing to be restored into chivalry's fold. Physical burden does not produce redemption, restoration, or reintegration— Yvain must publicly confess his shameful vow-breaking to Laudine in order to experience the redemption critics so desperately want for him. He cannot fight his way out of his shame.

Yvain's behavior after returning to Brocéliande exhibits more of his insistent evasion. He does not go directly to Laudine; he returns to Brocéliande's secret spring and deliberately causes a murderously severe storm. The narrator describes the environmental chaos:

Think not that this is a lie of mine, when I tell you that the disturbance was so violent that no one could tell the tenth part of it: for it seemed as if the whole forest must surely be engulfed. The lady fears for her town, lest it too, will crumble away; the walls totter, and the tower rocks so that it is on the verge of falling down. The bravest Turk would rather be captive in Persia than be shut up within these walls (77).

¹⁰⁴ For more on Gawain's downward spiral after he accuses Yvain of unchivalrous behavior because of his devotion to Laudine see Edward Joe Johnson, *Once There Were Two True Friends, or Idealized Male Friendship in French Narrative from the Middle Ages Through the Enlightenment* (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 2003) 40-41: "Caught up in the rescue of Guinevere, Gauvain is never present when needed. Readers of Chrétien's *Le Chevalier a la charette* are aware of Gauvain's ineptness in the rescue of Guinevere and his virtual abandonment of Lancelot, his great friend . . . Gauvain fails to protect his sister and her children from Harpin. His pledge to assist Lunete in her time of need is for naught because again he is absent. When he indiscriminately takes one side in a dispute over inheritance, he nearly kills his great friend Yvain . . ."

Lunete convinces Laudine that the lauded *Chevalier au Lion* is the only knight who can defend her spring against attacks. When Laudine acquiesces to the employment of the knight errant, Lunete forces Laudine to swear an oath: “[Y]ou shall swear that you will exert yourself in the interests of the Knight with the Lion until he recover his lady’s love as completely as he ever possessed it” (78). Laudine, as of yet unaware of the *Chevalier au Lion*’s true identity, swears “[S]o held me God and His holy saint, that my heart may never fail to do all within my power. If I have the strength and ability, I will restore to him the love and favour which with his lady he once enjoyed” (78). Lunete tracks Yvain down and after exchanging expositions of gratitude to one another Yvain double checks that his wife Laudine still has no inkling of his true identity. He would rather create further physical burden by destroying Laudine’s land, harming her subjects, and environmentally assaulting his wife rather than confess his shame. In this moment Chrétien’s romance comes full circle as Yvain’s unwillingness to debase himself in front of his lady starkly juxtaposes against Calogrenant’s willingness to confess his failures in front of Guinevere. Calogrenant humiliates himself in front of peers, mentors, and Guinevere ridding himself of the shame associated with his loss to Laudine’s former husband and jettisoning the need to undertake the physical burden of chivalry as a consequence of shame. Yvain stubbornly continues to avoid and evade confronting his wrongdoing— this time through blackmail and trickery. He sets the destruction of Laudine’s property in motion and then presents a falsified version of himself as the solution.

When Lunete and Yvain arrive at Laudine’s court, Yvain supplicates himself at Laudine’s feet. As the *Chevalier au Lion*, he adopts a posture of humiliation, remaining mute while Lunete reveals his true identity and pleads his case. The erroneous assumption made by both Lunete and Yvain is that Yvain’s exploits as the *Chevalier au Lion* act in proxy to

confession. Laudine, however, sees through the flimsy attempt at substitutionary confession calling the storm and ensuing rescue “a trap” (79). She castigates Lunete and Yvain: “You will make me love, in spite of myself, a man who neither loves nor esteems me . . . I would rather endure the winds and tempests all my life” (79). Only her own sense of honor allows her to reconcile with Yvain, and she archly points out: “this . . . fine piece of work [their reunion] . . . if it were not a mean and ugly thing to break one’s word, he would never make his peace or be reconciled with me . . . I must be reconciled with him” (79). At this point Yvain finally speaks, but only after he “hears and understands that his cause is going well.” His speech comes not to confess his shameful treatment of his wife or ask for her forgiveness—it is to ask to be excused and to make excuses. He instructs Laudine as to what she “ought” to do: have mercy on him—although for all accounts and purposes it seems she is doing just that. He suggests she excuse his initial absence, forgetfulness, further extended absence via questing, and his decimation of her lands due to his “madness.” Yvain’s final proposal deals with restitution for his unchivalrous behavior: She should accept his unnecessary absence due to questing and violent reputation building as both a proxy confession of shame and the payment of the debt his madness left with her. If she accepts his terms, he will never do her wrong again (79).¹⁰⁵ Fine words coming from the man who only hours before destroyed her town, castle, and surrounding forests to blackmail her into needing him. Yvain does admit “guilt” and “sin”, but his admission lacks the specificity, self-knowledge, or humility required to be considered a true penitential confession.¹⁰⁶ If

¹⁰⁵ “Lady, one ought to have mercy on a sinner. I have had to pay, and dearly to pay for my mad act. It was madness that made me stay away, and now I admit my guilt and sin. I have been bold, indeed, in daring to present myself to you; but if you will deign to keep me now, I never again shall do you any wrong.”

¹⁰⁶ Second Lateran Council (3 April 1139) in Peter Godman, *Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages: Abelard, Heloise and the Archpoet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) deals specifically with “True and false penance” and deems incomplete confession one of the major issues with which it will tangle. They examine the problem of motivation: “Faith is not assumed on the basis of obedience to punitive guidelines of

Calogrenant's sincere confession of shame brought about by impetuosity, defeat, cowardice, and confusion at the beginning of the romance models the desired form of chivalric confession, Yvain's paltry and generic "I admit my guilt and sin" tempered by the revisionist history apologetics blaming "madness," fails miserably.¹⁰⁷ Without an unconditional confession necessary to alleviate shame Yvain must continually carry the physical burden the truth of his relationship creates: His wife honors her word even if he cannot honor his. She agrees to let him stay, but not out of love, forgiveness, or a desire to restore Yvain's chivalric reputation completely; she lets him stay out of her unwillingness to dishonor herself: "If I did not do all I could to establish peace between you and me, I should be guilty of perjury" (79). The narrator inserts his opinion that Yvain and Laudine live in harmony with mutual adoration of one another, but Laudine's response to Yvain's machinations leaves ample room for doubt. Yvain and Laudine possess a fragile detent (79-80).¹⁰⁸ She will keep her vow to take him back, even though her actual promise was to take in the anonymous *Chevalier au Lion*, and Yvain will keep an "enduring peace" as the protector of Brocéliande and remain "polite" (80).¹⁰⁹ *Yvain the Knight of the Lion* ends with disharmony caused by shame evaded and never confessed. Restored only to the brotherhood of chivalry—first through tourneying and then through his reunion with Gawain

conduct. Sincerity is sought . . . Conviction alone ensures that the [confession] is valid. In its absence, penance is emptied of content and reduced to mere ritual which [is dismissed] as 'useless or sterile'" (46).

¹⁰⁷ Helen Block Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 30. According to Lewis's highly influential study, "The experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the thing done or undone is the focus. In guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but it is not itself the focus of the experience."

¹⁰⁸ Yvain: "[I]f you will deign to keep me now, I never again shall do you any wrong." She replied: "I will surely consent to that, for if I did not do all I could to establish peace between you and me, I should be guilty of perjury. So, if you please, I grant your request."

¹⁰⁹ "And Lunete [the maid], for her part, is happy too: all her desires are satisfied when once she had made an enduring peace between my polite lord Yvain and his sweetheart . . ." While this passage refers to "enduring peace" and politeness in reference to machinations executed by Lunete it mirrors the discussion between Yvain and his wife as well his demeanor towards her while they are in negotiations.

at the battle over the sisters of Noire Espine— Yvain remains physically burdened by his chivalric failings to his wife and his subjects.

Shame has been hailed as a “master emotion” and as “the invisible regulator” of lives.¹¹⁰ Shame experienced externally is often felt and amplified internally as the individual magnifies and distorts their self-image in their quest to see themselves through other’s eyes. An individual responds to shame often by seeking escape from the intrusive gaze which accompanies judgment leveled at them. In Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec and Enide* and *Yvain the Knight of the Lion*, both Erec and Yvain seek escape from their shame. Accused of *recreance* and *uxoriousness*, both men experience the identity annihilating shame brought about by the flagging opinion of their peers. Erec chooses to deflect the shame and in his efforts renders himself figuratively invisible (by disappearing from the gaze of his men) as well as literally invisible (by dying). His final deflection uses his new identity as king to blind the eyes of his accusers. Rather than deflection, Yvain chooses to evade the shame brought about by his lack of chivalry to his wife through madness, calculated anonymity, misplaced confession, blackmail, and trickery. Deflection and evasion of shame bring about the physical burden of chivalry borne by knights seeking chivalric restoration. In the comparative culture of chivalry knights like Erec and Yvain face an almost certain outcome of failure in one or more of chivalry’s multivalent and often oppositional ideals yet each stubbornly refuses the one option designed to alleviate the physical burden of chivalry shame creates: confession. The codification of physical violence and a belief these encounters act

¹¹⁰ Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger, *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), Xix. “We consider it [shame] to be the master emotion.” Also, Mary Y. Ayers. *Mother-Infant Attachment and Psychoanalysis: The Eyes of Shame* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), 2. “[S]uffice it to say that shame’s paramount significance and prominence in the world of affective experience has been firmly established. It is being hailed as the master emotion, the invisible regulator of our entire affective life.”

as a proxy to confession deter Erec and Yvain from ever fully alleviating their physical burden of chivalry.

CHAPTER III: “A BURDEN TO KEEP, THROUGH THEIR INNER COMMUNION, ACCEPT LIKE A CURSE AN UNLUCKY DEAL”: CHIVALRY’S RELIGIOUS BURDEN¹¹¹

In the *Ordene de Chevalrie* (ca. 1220), one of the earliest texts codifying chivalric behavior, the anonymous author takes a firm stance against the self-preservation of the knight’s body, insisting that the knight willingly act “sacrificially,” spilling his own blood as a representation of and in homage to the spilling of Christ’s blood in atonement for the sins of humanity.¹¹² The titular name “Ordene” is linguistically tied to the “Ordinals” or “a book prescribing the rules to be observed, and containing the form of service to be used, in the ordination of deacons and priests, and the consecration of bishops.”¹¹³ One of the more didactic medieval chivalric manuals, the *Ordene de Chevalerie* focuses on the knight’s place in a Christian society. Physical and social issues related to knighthood are examined through a religious lens. Historian Keith Busby asserts that manuals such as the *Ordene* became necessary due to twelfth-century romance’s move away from knighthood’s religious aspects toward glorification of martial prowess and chivalry’s social value. Richard Kaeuper finds that “problems arose when religious ideals threatened to invert or negate chivalry as a fierce warrior

¹¹¹ Joy Division. “The Eternal,” Peter Hook, Stephen Morris, Bernard Sumner, Ian Curtis (Factory Records, 1980).

¹¹² Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 82. “God and his law does not mean acting defensively, however, but rather acting sacrificially and seeking revenge for the wrongs done to Christ. In exchange for the spilling of Christ’s blood, the knight must spill his own.” See also Keith Busby, “Introduction,” in *Le Roman des Eles and the Anonymous: Ordene de Chevalerie*, ed. and trans. Keith Busby (Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 1983), 88. In Busby’s examination of varying extant manuscripts of the *Ordene* he finds “[T]here is little doubt that the composition of *OC* represents a growing awareness of the historical and literary need to explain the duties and functions of the knight in Christian terms.” Direct quotes from *Le Ordene de Chevalerie* are from Roy Temple House, trans. *Le Ordene de Chevalerie: An Old French Poem- Text, with Introduction and Notes*, *University of Oklahoma Bulletin* New Series No. 162 1 February 1919 Extension Series 48. Internet Archive last accessed 15 September 2021.

¹¹³ *Oxford English Dictionary*. Last accessed 13 January 2020.

code” in both literature and society.¹¹⁴ Late medieval romances represent a move away from depictions of knighthood and chivalry as religiously centered. Yet religious centrism as it applies to chivalry seems to suggest that a knight be both “meek” and “mild” in order to emulate Christ and the New Testament teachings of his disciples and apostles. Declaring “*C’adiés doit chevaliers avoir /Droiture et loiauté ensamble*” or “Knights must have these aides/helps: Righteousness and lawfulness together,” the *Ordene* shifts its focus onto the primacy of the religious aspects of chivalry while at the same time acknowledging the martial necessitations of chivalric knighthood (210-11).¹¹⁵

After the disintegration of the Roman Empire around 500 CE, The Middle Ages ushers in an era of tumultuous upheaval as newly formed countries find themselves embroiled in efforts to solidify their position, reputation and also to flourish both politically and religiously.¹¹⁶ Chevaliers tasked with furthering the aspirations of their lord/king/country eventually find themselves subject to a code, or set of rules like the *Ordene de Chevalerie*, governing their actions, attitudes, and attributes. Biography, *chanson de geste*, as well as romance reveal how knights attempt to navigate the burdensome, disparate, and often contrary martial and religious expectations of the chivalric code. William Marshal’s biography (ca. 1225-1250), *Chanson de geste The Song of Roland* (ca. 1100), Galehaut’s experiences in *The Prose Vulgate* (ca. 1210-30), and Gawain’s concerns over a life dedicated to chivalric violence found in both the *Prose Vulgate* and the *Awndrys of Arthyr* (ca. late thirteenth century) offer early written depictions of knights, both historical and fictional, struggling to reconcile the multifaceted and multivalent

¹¹⁴ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 6.

¹¹⁵ Busby, 88.

¹¹⁶ See Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: The Song of Roland and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

religious requirements of the chivalric code. The conflict between biblical teachings regarding violence, changing papal *decretums*, chivalric expectations of martial prowess, and a knight's own precarious position as a conduit between all three results in the religious burden of chivalry. Marshal, Roland, Galehaut and Gawain represent the fragility experienced by knights bearing their religious burden of chivalry. The religious burden of chivalry creates a deep sense of uncertainty about the soul's state of salvation within these knights prompting them to bully, bargain, and try to buy their way into eternal salvation.

The knights of history and romance like Marshal, Roland, Galehaut, and Gawain exemplify keenly developed physical and martial skill. Their talent for warcraft and weapon wielding would have been finely honed through generations of disseminated knowledge. The addition of religious significance to the duties of the chevalier complicates their *modus operandi*—violence must now move from its practical and political applications into a specifically religious; specifically Christian space where bloodshed signifies ultimate sacrifice; salvation, and in the case of the Crusades an extension of the Great Commission.¹¹⁷ The *Ordene* synthesizes concepts related to knighthood developed over “long periods of time” according to historian Keith Busby, and takes the evolution of chivalry out of the practical and represents “a growing awareness of the historical and literary need to explain the duties and functions of the knight in

¹¹⁷ *Douay-Rheims*. Romans 12:1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service.” Habacuc (Habakkuk) 3:13: “Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people: for salvation with thy Christ. Thou struckest the head of the house of the wicked: thou hast laid bare his foundation even to the neck.” Regarding the Great Commission: Matthew 28:19, 20: “Goin therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit . . . and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.” For more on the Crusades as an extension of the Great Commission see David M. Lantigua, *Infidels and Empires in a New World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 130 “The theological and legal framework of Christian-infidel relations applied and expanded to a new world order followed from conviction in the Lord's Great Commission to spread the Gospel to all peoples.”

Christian terms.”¹¹⁸ The *Ordene* succeeds in repackaging chivalry into an intensely religious undertaking through the use of spiritual symbolism akin to Christ’s use of parable to educate his disciples. In the poem *Saladin*, the King of Egypt, captures Prince Hugh II of Tiberias in a Crusade skirmish. While in captivity Prince Hugh enumerates to his captor Saladin the steps necessary to become a knight. Each step is physical and also representative of the Christian significance of knighthood. For example, bathing symbolizes the washing away of sin; lying on a bed signifies the reward of heavenly rest given to the chivalrously successful knight; white robes represent a clean body and soul; a scarlet cloak models the knight wrapped and covered in the “blood of the Lamb” as well as the blood he must be willing to shed to defend the Church.¹¹⁹ The most literal aspect of the knighting ritual is the narrator’s explication of the double-edged sword’s significance: justice and loyalty are inseparable as is the knight’s duty to defend both the Church and the defenseless from oppression.¹²⁰ One cannot help but draw connections between the symbolic armoring of Saladin by Prince Hugh II of Tiberias and Paul’s admonition to the Ephesians to “Put on the whole armour of God” followed by a cataloguing of spiritual significance found in each piece of plated protection.¹²¹ With a compact structure designed to

¹¹⁸ Busby, 88.

¹¹⁹ Bathing: “*Quant de baptesme est aportés, /Sire, tout ensemment devés /Issir sans nule vilonnie /De cest baing, car chevalerie /Se doit baignier en honesté*” (119-23). Lying on a bed with white sheets: “*Après si l’a du baing osté /Si le coucha en un biel Ht /Ou il avoit molt de délit . . . Tout blanc, vous donnent a entendre /Que chevaUers doit adiés tendre /A se car netement tenir /S’il a Diu velt ia parvenir*” (128-30, 143-6). Scarlet cloak: “*Apriés li vest robe vermelle . . .Sire, ceste robe vous donne /A entendre, chou est la somme, /Que vostre sanc devés expandre /Por Dieu et por sa loi defiendre*” (147, 153-6).

¹²⁰ “*Sire, fait il, che est garant /Contre l’assaut del anemi, /Tout ensemment com veés chi /Deus trenchans ki nos font savoir /C’adiés doit chevaliers avoir /Droiture et loiauté ensamble*” (206-11).

¹²¹ *Douay-Rheims*. Ephesians 6:11-18. “Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore, take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God).”

ensure comprehension by its readers, the *Ordene* succeeds in conflating chivalry with a holy order akin to the priesthood, and outlines a chivalric code designed to uphold and enforce laws of goodness, baptism, and faith.¹²²

Modern medievalist historians suggest that the author of the *Ordene* was a cleric who took great pains to create a text that both justified and glorified the more violent portions of chivalric knighthood:

[K]nights . . . whom everybody should honour . . . have us all to guard . . . for they defend the Holy Church, and they uphold justice for us against those who would do us harm . . . the good would never be able to endure if the wicked did not fear knights, and if there were only Saracens, Albigensians, and barbarians, and people of evil faiths who would do us wrong.”¹²³

Knights defend the homeland against practical attacks like theft and heresy, but they also commit their bodies, fortune, and skill to the Crusades. The church and the nobility draw on the warrior force of knights to protect their lands while deploying the rhetoric of chivalry in order to infuse a knight’s martial chivalry with ecclesiastical adherence.¹²⁴ Church leaders like Pope Leo IX who commanded armies against villainous interlopers were chastised by some clerics for participating in violence and martial activities, while Leo IX himself claimed that knights “willing to suffer a

¹²² *L’Ordene de Chevalerie*, 83-86. “*Sainte ordre de chevalerie/ Seroit en vous emploie./ Quar vous estes vieus en la loi/ De bien, de baptesme, et de foi . . .*” See also Leon Gautie, *Le Chevalerie* (Brussels: Victor Palme, 1884), 291 for a description of the symbolism present in the *Ordene*: “*Mais voici l’Ordene de Chevalerie, voici ce petit poème, savant et dogmatique, attrayant et élevé, et où la fleur de symbolism s’épanouit en toute liberté. Fleur un peu artificielle, mais non sans charme.*” (Translation mine: But here is the Order of Chivalry; here is a little poem: scholarly and dogmatic, attractive and lofty, and where the flower of symbolism flourishes. A little artificial flower, but not without charm.”)

¹²³ Busby, 419-27. “*L’une si est au commenchier /Comment on fait le chevalier /Que tous li mons doit honorer; /Car il nous ont tous a garder, /Car se n’estoit chevalerie /Petit vauroit no signorie; /Car il deffendent sainte egUse /Et si nous tiennent bien iustise /De chiaus ki nous voellent mal faire.*”

¹²⁴ Like the twenty-first century discussions around war, violence, and the church’s stance/place in politics, not every church official agreed that martial violence paired well with religious chivalry. Pope Leo IX (1048-53) denounced Norman knights in Italy as acting “with an ungodliness worse than that of pagans.” However, adding irony to an already paradoxical relationship, Leo raised an army to route the Norman knights and then led it in person. See I.S. Robinson, trans. *The Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 149.

pious death for the Christian faith and for the liberation of an oppressed people” received divine Grace (151). Examples of Leo IX’s perspective on the ecclesiastical use value of chivalric violence can be seen in the *Chanson de geste The Song of Roland* (ca. 1100). Frederick Goldin in the “Introduction” to his translation of *The Song of Roland* describes the relationship between the vassal Roland, the Emperor of Christendom Charlemagne, and the Lord of Heaven as “the feudal pyramid” that “rises above the world to end in the Author of all existence. The close relation between the epic genre of this poem, the feudal society it depicts, and the religious war that comprises nearly all of its action is the principle of its unity.”¹²⁵ For Roland the only distinction between himself and the warriors against whom he fights is his assurance that his fight is sanctified.¹²⁶ Christian knights remain savage, but their savagery is both chivalric and consecrated, thus making them redeemable men rather than mere proficient cogs in the chivalry machine as they had been prior to the intertwining of Christianity with the responsibilities of the chevalier. As Roland stands poised to attack the opposing force, he rallies his troops with rhetoric expertly intertwining chivalric legacy, noble service, violence, and ecclesiastical promises:

Now may God grant us [battle with the pagans]
We know our duty: to stand here for our King.
A man must bear some hardships for his lord,
Stand everything, the great heat, the great cold,
Lose the hide and hair on him for his good lord.
Now let each man make sure to strike hard here:
Let them not sing a bad song about us!
Pagans are wrong and Christians are right! (79.15-21)

¹²⁵ *Le Chanson de Roland*, trans. Glyn Burgess (New York: Penguin Putnam Incorporated, 1990) 9.

¹²⁶ *The Song of Roland’s* narrator describes Roland’s opponents before one of the battle sequences. Of Balaguer he makes almost no distinction between the pagan knight and the ideal Christian chivalric knight save one: “A great warrior, famed far and wide for fighting:/ if he were a Christian, he would be a great man” (72.5-6). A pagan can be an ideal warrior and a technically stellar fighter but he cannot be a great man if he is not a Christian.

Roland asserts that it is God's will that his knights destroy the pagans and suffer for their earthly Lord Charlemagne who happens to represent their heavenly Lord. In return Roland and his men secure their sanctified superiority by maintaining the binary of "Pagans are wrong; Christians are right" (79.19). A victory of Right over Wrong guarantees both earthly legacy in the form of "good songs" sung in their honor and God's pleasure—since he granted them the battle in the first place. If sanctification, superiority, and legendary status are not enough to motivate Christian knights to fight there are also threats and coercion: "God hate the man who runs!" (82.9). Failure to perform religiously sanctioned chivalric violence not only results in mortality, but also damnation, leading to a cumbersome religious burden of chivalry for those knights striving to serve the interests of both God and man.

Balancing the paradoxical forces of Christianity and the violence knighthood necessitates requires reassurances of pardon and peace after a knight's death. Ecclesiastical authorities prior to the 1030's sought to temper warfare and violence with "peace oaths and threats of excommunication."¹²⁷ However, Pope Leo IX's (1049-54) use of papal armies against the Normans in 1053 creates moral debate within ecclesiastical ranks which in turn influences a nascent and ever-evolving code of chivalry. Where once stood a "wicked mercenary" now stands an *imitatio Christi*—the imitation of Christ and the "vassals of St. Peter."¹²⁸ Recounted by his anonymous Lotharingian biographer, Pope Leo IX attempts to address death in the service of Christendom on his journey to Benevento in 1054. While burying some of the men slain in his service Pope Leo IX promises his remaining troops that because "they had been willing to suffer a pious death for the Christian faith and for the liberation of an oppressed people . . . [they]

¹²⁷ Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 100.

¹²⁸ Smith, 101.

rejoiced forever in the kingdom heaven . . . united in heavenly glory with the holy martyrs.¹²⁹ Leo IX also promises a level of eternal glory reserved for the hagiographical elite: martyrs—those who immolated themselves for Christ, suffered assault and violence rather than denounce Christ, or were killed for Christ.¹³⁰ *The Song of Roland* takes Pope Leo IX’s promises regarding warfare and violence onto the battlefield with and at the death of an hero of Christendom: Roland. In the battle for Saragossa Roland rallies his troops parroting promises of heavenly glory: “Here we shall receive martyrdom/ And now I well know we have scarcely any time left” (90.1922-3).¹³¹ Yet, as Roland feels his own death approaching the religious burden of chivalry reveals itself quite starkly. Roland, although guaranteed by the Church of his martyr status and espousing that same promise to his men, still doubts the forgiveness of his bloody legacy. As “through his ears his brains are seeping” Roland “beseeches God;” “prays on his own behalf to the angel Gabriel”; to “prevent reproach” he begins to destroy his oliphant, crossbow, and beloved sword Durendal so that they will not fall into the hands of pagans (101.2260-5). He also cries out to Mary; “confesses his sins over and over again”; offers his glove to God itself an act of propitiation meant to reconcile he and his Maker, and in a final act of desperation invokes Lazarus and Daniel in a request to “protect my soul from every peril/ And from the sins which I

¹²⁹Anonymous Lotharingian biographer, *The Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*, trans. I. S. Robinson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 151.

¹³⁰For more on what constitutes martyrdom see Candida R. Mos, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 4. Moss describes the fluidity and flexibility of the word martyr, especially to the early church and to early theologians citing several manners in which one could be considered a martyr that might differ from our modern conception of “dying for a cause”: “The early Christian heroine Thecla, whose legend spawned a vibrant cult in Syria and Egypt, is hailed by some as a martyr despite the fact that in the earliest version of Acts of Paul and Thecla she is never successfully executed. In a similar manner, the element of choice, so critical for adjudicating in modern times between murder and martyrdom, is not a crux in all ancient martyr acts. The second century heresiologist Irenaeus of Lyons calls the infants executed by Herod in the Matthean infancy narratives martyrs because they died for Christ.”

¹³¹For more on Roland’s offering of his glove see Gerard J. Brault, “Laisses 174-176: The Death of Roland” in *The Song of Roland Analytical Edition* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 255-9.

have committed in my life.”¹³² Even though Roland practices sanctified bloodshed with promises of a heavenly reward heretofore reserved for Christ’s most elite saints, at the end of his life he cannot shake the need to bargain for advocates, mercy, and finally make a physical offering of restitution and restoration.

Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) modifies Leo IX’s views on chivalric violence, and while he does not completely reject the idea that violence is a sacred duty with eternal reward, he does add specific stipulations and caveats. Gregory VII’s sixth *decretum* determines that the profession of the knight “may not be carried out without sin.”¹³³ Therefore, there is no real way for the knight to perform penance for his violent acts “unless he lay down his arms and use them no further, except on the advice of religious bishops in order to defend justice.”¹³⁴ The boundaries for acceptable acts of violence become much tighter and indicate that in order to receive full forgiveness and heavenly rewards a knight must first renounce his knighthood. Pope Gregory VII adds that the knight “should not despair, and whatever good deeds he is able to do, we urge him to perform them, so almighty God might lighten his heart toward penitence.”¹³⁵ Thus, Gregory VII tempers Leo IX’s rather open acceptance of a knight’s chivalric violence and its eternal rewards. A knight may be advised by a cleric on the proper application of violence but ultimately the knight, by default, sins just by pursuing the specificity of the chivalric code where violence is concerned. Paradoxical layers begin to build up when the only way to perform penance is to lay down one’s arms and begin atonement through acting in defiance to the

¹³² 102.2303; 104.2364-5; 105.2383-2388.

¹³³ Gregory VII. *Registrum*, epist. VI. in *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume One*, trans. Laura Ashe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 181. “*Sine peccato exerceri non possit.*”

¹³⁴ 181. “[N]isi arma deponat ulteriusque non ferat nisi consilio religiosorum episcoporum pro defendenda iustitia . . .”

¹³⁵ 181. “[E]t odium ex corde demittat, bona quae iniuste abstulit, restituat; ne tamen desperet, interim, quicquid boni facere poterit, hortamur ut faciat, ut omnipotens Deus cor illius illustret ad paenitentiam.”

chivalric code and therefore losing one's identity as chivalric knight. With the Church as ultimate arbiter the knight must adhere to a chivalric code fully interpreted through an ecclesiastical lens. Not only must he serve his lord, his lands, and his brothers he must do so in a manner sanctioned by an outside papal apparatus. Where once the religious burden of chivalry dealt with personal faith in the preemptive pardon for violent acts now the religious burden of chivalry requires amorphous exegetical understanding of "good deeds" pleasing to the Church and therefore to God. While not always the case, often the atoning "good deeds" required by the Church took the form of endowments—endowments by knights to the ecclesiastical system holding their soul in the balance. William Marshal (1146-1219), like Roland, faces uncertainty about the fate of his soul after death. Marshal, however, seeks to secure his place in Paradise through "good deeds" of substantial gifts of lands and assets to the Church.

The History of William Marshal (1220) is the earliest surviving biography of a medieval knight. Commissioned by Marshal's son, it was written shortly after Marshal's death and as such offers a rare view "into the attitudes and perceptions of the time, especially into the experience and nature of warfare in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries."¹³⁶ William Marshal gains the reputation of "the greatest knight that ever lived" and features prominently in the reigns of Henry II, Richard Lionheart, John, and Henry III.¹³⁷ On his death bed, William wrestles with the religious burden a lifetime of service to the chivalric code has wrought. Frustrated by the local clergy's expectations of gifts and bequests in order to "not be distanced from [God] and [God's] company" he declares: "The clerics are too hard on us!" (219). His exasperation comes as a final exertion of strength before his passing. Yet Marshal's comrade Sir Henry FitzGerald worries

¹³⁶ John Marshal, *The History of William Marshal*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), (i).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

about the state of Marshal's soul: "No one can defend himself from Death. And the clergy insist that no man is safe unless he returns what he has taken" (219). The Marshal replies:

They [the clerics] shave us too close! I've captured five hundred knights and kept their arms, their destriers and all their gear. If that means the kingdom of God is barred to me then that's that—I can't give them back! I can do no more for God, I'd say than yield myself to Him repentant of all my misdeeds, of all the wrongs I've done. Unless the clergy mean to see me damned they should stop their harrying! Either their claims are false or no man can have salvation! (219)

Even as his own death looms on the horizon, Marshal bravely calls into question the hypocritical paradox of the religious requirements of chivalry. They are, in his view, untenable and border on entrapment for the knight wishing to achieve chivalric prowess. Still, the Marshal hedges his bets. When the head of the abbey of Notley arrives with sealed letters from the abbot, Marshal reveals part of the contents of his will: "I've left five hundred marks to your house in my will, as I have to every abbey whose name I knew in my lands overseas . . . in the hope that I may share in their good works and prayers both night and day eternally" (221). Even though Marshal knows he cannot hope to meet the Church's exacting requirement to return fully the gains he made through violent acts, he ostensibly attempts to match the economic value of these spoils through his endowments to the church. Marshal's ploy works, the gleeful head of Notley assures Marshal "God will repay you more richly still, I'm certain, in the glory of Heaven!" (221). As if to underscore Marshal's guaranteed place in heaven the abbot of Reading arrives stating he has had a vision that St. Peter instructed the Pope to absolve Marshal "of all the sins you've committed since the hour that you were born . . ." (224). Even with all of the clerical assurances of Marshal's place in the eternal heavenly kingdom, however, the knights who attend Marshal's funeral attest to their own insecurity: "[E]veryone must die when his time comes . . . We have before us our mirror . . . let us all say our paternoster, praying that God may receive this Christian in His heavenly kingdom . . . believing as we do that he was truly good" (225). Marshal's

abilities to lead and inspire his knights stop short at their own burdensome uncertainty that their souls may not be received so heartily in Heaven.

The same religiously burdensome frustrations and uncertainties over “good deeds”; restitution for battle-won spoils; salvation, and the state of one’s immortal soul after a lifetime of service to chivalry appear in romance contemporary to Marshal’s biography. Comprising over half of the Old French chivalric romance *Lancelot-Grail/ Vulgate Cycle* (1230-1235), the *Prose Lancelot* trilogy follows the adventures of Lancelot and other knights of the Round Table and includes a lengthy section chronicling the exploits of Lancelot’s dear friend Galehaut. Prodigiously successful in chivalry, Galehaut consults Arthur’s dream interpreter Master Elias in order to discover the date of his death. Galehaut seeks this knowledge so that he may “strive to behave more the right way.”¹³⁸ Burdened by the idea that he may meet his Maker before rectifying any past transgressions performed in the name of chivalry Galehaut confesses: “I have committed many wrongs in my life, destroying cities, killing people, dispossessing and banishing people”¹³⁹ Galehaut assaults and destroys as part of his chivalric identity; he functions within the chivalric code, under the banner of King Arthur, and within the bounds of the Church yet he still understands his actions to be “wrong” and is driven to atone before his death. Master Elias exercises a bit of dry humor with the understatement “No man who has conquered as much as you have could be without a very great burden of sins.”¹⁴⁰ However, as the conversation ensues, Galehaut attempts to bargain away the burden he feels under the religious applications of

¹³⁸ *The Prose Vulgate in The Oxford English Literary History: Volume 1: 1000-1350*, ed. Laura Ashe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Chpt. 5. I. “[J]e me peneroie plus de bien fere”

¹³⁹ “[J]e me peneroie plus de bien fere et plus m’en hasteroie que je ne gferoie, se je devoie vivre mon droit aage; et il me seroit molt grans mestiers, car molt ai fet mals en ma vie, que de viles destruire, que de gens occire et deseriter et essilier.”

¹⁴⁰ “Nus hom qui tant ait conquis com vos avés ne porroit ester sans trop grant charge de pechiés.”

the chivalric code. God, he argues, surely will not damn a knight He has favored in life: “God has allowed me until now to have more power and wealth than anyone of my age has ever had.”¹⁴¹ Galehaut then turns the logic of divine abundance to the future: “It seems to me God will be showing me much love if he allows me to enjoy the pleasures of this world and then look forward to the joy that has no end.”¹⁴² Finally, Galehaut cuts to the chase and addresses the religious burden that he feels after a lifetime spent in chivalric service: “[T]he closer I am to death, the more I will strive to deserve the everlasting life.”¹⁴³ The “good deeds” referenced by Pope Gregory VII take the form of frantic bargaining and ever-harder work for Galehaut. He vacillates between the insecure warrior hoping his good deeds cancel out his bad and the cocksure knight of Christendom who feels he has God not only on his side, but also in his back pocket. In almost the same breath as his bargaining and begging, Galehaut boasts to Master Elias: “If you hide the truth from me, I will call on the Saviour of the world to be my guarantor and put your soul in the place of mine if I sin as a result of you failing [to reveal the date of Galehaut’s death].”¹⁴⁴ As Galehaut wraps up his conversation with Master Elias he contemplates the work he must do to ensure his acceptance into heaven. His chivalric performance and piety leading up to this conversation are no longer enough to preserve his soul, but to Galehaut the clergyman in front of him should bear the brunt of offsetting the burden created by clerical insistence that knighthood is inherently sinful. When Elias refuses, Galehaut is left with no other

¹⁴¹ *“Diex m’a soffert jusqu’al jor d’ui a avoir plus d’onor et de richece que nus n’ot onques de mon aage qui fust de greignor lignage que je ne sui.”*

¹⁴² *“Por ce m’est il avis que Diex m’amera molt, s’il me sueffre a avoir le delit de cest siècle et que ju puisse atendre après la joie qui ja ne faudra. . .”*

¹⁴³ *“[E]t detant com je serai plus pres de ma mort, de tant me penerai je plus de la vie pardurable porchacier.”*

¹⁴⁴ *“Et se vos m’en celés la verité, j’en trairai a garant le salveor del monde qui mete la vostre ame en celui point ou la moie seroit, se je peche par defaute de vos ne de vostre enseignement.”*

option than to continue to work harder in the hopes that “God is a righteous judge who judges every man according to his works.”¹⁴⁵ Chivalry’s move from sanctified to sinful destabilizes an entire cadre of knights reared on symbolic spiritual imagery equating their armor, their accoutrements, their actions, and their identities with something, according to the *Ordene de Chevalerie* “everybody should honor.” Without a chivalric code supported by the Church, knights like Roland, Marshal, and Galehaut lead lives verging on the criminal.

Equally cognizant of the Church’s importance within chivalric exploits is Gawain. In more than one instance Gawain contemplates ways to mitigate the damage he inflicted on earth in order to secure eternal life in heaven. Appearing in the same *Prose Lancelot* section of the *Lancelot-Grail/ Vulgate Cycle* (1230-35) as Galehaut, Gawain’s origin story in “The Death of King Arthur” (“*Vulgate Mort le roi Artu*”) corroborates the idea that a knight must be protected by the church in order to enact the physical violence necessary to protect the realm. Gawain’s father, King Lot, has Gawain baptized by a holy man/hermit who lives in the woods nearby. After Gawain’s baptism one of Lot’s knights asks the hermit to “do a great service to the kingdom, and see to it through your prayers that when the child is of an age to bear arms, he will be more gifted than any other.”¹⁴⁶ The hermit seeks Christ’s wisdom on the matter and after Mass the next morning returns to the knights with assurances: “Lords, I can say with certainty that this child will be more endowed with prowess than his companions . . . He has been so blessed through my prayer” (103). Yet, even though Gawain’s chivalric prowess, from the very beginning of his life, has purportedly come from God he still labors under the burden of religious uncertainty. In the late fourteenth century, ostensibly, Cumbrian poem *Awntyrs off Arthyr*

¹⁴⁵ “*Diex est si drois jugieres qu’il rent a chacsun solonc ses oevres.*”

¹⁴⁶ “The Death of Arthur,” in *Lancelot-Grail: The Death of Arthur*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 210), 102.

Gawain's concerns address the religious burden of chivalric violence head-on. He asks a ghost "How shal we fare . . . that fonded to fight, / And thus defoulen the folke on fele kings londes, / And riches over reymes withouten eny right . . .?"¹⁴⁷ Gawain, the embodiment of chivalry's physical aspects, still feels the religious burden of chivalry when he contemplates the violence he has enacted as one of Arthur's favored few. Gawain appeals to the ghost; he references chivalric identity directly asking how—without anything other than the title of "Knight" and the attendant expectations of fighting, destroying, and collecting spoils that come with it—can his lifestyle equate to "worship in were thorgh wightnesse of hondes?" (264). Where Roland offers his glove in an effort to reconcile his violent lifestyle to in the face of heavenly judgement; where Marshal tries to endow his way into the good graces of Christ; where Galehaut tries to barter earthly blessings for eternal mercy—Gawain faces the reality of the religious burden of chivalry and realizes that he cannot shift it. Gawain's only guarantee is temporal: with Arthur on the throne Gawain will "win worship" and be protected by chivalry's code. His eternal fate remains to be seen. Only the chivalric code's inflated valuation of dispensations by the Church appear to make Gawain and warriors like him worthy of salvation and worship.

While Gawain wrestles with chivalry's religious burden, the medieval romances in which he appears do not depict the warrior eschewing the way of the sword in order to ensure the safety of his soul in his final days. In the *Lancelot-Grail* "Deaths of Gawain and of the Lady of Beloe" Gawain dies as a result of a head wound. Unlike Roland's death scene where the knight plaintively asks for help from the angels and Mary, Gawain commands all and sundry even as he

¹⁴⁷ "The Awntyrs Off Arthur," in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (TEAMS Middle English Texts: Robbins Library Digital Projects, 1995), 261-3. Gawain essentially asks: "How shall we fare whose job it is to fight and ruin the lands of other kings and take the riches that aren't ours?"

takes his final breath. He offers advice to Arthur about avoiding battle with Mordred;¹⁴⁸ sends his love to Guinevere,¹⁴⁹ and asks for Lancelot's forgiveness (113).¹⁵⁰ He makes arrangements for his burial and crafts his chivalric legacy (114).¹⁵¹ In his last breath Gawain issues a final command, and it is to Christ: "Do not judge me by my faults" (114). At first glance Gawain's story reads as if his agency in death sheds the religious burden of chivalry. He controls every aspect of the scene and reaps all of the reputational benefits chivalry affords to a knight of his stature. Rather than worry about his eternal reward or damnation, Gawain simply notifies Christ as to the behavior he expects once his life on earth is over. Burden lifted, one might think.¹⁵² However, this is not the case. Immediately after burying Gawain as per his command, he appears in Arthur's dream. In this vision Gawain reiterates his command to Arthur not to fight Mordred. Arthur obstinately refuses to heed Gawain's dying wish which eventually leads to the king's demise. Gawain also instructs Arthur to call Lancelot, another command Arthur refuses (114).¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ "Deaths of Gawain and of the Lady Beloe," in *Lancelot-Grail: The Death of Arthur*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2010). "Sir, I'm dying; in God's name, if you can avoid doing battle with Mordred, do so, because I tell you truly that if you die at the hand of any man, it will be his" (113).

¹⁴⁹ "[G]reet my lady the queen on my behalf." Incidentally this dying wish is significant because prior to his death Gawain and Lancelot have a bitter falling out. Gawain does not want to die holding a grudge.

¹⁵⁰ "If any of you, God willing, should see Lancelot, tell him that I send more sincere greetings to him than to anyone I've ever known and that I ask his forgiveness. And I pray that God will keep him as I left him." In other words: alive.

¹⁵¹ "[H]ave the tomb inscribed 'here lie Gaheriet and Gawain, whom Lancelot killed through Gawain's folly' I want those words written there so I will be blamed for my death, as I deserve to be . . . the head wound [Lancelot] caused . . . would have healed, except that the Romans reopened it in battle."

¹⁵² This is not the only time that Gawain feels his stature as a knight outweighs religious statutes. In Volume II of Malory's *Morte Darthur* (Book XIII; Chapter XVI) Gawain on his quest for the Sangreal meets a priest who tells him he has lived a sinful life but that if he is shriven he can redeem himself. The priest offers penance to Gawain who replies: "Nay . . . I may do no penance; for we knights adventurous oft suffer great woe and pain." For Gawain the suffering his body endures on earth in service of the chivalric code (secular or religious) redeems him from any sins he commits.

¹⁵³ Gawain: "Sir don't do battle with Mordred; if you do, you'll die or will be mortally wounded." Arthur: "I most certainly will fight him, even if I must die as a result . . ." Gawain: "Sir, send for Lancelot, for you can be sure that if you have him in your company, Mordred will never be able to hold out against you." Narrator: "The king said that he would not summon him for this reason, because Lancelot had so wronged him that he did not think he would come if sent for."

Herein lies the rub. Gawain, the absolute pinnacle of chivalry, commands and controls nothing. Arthur benignly acquiesces to Gawain's deathbed counsel to avoid battle with Mordred; then almost immediately he wades into battle with Mordred. Gawain seeks forgiveness from Lancelot, but Arthur will not even agree to call Lancelot to his aid against Mordred much less summon him to discuss forgiveness as Gawain hoped. If Gawain lacks command and control over the machinations of mortal king Arthur to what greater extent does he lack control over whether or not the King of kings will ignore his "faults" and grant him eternal life? Gawain's deathbed decrees are worthless; ultimately his adherence to the more violent allowances within the chivalric code puts his soul at risk.¹⁵⁴

The chivalric code is far from static; its longevity bears witness to both its evolution and also its malleability. As the relationship between knights and the church changed after Pope Leo IX gives way to Pope Gregory VII, the paradoxical and burdensome relationship between chivalrically endorsed violence and the knight's religious status intensifies. Gregory VII's perspective on chivalric violence ensures greater focus on the knight's moral responsibility within Christendom. Pope Leo IX makes chivalric violence sacred, but Pope Gregory VII emphasizes that a knight must also exhibit Christ-like mercy, make restitution for any spoils of battle, and leave the role of knighthood altogether if they wish to find heavenly salvation. The fraught and burdensome relationship between religion and chivalry deepens between the twelfth and the fifteenth century. In the early *Chanson de geste The Song of Roland*, William Marshal's

¹⁵⁴ For a different interpretation of Gawain's posthumous appearance to Arthur see: Paul Rovang, *Malory's Anatomy of Chivalry: Characterization in the Morte Darthur* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), 34. "Rather than the independent, headstrong, abusive Gawain of the early stories in the *Morte*, we find, significantly, a Gawain who has in his life succeeded in aiding some women . . . and who is now helped by them in making a final bid to save Arthur's reign . . ." To Rovang Gawain's true nobility is only realized after death due to Heaven's "merciful forgetfulness" (35). This is also a factor of the difference between how the French and the English represent Gawain.

biography, and romances *Lancelot-Grail* and “Awntyrs of Arthyr”, Roland, Marshal, Galehaut, and Gawain focus on how their martial violence and chivalric performances impact their souls after death. The fear, striving, and doubt produced by identities intertwined with violence becomes their religious burden of chivalry. Malory’s *Morte Darthur* (1485) features the knight Lancelot who also experiences the religious burden of chivalry. Lancelot’s beatific exaltation of Guinevere as his god along with a willful rejection of Christ as the nexus of chivalry that creates Lancelot’s religious burden of chivalry. The ramifications of Lancelot’s religious burden of chivalry take Roland, Marshal, Galehaut, and Gawain’s bullying, bargaining, and begging for their eternal salvation several steps further. Lancelot must lose his love, his reputation, and his chivalric identity in order to atone for his idolatrous love of Guinevere and rejection of Christ as his Lord and in more than one instance he refuses.

Malory’s Lancelot is also much more nuanced than the knights examined earlier in this chapter. For at least half of the *Morte* he appears to blithely perform chivalry while worshipping Guinevere without any overt sign of religious burden influencing his actions or attitudes. Two key factors help to explain how the religious burden of chivalry exists for a knight like Lancelot even as he disregards its presence altogether. First: the impetus of Malory’s publisher to use the *Morte* as instruction regarding chivalric behavior and therefore Lancelot’s influence on an expanding fifteenth-century readership. Second: Ramon Llull’s deeply religious chivalric manual *Le Livre de l’Ordre de Chevalerie* (1274-76) and its potential influence on Malory at the writing of the *Morte*. If Llull’s manual and Malory’s *Morte* are meant for instruction, and I would argue that they are, then Lancelot bears the religious burden of chivalry as both an example of how *not* to conduct oneself and as a warning of what befalls the knight/reader if they reject the primacy of Christ for their own interests.

Malory writes the *Morte Darthur*, according to publisher William Caxton, as a moral character study for his peers. Caxton asserts that Malory compiles and translates previous Welsh, French, and English sources related to Arthur and his court with the intent “that noble men may see and learn noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke”¹⁵⁵ Caxton addresses the reader directly “humbly beseeching” them to use the book’s content as instruction (Preface).¹⁵⁶ He also stresses the importance of instruction determining that “this book shall be pleasant to read . . . but all is written for our doctrine . . .” (Preface). Malory’s *Morte Darthur* and Caxton’s “Preface” reveal the potential for greater religious burden within chivalry’s ranks as larger numbers of readers look to knights as their temporal and religious models. These readers include women and the newly emerging merchant class with Caxton’s list of the potential beneficiaries of Malory’s work comprising “noble lords and ladies, with all other estates of what estate or degree they been of . . .” (Preface). Chivalry’s influence broadens and with it the potential for chivalric burden intensifies. Examining the shifting cause of religious burden carried by Malory’s Lancelot is not meant to suggest that in the fifteenth century there was suddenly a *laissez-faire* attitude among knights and clergy about chivalric violence. Chivalric manuals published after the *Ordene* continue to emphasize the knight’s importance within the structure of martial Christianity. Malory’s fifteenth-century Lancelot merely demonstrates that the religious burden of chivalry has as much

¹⁵⁵ William Caxton, “Preface,” in *Le Morte Darthur: King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*, Project Gutenberg. Release date 6 November 2009. Last Update 3 August 2020. Last accessed 15 September 2021.

¹⁵⁶ “Take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same.”

malleability as the chivalric code. As the code adapts to address and encompass evolving religious, social, and political perspectives, so does chivalric burden.

One successor to the *Ordene de Chevalerie* is Ramon Llull's *Le Livre de l'Ordre de Chevalerie* (1274-76 in Catalan). Beverly Kennedy describes Llull's chivalric manual as "a classic statement of the religious view of knighthood as the governing class of society."¹⁵⁷ She asserts that Llull directly informed Malory's description of the Order of Chivalry in *Le Morte Darthur* because "to speak of knighthood as a 'High Order' as Malory does, is to take for granted the Christian ideology taught by these treatises . . ." (13). Beverly Kennedy also believes that Llull's manual informed Thomas Malory's representation of the order of knights and the chivalric code since after being translated into French it became "the standard work on the subject for the next two hundred and fifty years" (13). Additionally, Malory's publisher William Caxton also translated Llull's manual from French into English in 1484, a mere year before publishing Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Ruth Lexton calls *Le Livre's* influence on the *Morte* part of the "Caxtonian agenda" and Ruth Mazo Karras explains that "[t]he typical knightly household owned several books that quite often included chivalric literature" including Llull's manual.¹⁵⁸ Llull was profoundly religious from the age of thirty and his chivalric manual reflects a near singleness of mind which would have informed Malory's perception of chivalry:

The knight represents the embodiment of man's effort . . . to achieve everlasting rest with his Creator . . . Man must battle with himself and with the world. In doing so, he remains in a state of permanent *certamen* (struggle) or constant state of anxiety as he strives to overcome his moral infirmity.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*, 2nd edition (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 13.

¹⁵⁸ Ruth Lexton, *Contested Language in Malory's Morte Darthur: The Politics of Romance in Fifteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014). Ruth Mazo Karras *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Karras explains that the *Morte* was "very popular among Malory's peers . . . [and] the literature of chivalry was widely read" (26).

¹⁵⁹ Antonio Cortijo Ocana, "Introduction" in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry Llibre de l'Ordre de Cavalleria*, trans. Antonio Cortijo Ocana (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company: 2015), 11. Raised in

To ease the burden this state of permanent struggle and anxiety creates, Lull's manual methodically addresses the physical, religious, and social expectations of knighthood. Lull's tripartite model of chivalry places Christological embodiment as the locus of chivalry. This religious locus finds its way into the Malory's Lancelot narrative with opportunities for Lancelot to acknowledge and embody Christ's control over his chivalric performance at every turn—opportunities he rejects in favor of worshipping Guinevere.

Lull's manual begins with a frame-tale homily about a successful knight who, after long upholding "the Order of Chivalry with the nobility and strength of his lofty courage . . . forsook his estates . . . and in a great forest . . . shunned the world so that the frailty of his body . . . would not dishonor him" (35.2). The knight reflects on his impending death and the "everlasting sentence that he would have to face" (36.2). The aging knight appears to model Pope Gregory VII's decree that knights must lay down their arms and give up their lands thus living a life of penitential quasi-monasticism as penance for their violent careers. A young squire on his way to be knighted happens across the old knight and begins a conversation about "the high honour of Chivalry" (37.7). Even within the "Prologue's" frame tale the impetus of Lull's manual is to educate and influence the behavior of the reader. The second section of Lull's manual addresses the religious expectations of knights and those who aspire to be knights or act in accordance to chivalry's codes: "It is the office of the knight to uphold and defend the Holy Catholic Faith" (44.2). Lull asserts that knights are the martial incarnation of clergy, citing that the clergy upholds the faith through the application of scripture and preaching to "Infidels" as a form of charity. These clerics are willing to give their lives in the service of the Lord God, and likewise

the mainly Muslim kingdom of Majorca, Lull converted to Christianity in 1263 at the age of 30. After his conversion he devoted himself to the conversion of Muslims to Christianity through the use of apologetics/logic/dialectics. Lull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry* is one of his earliest works. (1-3).

knights uphold the faith through conquering and overcoming by force “the Infidels who contrive every day to destroy the holy Church” and its representatives (44.2). Knights take on the role of warrior clergy, killing and conquering so that ecclesiastical clergy can continue to proselytize. Lull’s ideal model of chivalry becomes the unattainable standard influencing all those who come in contact with his manual. Insecurities sparked by changing papal views on church sanctioned violence compound in complexity as religion weaves its way through every facet of the chivalric code.

Lull’s homiletic knight-turned-hermit flags beneath the religious burden of chivalry. The narrator describes the knight as a penitent seeking absolution through self-immolation: “[He] had a full beard, long hair, and was wearing tattered old clothes; and because of the penitence that he was doing he was thin and pale, and because of the tears he was shedding his eyes were hollow-rimmed . . .” (36.5). The knights reading Lull’s manual are met with both the hermit’s reaction to the religious burden of chivalry and the realization that they must take on their own religious burden lest they face damnation. The hermit issues a warning to the young squire: a knight who turns from his chivalric service to God commits “miscreance, which is contrary to faith and salvation, on account of which he will be sentenced to travails without end” (36.5). The specificity of Lull’s manual increases the potential for religious burden; not only are knights glorified for their defense of the Church, Christianity, and Christendom, but they are also warned in no uncertain terms about faithlessness—intentional or accidental, and failure’s consequential damage. Rather than *decretum* from a distant Pope in Rome or exhortations from behind the pulpit, these warnings regarding failure’s impact on a knight’s eternal soul come from a fellow

knight—a comrade whose experience gives weighty significance to the words on the page.¹⁶⁰ Lull's *Livre* places service to God and the Holy Church in primacy over service to Lord, country, and comrades. At the same time, he does not remove the secular obligations of knighthood. Knights must still rule and govern the people with nobility of heart and courage: “The king or prince who makes procurators, magistrates and baillis of any men who are not knights does so contrary to the Office of Chivalry . . . the knight is more worthy of ruling the people than anyone else” (46.7). A knight must always defend his Lord and if a knight comes to the aid of the people over the aid of his lord he is guilty of “malfeasance: not following the office for which he is called a knight” (46.8). Knights are expected to uphold justice: “Justice must be upheld by the knights . . . And if the knight and book-learning could be joined in such close concert” then knights should be judges too (46.9).¹⁶¹ Knights are still expected to ride horses expertly, participate in tournaments, fence, and hunt all manner of animals masterfully. The knight must also maintain the land for his lord (47.12). Failure to complete these requirements “scorn[s] the Order of Chivalry” (47.10). Lull also demands that the knight's closest friend and ostensibly the person/group to whom his preeminent devotion is given become the clergy: “the two closest offices that there are in this world are the office of the cleric and the office of the knight, and therefore the greatest friendship that there can be in this world should be between cleric and knight” (45.4). If the knight “contravenes and disobeys the clerics” he contravenes the Order of Chivalry (45.4). Lull spares no knight and offers no loophole for the knight who finds it impossible to navigate oppositional views of earthly lord, heavenly Lord, brother, or the will of

¹⁶⁰ Lull started his chivalric career as a knight in King James I of Aragon's court. For more on the cultural significance of Lull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry* see Jennifer G. Wollock, *Rethinking Chivalry and Courtly Love* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011) where she determines Lull's manual to be, perhaps, “The most widespread of all Western chivalric manuals” and “part of a comprehensive social theory” (108).

¹⁶¹ “It is the office of the knight to support and defend his temporal lord.”

the people he serves and protects. Lull compounds chivalry's religious expectations making every secular aspect of chivalry "justice, wisdom, charity, loyalty, truth, humility, fortitude, hope and prowess" now apply to the knight's soul. In other words, it is no longer enough for the knight to physically perform chivalry he must now embody these criteria all the way down into his soul. To simply perform chivalry for its own sake becomes a sin (47.11).¹⁶² According the Lullian model, failure in any area of chivalry no longer represents just a shameful failure for the individual knight—a knight now fails the Order of Chivalry of which Christ is the head. What becomes of the knight who refuses to recognize Christ as his ultimate lord? The knight is "unmade" in the presence of God and man and must be "expel[led] from its Order and benefit" due to their blindness to their own sin and failure to repent (50.20).¹⁶³ To be expelled from the Order of Chivalry and its benefits equates to a loss of salvation since "God and Chivalry belong together" (54.32). To lose one's chivalric identity is to lose God, yet an examination of Malory's Lancelot in *Morte Darthur* shows the "flower of chivalry" staunchly refusing to acknowledge God as the impetus and *raison d'être* for his chivalric identity. Guinevere is his impetus and *raison d'être* therefore he carries chivalry's religious burden wherever he wanders by his refusal to honor God. Chivalry's religious burden reveals itself in similar ways as it did for Roland, Marshal, Galehaut, and Gawain in that Lancelot finds himself bargaining and bartering penitential performance in the hopes that God will excuse his idolatry of Guinevere. However, just as Ramon Llull's manual intensifies the religious expectations of chivalry, so *Le Morte* depicts Lancelot's religious burden intensifying and destroying not only the knight himself, but also impacting the destruction of Camelot and the Round Table knights.

¹⁶² "Therefore the knight who practises these things that pertain to the Order of Chivalry with respect to the body but . . . [not] the soul . . . would be contrary to the soul and its virtues . . ."

¹⁶³ Llull uses the term "bewail" rather than repent.

Chrétien de Troyes' lusty lover in *Lancelot: Knight of the Cart* depicts the knight successfully performing all of the secular aspects of chivalry. Lacking in Chrétien's Lancelot is any indication that the knight performs chivalry for any reason other than earthy gains—gains that include the adoration of Guinevere. However, Chrétien foregrounds a reading of Guinevere as Lancelot's god in *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart's* bedroom scene. While Sir Kay sleeps at the foot of Guinevere's bed, Lancelot breaks through the iron bars obstructing his entrance to her bedroom. As he approaches the bed he pauses "bowing in adoration/ Before the holiest relic/ He knew."¹⁶⁴ As Lancelot genuflects at the altar of the queen's bed, she "reached out/ Her arms" in her own *imitato Christi* drawing her supplicant up onto her altar (147). When the morning comes the narrator calls Lancelot's departing pain "Some terrible martyrdom" and in a final moment of veneration Lancelot passes back through the window and after replacing the iron bars "bowed and crossed himself, / As if acknowledging an altar" (147). Chrétien's Lancelot clearly worships Guinevere with his whole, heart, soul, mind, and body.¹⁶⁵ In the *Morte*, Malory's Lancelot continues his devotion and worship of Guinevere, but true to Caxton's assertion that the *Morte* be used for instruction—Lancelot receives warnings and admonitions from comrades, clerics, visions, and even his own son.¹⁶⁶ His decision to continue as a chivalric disciple of Guinevere rather than Christ causes him to stagger beneath the weight of the religious burden of chivalry his choice applies.

¹⁶⁴ Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 147.

¹⁶⁵ *Douay-Rheims*. Matthew 22:37 "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."

¹⁶⁶ Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* (Woodbridge: DS Brewer, 1992), 94. Kennedy gives Lancelot the benefit of the doubt stating that Lancelot is able to become the hero of the *Morte* because his intention is to be Guinevere's true (chaste) lover even if he cannot meet his own intentions" (94). Alternatively, C.S. Lewis, "Courtly Love," in *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) sees a moral paradox in Lancelot because the political implications of Lancelot's adultery (whether premeditated or not) make him a traitor to King Arthur (38).

Initially *Le Morte Darthur*, much like Chretien's *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, focuses on the physicality and prowess of Lancelot and how his performance of chivalry impacts Guinevere. Arthur hosts a tournament in which Lancelot performs so expertly he catches the queen's eye. Word of Lancelot's love and devotion to Guinevere spreads throughout the kingdom. Trapped in Morgan le Faye's castle Lancelot must choose between four queens to take as his lover. Even his captors admit to understanding Lancelot's devotion to Guinevere while at the same time pointing out that his love for her will be his undoing: "we understand your worthiness, that thou art the noblest knight living, and as we know well there can no lady have thy love but one, and that is Queen Guinevere, and now thou shalt lose her forever, and she thee" (VI.III). At the point of the *Morte's* Four Queens vignette physical performance of the chivalric code sits at the forefront. Malory depicts Lancelot as the perfect example of a secular knight or as Llull would describe him "the knight who has faith but does not practice faith" (44.3)¹⁶⁷ Initially Lancelot publicly expresses no form of devotion to God or the church, instead he relies on his own reputation as a chivalric warrior as surety (71.4).¹⁶⁸ Since Malory's *Morte* is instructional and influenced by Llull's chivalric manual emphasizing Christian service as the primary force behind chivalry, Lancelot's acknowledgement of the burden his dismissal creates matters very little. Even though he performs his chivalric exploits with aplomb his lack of faith in Christ renders his performances empty and thereafter he must bear the weight of religious burden. The knights, nobles, gentlewomen, and merchants engaging with the *Morte* have the

¹⁶⁷ See also 71.3: "A knight who has no faith cannot be trained in good habits, for through faith man sees God and His works spiritually . . . and through faith man has hope, charity and loyalty, and he is the servant of truth."

¹⁶⁸ When promising to assist King Bagdemus in a tournament Lancelot swears: "[B]y the faith of my body, ye shall have my body ready to do your father . . . service"

opportunity to experience Lancelot's failures within the Order of Chivalry and, hopefully, learn from his mistakes thus keeping the impact of his burden confined to the pages of the *Morte*.

Adding weight to his burden, Lancelot's chivalric performance does nothing to inspire a devotion to God in his fellow knights or the people he serves. Rather, the characters and audience focus on the status of Guinevere's and Lancelot's physical relationship. Lull makes it clear that one knight's misstep leads to the downfall of all the knights underneath him, therefore even the idea of scandal can be detrimental to the chivalric knight (48.14).¹⁶⁹ Lancelot's rejection of Christ as the Order of Chivalry's head and distracting devotion to queen Guinevere indicate a knight with "vanity of the mind" which, according to Lull is "neither agreeable to God nor does he uphold the Order of Chivalry" (77.18). Initially the *Morte's* narrator also avoids any culpability on Lancelot's part when his sexual exploits are outlined although this changes as their affair intensifies. If Lancelot is not overtly religious at the beginning of the *Morte*, he is also not overtly carnal. Yet he demonstrates his single-minded desire for Guinevere enough that rumors swirl accusing Guinevere of witchcraft and spell-casting: "it is noised that ye love Queen Guenever, and that she hath ordained by enchantment that ye shall never love none other but her" (VI.X). Already Lancelot's passion for the queen and not for Christ begins to burden him: his devotion to Guinevere causes such jealousy and consternation that she is accused of manipulating his feelings through magic, a charge Lancelot could have quashed had his devotion turned toward the cross rather than her bed. Later in Book XI accusations turn to actions as witchcraft dupes Lancelot into sleeping with Dame Elaine who he thinks is Guinevere. Dame Elaine becomes pregnant with Galahad and Lancelot must bear the burden of his own attempted

¹⁶⁹ "The knight or prince who unmakes the Order of Chivalry itself not only unmakes himself as a knight, but also the knights who are subordinate to him . . ."

adultery, shame at being tricked into sleeping with the virgin daughter of his host, and siring a bastard. Lancelot's "gladness" after finally consummating his desire for Guinevere turns to anguish, shame, and anger.¹⁷⁰ It also places a bounty on his head when Elaine's suitor Sir Bromel la Pleche finds out that Elaine will no longer marry him because her "love is set upon the best knight of the world . . . Sir Launcelot du Lake" (XI.III). Malory's narrator does not blatantly explain why Lancelot's behavior with Elaine as Guinevere is contrary to both biblical teachings and the chivalric code. Instead, he allows the consequences of Lancelot's actions to depict such religious burden that a reader has no choice but to understand that Lancelot's devotion to Guinevere destabilizes the Order of Chivalry. Without Christ as the foundation of Lancelot's chivalric identity his lust for Guinevere causes him to: deflower a virgin while also gladly committing adultery, threaten at sword point both Elaine and the enchantress responsible for the bed-trick, and also forces another knight into a murderous rage over his jilting. All of these actions run contrary to the chivalric code. Lull describes a knight's engagement with lust as a battle won "by remembering God and His commandments, and by understanding God and the benefits and sufferings that He can give, and by loving God because He is worthy of being loved, feared, honored and obeyed" (74.11). A knight must also demonstrate fortitude in the face of lust lest a knight "descend from . . . high honour to be censured by the people" (74.11). Lancelot serves Guinevere not God therefore he neither remembers God nor His commandments nor His sufferings. Lacking fortitude in the face of lust, Lancelot descends from honor and is censured not only by Sir Bromel and his cousin Sir Bors, but also by Guinevere herself.

¹⁷⁰ XI.II: "Wit you well that Sir Launcelot was glad . . ."; XI.III: "And anon as he had unshut the window the enchantment was gone; then he knew himself that he had done amiss. Alas, he said, that I have lived so long; now I am shamed. So, then he gat his sword in his hand and said: Thou traitress, what art thou that I have lain by all this night? Thou shalt die right here of my hands."

Before Sir Bromel can satisfy his grudge Morgan Le Faye imprisons Lancelot for six months, forcing the jilted knight to fight Sir Bors- Lancelot's cousin instead. After defeating Sir Bromel, Sir Bors travels to Elaine's castle where he meets the baby Galahad and has a holy vision. After his vision, Sir Bors is sent away from Elaine's castle by an old man with a warning for Lancelot. Sir Bors' vision concerns the quest for and acquisition of the Holy Grail and the fate of the kingdom. Sir Bors must censure Lancelot on account of his willful worship of Guinevere: "Go ye to your cousin, Sir Launcelot, and tell him of this adventure the which had been most convenient for him of all earthly knights; but sin is so foul in him he may not achieve such holy deeds" (XI.VI). The quest for the Holy Grail, according to Sir Bors prophetic vision would have been perfect for Lancelot except that his sin, desiring Guinevere more than Christ, dashes all hopes of his holy service in the search for the sangreal. Lancelot's censure continues: "[H]ad not been his sin he had passed all the other knights that ever were in his days . . . of all worldly adventures he passeth in manhood and prowess all other, but in the spiritual matters he shall have many his better" (XI.VI). Lancelot's opportunity to lead by example other knights less physically capable than himself is negated by his rejection of spiritual and chivalric mores. Lull explains the purpose of demotion within the chivalric ranks due to loss of reputation in "On the Beginning of Chivalry": "[I]f you, who are taking the Order of Chivalry, are base or malfeasant you can imagine what an affront you are causing to your subjects and companions who are good . . . because of the baseness in which you find yourself you should be a subordinate of another person" (41.9). His culling, as it were, from the herd of spiritually exemplary knights places him "outside" of the Order of Chivalry both in the Lullian sense of the term but also literally— he will not get the opportunity to acquire the Grail. Censure and rejection revealed by Sir Bors' vision illuminate Lancelot's religious burden.

Lancelot's burden compounds with additional censure from Guinevere—the hardest for him to bear. Guinevere's response to Lancelot's love-child is first to forgive him for being duped by magic. Having taken none of Sir Bors prophetic admonition over his sin of lust and sacrilegious worship of Guinevere to heart, Lancelot attempts a second time to make his way to Guinevere's chamber only to find himself once again in the arms of Elaine. After the bed-switch trick befuddles the love-sick knight a second time, Guinevere's response is to exile him from the kingdom calling him "False traitor knight" twice in the same tirade.¹⁷¹ She banishes him from the kingdom and worse still from her bed—Lancelot's god turns her back on him, excommunicating him from her body, court, and sight. Mad with grief Lancelot finds his way after two years to Elaine who heals him by laying him next to "that holy vessel" the Sangreal (XI.V). After his censure by Sir Bors, excommunication by Guinevere, and madness Lancelot recognizes the religious burden caused by his devotion to Guinevere. For the first time in the *Morte* he calls directly on Christ to ease his burden: "O Lord Jesu, how came I here?" (XI.V). He wonders about how he came to be in Elaine's country but also how such a sorry state befell him. Wounded, miserable, banished and shamed Lancelot devotes himself to penitential performance in the hopes of alleviating his burden. He feels compelled to enact penance by first removing himself entirely from visibility, running off to hide in the Castle of Bliant or "Joyous Isle" (XII.VI). He also attempts his own erasure, renaming himself *Le Chevalier Mal Fete* or "the knight that hath trespassed" (XII.VI). Yet even in Lancelot's new found religious performance his devotion to Guinevere remains the bedrock of his chivalric identity and thus his religious burden of chivalry stays with him. His madness and conversion experience are a result of

¹⁷¹ Guinevere is so angry she repeats herself: "False traitor knight that thou art, look thou never abide in my court, and avoid my chamber, and not so hardy, though false traitor knight that thou art, that ever thou come in my sight" (XI. VIII).

Guinevere's forsaking consequences not a result of censorious revelations about his sin and rejection of Christ's place in the Order of Chivalry. The fact that after his censure he eagerly attempts to make his way to Guinevere's bed while the mother of his bastard child sleeps in the next room exhibits behavior far more concerned with the temporal rather than the transcendent. Lancelot demonstrates the flimsiness of his heart's change when he catches word that Guinevere has forgiven him and immediately abandons both penance and Elaine.¹⁷²

As *Morte Darthur* progresses, the prominence of religious overtones and Christological rhetoric progress as well, increasing the opportunities for Lancelot's single-minded adoration of Guinevere to add to his burden. Lancelot returns to Camelot during Pentecost sparking a bevy of burdensome religious responsibilities tied to his chivalric status. For the first time Guinevere meets his son Galahad which leads her to the announcement that Lancelot is eight degrees separated from Jesus therefore Galahad is nine degrees separated from Jesus.¹⁷³ Compounding the reputational value and burden placed upon those stemming from the bloodline of the Son of God, Galahad's mother hails from Joseph of Arimathea's bloodline. The theological implications of Lancelot and Galahad's genealogy are legion. The two knights hold within their bloodline traces of both Saviour/saviour and Saved/saved. In other words: Christ came as the Saviour of mankind but Joseph of Arimathea, in effect, saves Christ by providing a space for his burial and fulfillment of the prophecy of his resurrection. Lancelot and Galahad, according to Guinevere, represent both divinity and the human approximation thereof. Guinevere's revelation also exalts

¹⁷² Sir Ector tells Lancelot "King Arthur and all his knights, and in especial Queen Guenever, made such dole and sorrow [when Lancelot left the court] that it was marvel to hear and see. . . I dare say there was never knight better welcome to the court than ye . . . it hath cost my lady, the queen, twenty thousand pound the seeking of you" (XII. IX).

¹⁷³ "[H]e is of all parties come of the best knights of the world and of the highest lineage; for Sir Launcelot is come but of the eighth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, and Sir Galahad is of the ninth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, therefore I dare say they be the greatest gentlemen of the world" (XIII. VII).

Lancelot above all other knights except, perhaps, for his son Galahad— the physical embodiment of the grail. Once Guinevere reveals the lineage of the two knights the Holy Spirit descends on the knights of the Round Table in much the same manner as it did on the first Pentecost:

And then the king and all estates went home unto Camelot . . . anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder, that them thought the place should all to-drive. In the midst of this blast entered a sunbeam more clearer by seven times than ever they saw day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then began every knight to behold other, and either saw other, by their seeming, fairer than ever they saw afore. Not for then there was no knight might speak one word a great while, and so they looked every man on other as they had been dumb (XIII.VII).

Rather than begin speaking in tongues as the disciples do in Acts 2's account of Pentecost, the Round Table knights are struck dumb.¹⁷⁴ And rather than tongues of fire settling on their heads like the disciples experienced, a vision of the Holy Grail appears before the knights.¹⁷⁵ Still, the message of Pentecost holds whether in Peter's gathering space or Arthur's banquet hall.

Biblically the tongues of fire or the grail covered in ash offer proof that Christ died, rose, and returned to heaven but left the Holy Spirit to empower his church to do great works in his name.¹⁷⁶ In Acts, Peter sets everyone in the room on a quest: to be baptized, break bread, pray, and spread the gospel.¹⁷⁷ The grail's appearance to the Knights of the Round Table functions in much the same way. It is proof through the iconography of transubstantiation that Christ is alive

¹⁷⁴ *Douay-Rheims*. Acts 2:4, 12: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak . . . And they were all astonished, and wondered, saying 'What meaneth this?'"

¹⁷⁵ *Douay-Rheims*. Acts 2: 1-3: "And when the days of Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them."

¹⁷⁶ *Douay-Rheims*. Acts 2: 29, 32-33: "Ye men, brethren, let me [Peter] freely speak to you . . . This Jesus hath God raised again, whereof we are all witnesses. Being exalted therefore by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this which you see and hear."

¹⁷⁷ *Douay-Rheims*. Acts 2:38-39: "Peter said to them: 'Do penance, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins: and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are far off, whomsoever the Lord our God shall call.'"

within His chosen people, empowering them to spread his gospel.¹⁷⁸ The questing legacy of the *Morte's* Pentecostal Sangreal instigates the same religious fervor within the knights felt by the disciples and their followers. Even Gawain, problematically boorish, violent, and misogynistic catches the fever and is the first to pledge to find the grail no matter how long it takes or how dangerous it is. Lancelot agrees to the quest as well even though the censorious prophecy shared by Sir Bors guarantees that he will not be the knight allowed to find it. Guinevere's revelation of Lancelot's proximity to Christ should, arguably, cause the knight to re-dedicate himself to Christ-centered chivalry, but still he resists.

On the quest for the Sangreal, Lancelot experiences a string of consequences related to his refusal to acknowledge Christ as his lord. He interprets the loss of his horse, harness, sword, and armor as a punishment from God due the shame of his "old sin" rather than merely a failure of his prowess, a series of mishaps, or even the necessary "way paving" for Galahad—the only knight pure enough to seize the Grail (XII.XIX). In Lullian terms Lancelot experiences the "unmaking" process of a knight determined to be malfeasant or contrary to the Christian Order of Chivalry. Lull determines that "In order to unmake a knight, the strap of the sword must be cut from behind and the sword taken away from him to signify that he cannot practise knighthood" (72.7). Lancelot's sword is stolen while he lies paralyzed at the foot of a cross, but the narrative does not mention the cutting of the strap, indicating that his "unmaking" is incomplete. Still, his unconfessed sin requires such a strong application of burden that Lancelot must be stripped of all visual markers of knighthood. Of particular note is the loss of his horse.

¹⁷⁸ Since the grail held the blood of Christ as he died as well as the wine Christ drinks at the Last Supper it embodies the miracle of transubstantiation. For more on grail iconography as well as its role in representations of transubstantiation see Alison Stones, "Seeing the Grail: Prolegomena to a Study of Grail Imagery in Arthurian Manuscripts," in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. Dhira B. Mahoney (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2000), 301-25.

To Lull the horse is the linchpin of chivalric signifiers. After the amorphous qualifications of nobility and a good education the horse is Lull's first concrete marker of chivalry: "Among all the beasts, the finest, swiftest, and most capable of enduring the most work, and the most suitable for serving man was sought out . . . thus of all the beasts the horse was chosen" (40.3). Richard Kaeuper details the significance of the knight/destrier relationship citing examples from both romance and history: "[I]n all representations of themselves knights want to be seen mounted on great chargers, a noble man atop a noble beast, literally above the commoners."¹⁷⁹ Lancelot's horse and his harness are stolen while he lies unconscious in an isolated chapel. The squire who takes his horse, harness, sword, and armor for another knight remarks "I dare right well say . . . that he [Lancelot] dwelleth in some deadly sin whereof he was never confessed" (XIII.XVIII). The loss of his horse and harness further signals Lancelot's chivalric "unmaking" since the careful maintenance and protection of a horse's harness is an integral part of the knight's duties: "Keeping his harness lustrous, and ministering to his horse is the office of the knight . . . destroying his harness is not Chivalry . . . what is Chivalry without armour?" (54.31). When Lancelot awakens and realizes his predicament he moans and bewails his sin and shame but he does not repent even though objectively he is in the exact space Christ specifies in Matthew 11:28-30. Prone, at the foot of the cross—the ultimate representation of the lordship of Christ—Lancelot has the opportunity to "Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light."¹⁸⁰ Instead, Lancelot heads off on foot into the forest.

¹⁷⁹ Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 175. Kaeuper cites Froissart, the Chandos Herald, and Sir Geoffrey Luttrell as historical evidence for his claims.

¹⁸⁰ *Douay-Rheims*.

Almost immediately he meets a hermit priest who offers to shrive him, but also takes the time to castigate Lancelot. The hermit points out that God “will not appear where such sinners be . . . ye are the more beholding unto God than any other man, to love Him and dread Him, for your strength and manhood will little avail you an God be against you” (XIII.XVIII). Reiterating Sir Bors’ admonition, the hermit priest reminds Lancelot of the religious burden of chivalry he chooses to carry because of his refusal to acknowledge God’s central role in the Order of Chivalry. All of Lancelot’s chivalric prowess and reputation will be removed like his sword, horse and armor if God turns his back on Lancelot; his unmaking will be complete. The priest tells Lancelot “hide none old sin from me” (XIII.XVIII). Lancelot dodges the question of his devotion to and lust for Guinevere only admitting: “he had loved a queen unmeasurably and out of measure long” (XIII.XX). His attempts at mitigation are short lived however, as he moves the confession away from his and Guinevere’s physical attraction and begins to boast of her preeminent place as the core of his chivalric identity: “all my great deeds of arms that I have done, I did for the most part for the queen’s sake, and for her sake would I do battle were it right or wrong” (XIII.XX). His final confession reveals his consummate sin. He admits he “never did . . . battle all only for God’s sake, but for to win worship and to cause me to be the better beloved and little or nought I thanked God of it” (XIII.XX). His besetting sin is participating in the Order of Chivalry so that Guinevere would love him even more; not to bring God glory or to model Christ’s mercy or to be the *imitatio Christi*, or an example to younger knights, or spread the tenets of Christianity. It is all for Guinevere’s glory and the reciprocal power and pleasure he gains.

The hermit priest presents a solution to Lancelot’s idolatrous relationship with Guinevere and a way to rid himself of the religious burden his worship of her causes. Lancelot can only

truly be shriven if he stays away from Guinevere. Lancelot agrees but the hermit cautions him against rashly agreeing to the proposed expiation: “Look that your heart and your mouth accord” (XIII.XX). Lancelot cannot merely claim to have faith he has to embody its precepts including ridding himself of anything that could come between him and service to God. As Llull mandates, there is no more performative chivalry; the knight must embody its physical and religious tenets or risk their soul.¹⁸¹ The hermit belabors his point just in case Lancelot still thinks he can somehow associate with Guinevere and remain within the Order of Chivalry. The hermit priest delineates all of the chivalric attributes God has bestowed on Lancelot: “fairness with seemliness”; “wit”; “discretion to know good from evil”; “prowess and hardiness” (XIII.XX). Despite God’s personal interest in Lancelot, Lancelot has always loved Guinevere more than God. Lancelot has to go against a lifetime of love and worship of Guinevere in order to save his soul. God, it seems, is fed up with Lancelot: “Our Lord will suffer thee no longer, but that thou shalt know Him whether thou wilt or nylt” (XIII.XX). Lancelot takes for granted all of the external and internal gifts given to him by God—gifts that allow him to perform his chivalric duties flawlessly. Yet by Lancelot’s own admission, his entire life of chivalry was for Guinevere’s glory—God rarely, if ever, factored into the equation. Because of Lancelot’s willful idolatry the hermit describes Lancelot as “harder than the stone and bitterer than the [rotten] tree” (XIII.XX). He then relates the parable of the fig tree where Christ preaches in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and finds a city full of “hardness . . . no fruit; that betokeneth the fig tree unto Jerusalem, that had leaves and no fruit” (XIII.XX). Rather than leave Lancelot to contemplate

¹⁸¹ “[J]ust as all of these aforesaid practices pertain to the knight with respect to the body, so justice wisdom, charity, loyalty, truth, humility, fortitude, hope, prowess . . . pertain to the knight with respect to the soul. Therefore, the knight who practices these things that pertain to the Order of Chivalry with respect to the body but does not practise those virtues that pertain to the soul is not a friend of the Order of Chivalry” (47.11).

the meaning of the fig tree parable the priest explains it on the spot: “So thou . . . when the Holy Grail was brought afore thee, He found in thee no fruit, nor good thought nor good will, and defouled with lechery” (XIII.XX). God rejects the knight to whom he bestowed countless gifts. Lancelot feels the burden his idolatrous worship of Guinevere brings him and buckles, pledging: “Certes . . . all that you have said is true, and from henceforward I cast me . . . never to be so wicked as I have been, but to follow knighthood and to do feats of arms” thus beginning the bargaining process for Christ’s forgiveness and burden-lifting favor experienced by Roland, Marshall, Galehaut, Gawain and countless other knights” (XIII.XX).

Lancelot’s response to the hermit’s warning is to throw himself into religiously chivalric deeds and feats of arms in order to stay away from the wickedness of loving Guinevere more than God. He prays and supplicates; he takes to wearing a hairshirt made of the hair of a dead holy man he finds and buries.¹⁸² He becomes a tea-totaling vegetarian; gives up his newly acquired destrier for a mule; ceases killing—all while grieving over his shortcomings.¹⁸³ Still, he continues to face warnings and chastisement about displeasing God. He has a vision where God emphasizes the burden Lancelot bears because “I have lost all that I have set in thee, for thou hast ruled thee against me as a warrior, and used wrong wars with vain-glory, more for the pleasure of the world than to please me . . .” God specifies the religious burden Lancelot carries: “[T]herefore thou shalt be confounded without thou yield me my treasure” (XV.III). If Lancelot does not fully acknowledge Christ as the creator and controller of his chivalric reputation he will

¹⁸² XV. II. Prior to making the hairshirt, the holy man with whom he stays censures Lancelot for the third time in the *Morte*: “[Y]e shall have no power to see it [the Grail] no more than a blind man should see a bright sword, and that is long on your sin . . .”

¹⁸³ “[E]at no flesh as long as ye be in the quest of the Sangreal, nor ye shall drink no wine” (XV. II).

continue to be treated as an adversary and “confounded” or brought to ruin.¹⁸⁴ Another hermit tells him to stop expecting other people to advocate for him through prayer. He suggests Lancelot “bear his own burden. And . . . beseeke thou only God” (XV.IV). His own son, Galahad, tells him he will not pull his father from his metaphorical cross by offering up prayers: “No prayer availeth so much as yours” (XVII.XIV). A strange lady comes to Lancelot to reinforce what the first hermit priest told him: “Now have I warned thee of thy vein glory and of thy pride, that thou hast many times erred against thy Maker. Beware of everlasting pain, for of all earthly knights I have most pity of thee, for I know well thou hast not thy peer of any earthly sinful man” (XV.VI). She stresses that while Lancelot is peerless as a chivalric knight, he is also peerless as a sinner. Lancelot looks to others to off-set his burden still stubbornly refusing to address its root cause: Guinevere as his god. He attempts to immerse himself in the visual or optical performance of repentance—wearing the right clothing; associating with the right people; publicly requesting prayer, but never humbling himself in true thankfulness and contrition.

Lancelot suffers from, for lack of a better term, a kind of ecclesiastical *uxoriousness*. His chivalric identity remains out of balance and leans too heavily towards penitential striving. Lull’s *Le Livre* clearly explains that a knight is expected to continually perform all of the acts of chivalry associated with the Order all for the glory of Christ. A knight worships and honors God through physically executing the tenets of chivalry and adhering to the exegetical expectations of the Church. There is no sanctification within the Order of Chivalry without the physical prowess gained through public performance. Lancelot tries to shake his burden by becoming completely Christ-focused, not to honor Christ’s place within the Order of Chivalry, but through the lens of

¹⁸⁴ Confound *transitive* (ca. 1330-1796): “To defeat utterly, discomfit, bring to ruin, destroy, overthrow, rout, bring to nought (an adversary).” *OED* last accessed 14 September 2021.

self-interest. He punishes his body for the sins of his heart and misinterprets public humiliation as a true repentance. He does not embody religious chivalry and allow this embodiment to inform his daily chivalric performance; he drops most of the physical and social markers of chivalry to luxuriate in the self-righteousness performance of self-abasement.

The narrator asserts that Lancelot's commitment to Christ is more about optics than a heartfelt acceptance of Christ as the bedrock of his chivalric identity. When Lancelot chooses to return to Camelot and Guinevere the narrator reveals: "[H]ad not Sir Launcelot been in his privy thoughts and in his mind so set inwardly to the queen as he was in seeming outward to God . . . there had no knight passed him in the quest for the Sangreal; but ever his thoughts were privily on the queen" (XVIII.I). Because Lancelot's attempts to shift the chivalric burden he bears are more about being seen as a devout servant of Christ than actually devoting his chivalric service to Christ, he swiftly slides back into veneration of Guinevere. As soon as Lancelot and Guinevere are together the narrator says he "forgot the promise and the perfection that he made in the quest" (XVIII.I). As it stands, Lancelot trades ecclesiastical *uxoriousness* back for Guinevere's preeminence in his life. The result: he now bears the religious burden of chivalry with an even greater weight because he knows, for sure, that what he does displeases God, is counter to his role within the Order of Chivalry, and damns him. Once Lancelot welcomes his burden and the consequences rejecting God's place in the Office of Chivalry create, he jettisons all appearances of sexual propriety with Guinevere. The narrator speaks of their affair rather frankly: "so they loved together more hotter than they did to-forehand, and had such privy draughts together, that many in the court spake of it" (XVIII.I). The boldness of their affair starts to worry Lancelot, but his fears are practical, rather than moral. He worries: "wit ye well that there be many men speak of our love in this court . . . I dread them more for your sake than for

any fear I have of them myself" (XVIII.I). Lancelot worries that if "shame and slander" befall the two of them he will be able to withstand the accusations, but she will face dire consequences. Lancelot understands that if Guinevere is his god, he must serve and protect her just as the chivalric code requires knights to serve and protect the Church as Christ's earthly representation. The only remedy for an attack on Guinevere comes "by me and my blood" (XVIII.I). Lancelot will willingly spill his blood in service to Guinevere in effect embracing the religious burden of chivalry even unto death.

Lancelot's refusal to acknowledge Christ's supremacy within the Order of Chivalry and his acceptance of the burden brought about by his sacrilegious service to Guinevere sets in motion consequences far greater than just his own "unmaking." At the end of their lives Lancelot and Guinevere look back on the carnage of Camelot. The quest for the Grail "disparples" the ranks of the round Table; fallout from the rumors of their affair cause the death of Agrevaine, Gawain, Arthur and countless others.¹⁸⁵ Had Lancelot and the Pope not intervened Guinevere would have been burnt at the stake or forever excommunicated from Christendom. Guinevere retreats to a nunnery and Lancelot disappears to live on family land in France.

¹⁸⁵ XX.I: "Alas, said Sir Gawaine and Sir Gareth, now is the realm wholly mischieved, and the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be disparpled . . ." Disparple *transitive*: "to scatter abroad, disperse, drive in different directions; to throw into confusion." *OED* last accessed 14 September 2021. Regarding the rumors of Lancelot and Guinevere's sexual relationship: When trapped by Agrevaine and Mordred in the Queen's bedchamber the narrator will only say: "And then, as the French book saith, the queen and Launcelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not hereof make no mention, for love that time was not as is now-a-days." Lancelot when rallying his troops to defend Guinevere uses slippery linguistics: "And therefore the king will in his heat and malice judge the queen to the fire, and that may I not suffer, that she should be brent for my sake; for an I may be heard and suffered and so taken, I will fight for the queen, that *she is a true lady unto her lord*; but the king in his heat I dread me will not take me as I ought to be taken" (emphasis mine). Lancelot also argues to the Bishop of Canterbury that "had not the might of God been with me, I might never have endured fourteen knights, and they armed and afore purposed, and I unarmed and not purposed" so therefore he must be innocent of the charges leveled against him. When Arthur and Lancelot meet to discuss the papal bull ordering Arthur to take Guinevere back Arthur laments that he ever believed that Lancelot or Guinevere would be untrue to him.

Lancelot returns to England to visit Gawain's grave and there he finds both Gawain's epithet asking for his forgiveness and after a bit of travel, Guinevere. Their reunion not only solidifies Lancelot's chivalric "unmaking" it also activates his religious burden of chivalry's far-reaching consequences. Guinevere heaps coals of blame and burden onto Lancelot holding him (and herself) responsible for the destruction of Camelot, the Round Table, and the death of Arthur and countless knights in his service: "Through this man and me hath all this war been wrought, and the death of the most noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain" (XXI.IX). As Lancelot's god, Guinevere deems him unworthy of even the title Knight, much less Knight of the Round Table. Rather, she dubs him "this man": a co-conspirator; a murderer, and a despot. She has a demand for Lancelot that sounds strikingly similar to the suggestion made by the hermit priest prior to Lancelot's quest for the Sangreal:

Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me more in the visage; and I command thee, on God's behalf, that thou forsake my company, and to thy kingdom thou turn again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrack; for as well as I have loved thee, mine heart will not serve me to see thee (XXI.IX).

Guinevere also tells him to marry someone else. Lancelot says he will never marry another but he will devote the rest of his life to Christ: "Nay, madam, wit you well that shall I never do, for I shall never be so false to you of that I have promised; but the same destiny that ye have taken you to, I will take me unto, for to please Jesu, and ever for you I cast me specially to pray" (XXI.IX). Here the reader can see the end result of Lancelot's inability to fully embody the religious expectations of the chivalric code. His all-encompassing, sacrificial, religiously chivalric love and worship is of Guinevere. Guinevere is his god. When agents of Christ tell Lancelot to stay away from Guinevere so that he can rid himself of his religious burden of

chivalry brought about by idolatry, he cannot fully commit to the task. Now Guinevere demands the same of him and he acquiesces. Lancelot only devotes his life to God because he can no longer devote his life to Guinevere. Still, he swears his continued fealty and worship to her: “For I take record of God, in you I have had mine earthly joy; and if I had found you now so disposed, I had cast me to have had you into mine own realm” (XXI.IX). His god rejects him and so he reluctantly returns to Christ after throwing out one last ditch attempt to take her home with him. He would rather live out the rest of his life with Guinevere isolated on his family land in France than devote his life to Christ. He will gladly keep his burden if it means living the rest of his life with Guinevere. When Guinevere refuses his offer and his parting kiss, Lancelot becomes a brother at the first hermitage he finds. He influences seven of his comrades to become brothers as well. They live lives of quiet contemplation eschewing all worldly goods and accolades looking, for all intents and purposes like devoted Christian clerics making restitution for the violence their chivalric identities wrought across Christendom.

After becoming a priest Lancelot dreams of Guinevere’s death three times and interprets from the dream that he must take her body to Arthur’s grave in Glastonbury (XXI.X). As Guinevere’s marble coffin drops into the ground Lancelot crumbles beneath his burden. He “lay long still” until the Bishop of Canterbury rouses him. Lancelot finally confesses his burdensome sin for the first time in *Morte Darthur*: “when I remember me how by my default, mine orgule and my pride, that they were both laid full low . . . wit you well . . . this remembered, of their kindness and mine unkindness, sank so to mine heart, that I might not sustain myself” (XXI.XI). After acknowledging his fault: worshipping Guinevere rather than God, his haughtiness: thinking he could perform chivalrically without honoring Christ as the center of the Order, and his stubborn pride: believing he could escape the ramifications of his burden—ramifications that

were not isolated to only himself— Lancelot starves himself to death. He refuses food and “[grovels] on the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guenever” enacting a form of *anorexia mirabilis* (named after Saint Christina Mirabilis 1150-1224), where one deprives their body of food in an effort to restore unity with God through corporeal remaking. Lancelot employs what Rudolph Bell terms “holy anorexia” but not in an effort to remake his body and through his own death restore himself to Christ. He starves himself on Guinevere’s final resting place; groveling in penance desperately hoping for restoration with his god.¹⁸⁶ In his final penitentiary act he seeks first the kingdom of Camelot where Arthur loves him; the knights of the Round Table revere him; and Guinevere gladly receives his supplication.

The Bishop of Canterbury has a vision the night Lancelot dies. In it he sees “Sir Launcelot with me with mo angels than ever I saw men in one day. And I saw the angels heave up Sir Launcelot unto heaven, and the gates of heaven opened against him” (XXI.XII). Lancelot, like Gawain, only achieves eternal life in the minds of others, and both must be hurled violently past St. Peter. Malory leaves the question of Lancelot’s eternal fate unanswered, but the opportunity for Lullian influenced instruction remains. *Morte Darthur*’s final chapter discloses Lancelot’s instructions to the few remaining Knights of the Round Table who gather by his bed: “Sir Bors, Sir Ector, Sir Blamore, and Sir Bleoberis, went into the Holy Land . . . For the book saith, so Sir Launcelot commanded them for to do, or ever he passed out of this world. And these four knights did many battles upon the miscreants or Turks” (XXI.XIII). Lancelot sends his comrades off to the Crusades ostensibly in an effort to purify their souls in a way that he never

¹⁸⁶ For more on *anorexia mirabilis* see: Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985). Or: Diana Neal, “Wounding and Healing: Reciprocity in Divine and Human Narratives: the Cases of Christina Mirabilis, Hadewijch and Mechthild. *New Blackfriars* 83, no 972 (February 2002): 86-93. *JSTOR*. Last accessed 14 September 2021. Finally see Michelle Mary Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

could purify his own. There the remnant of the Round Table will give their lives as *miles Christianus* or “Christian soldiers” marching as to war with the cross of Jesus going on before. Lancelot’s comrades die crusading for Christ—Gregory VII’s *ducem ac principem et defensorem christintis* “defenders of Christendom” and Lull’s “upholders and defenders of the office of God and of the faith through which we will be saved”— on Good Friday.¹⁸⁷ Lancelot’s unwillingness to allow Christ’s primacy within the Order of Chivalry creates a burden that ultimately destroys him and the carefully constructed chivalric world of Camelot. His final bargain as he stares down his mortality is to offset potential burden born by his brethren by sending them to their deaths in the name of Christ. Roland, Marshal, Galehaut, and Gawain also all fervently sought to serve God through Crusading and questing, but in their efforts to please both God, the Church, lords, and the people, they each take on the religious burden of chivalry as they struggle with insecurities about the state of their immortal soul. Lancelot’s final efforts in the name of his Round Table brothers are only another in a string of futile efforts to shift the religious burden of chivalry born by so many like him.

¹⁸⁷ Gregory VII Reg. 9.4, to Abbot Desiderius of Montecassino (Feb. 1081) in H.E. J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 650. Lull, 44.2.

CHAPTER IV: “DO THEY SHOULDER THE BLAME . . . DO THEY CALL OUT YOUR NAME . . . ALL THESE BOYS LOOK THE SAME”: CHIVALRY’S SOCIAL BURDEN¹⁸⁸

Chivalry, at its core, is socially constructed. Its qualities and applications are measured by society and in turn the knights who perform chivalry are deemed either worthy or failed.¹⁸⁹ Geoffroi de Charny writes candidly about the social burden of chivalry in the section of his manual *Le Livre de Chevalerie/ The Book of Chivalry* (1350) entitled “The Heavy Responsibilities of Men of Rank and Prowess”: “[knights] should strive with the utmost diligence to ensure that they suffer no reproach against themselves . . . And when men of such condition are in the company of other people, they are held in higher regard than the rest.”¹⁹⁰ While there is merit in the facile argument that elevation within society comes with a certain level of social obligation and expectation, G.W. Kitchin’s definition of “chivalry” outlines the absurd weight of expectant responsibilities these men faced. Kitchin creates a veritable laundry list of physical, religious, and social obligations of knighthood each open to subjective judgement: “chivalry sets before us the perfect gentleman—gently born, gentle-mannered, truthful, faithful, courteous to women, pure, brave, and fearless, unsparing of self, filled with deep religious feeling, bowing before God and womankind, but haughty in the presence of all others.”¹⁹¹ Socially, chivalry functions in three ways: to set knights apart from other estates; to determine the appropriate behavior for knights and a measurable scale for judging the efficacy of

¹⁸⁸ The Twilight Sad, “[10 Good Reasons for Modern Drugs]”, James Graham, Andy MacFarlane, Johnny Docherty, Brendan Smith, Sebastien Schultz (Fatcat Records, 2019). Lyrics used with permission.

¹⁸⁹ Richard Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 10. “We must avoid the notion of a rigid and singular code or detailed list of inalterable practices, set forth once and always and everywhere agreed upon and enacted. Rather, we will analyze a more nuanced social construct.”

¹⁹⁰ Geoffroi de Charny, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper, trans. Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 109.

¹⁹¹ G.W. Kitchin, *History of France*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 243.

their behavior and performance; and to create a reproduceable and reifiable value/exchange system that requires the participation of society to even exist. In simpler terms, a knight is only a knight if someone calls him a knight. A knight only stays a knight if he performs the role of knight successfully in public. A knight can only perform the role of knight successfully if his acts are viewed and determined to fall within the socially agreed upon framework of the chivalric code. “Medieval chivalry,” according to Nigel Saul, “is more an outlook than a doctrine, more a lifestyle than an explicit ethical code. It embraces both ideology and social practice.”¹⁹²

Stemming from an ever-evolving social and ideological code of chivalry comes an untenable social burden of chivalry.¹⁹³ This chapter examines the social burden of chivalry experienced by Lanval in Marie de France’s *lais* of the same name (ca. 1170-1215) and Lybeaus in the anonymously penned fourteenth-century romance *Lybeaus Desconus*. Lanval experiences the social burden of chivalry as a force so great it nearly crushes him until he rejects his chivalric identity and fealty to Arthur for love. Unlike Lanval who acknowledges chivalry’s social expectations and attempts to satisfy them, Lybeaus handles his social burden with spectacular ignorance placing all and sundry in far more danger than need be. Each knight experiences a shift in burden through supernatural intervention. Lanval receives freedom from burden through the patronage and love of a beautiful faery queen and his decision to disappear into her world. Lybeaus, on the other hand, is never freed from social burden, but a kiss from a dragon-cum-

¹⁹² Nigel Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁹³ Keen, *Chivalry*, 12 “From a very early stage we find the romantic authors habitually associating together certain qualities which they clearly regarded as the classic virtues of good knighthood: *prouesse*, *loyauté*, *largesse* (generosity), *courtoisie*, and *franchise* (the free and frank bearing that is visible testimony to the combination of good birth with virtue). Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France During the Hundred Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6. Taylor asserts that along with the ideals Keen mentions one needs to keep in mind that all of these qualities are moderated (in reference to their importance in varying situations). Nigel Saul adds to Keen’s list: “humane [qualities] of courtesy, and magnanimity, mercy and generosity.”

noble turns him from a brash and boorish burden-denying savage into a socially responsible neophyte knight far more prepared to navigate the courtly expectations of chivalric behavior. Lybeaus and Lanval reveal that the social burden of chivalry can only be removed with supernatural intervention and a retreat from chivalric society. Lanval chooses to remove himself from society's gaze while Lybeaus chooses to meet society's gaze with newfound humility and nobility.

In addition to *lais* and romance this chapter uses Ramon Llull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry* (1220) and Geoffroi de Charny's *The Book of Chivalry* (ca. 1350), contemporary chivalric manuals of *Lanval* and *Lybeaus Desconus*, to contextualize the decisions and actions of the titular characters and others in their respective texts. Knight turned scholar and evangelist, Ramon Llull's chivalric manual is often touted as "the classic theoretical manual . . . at the core of our understanding of medieval knighthood."¹⁹⁴ Noel Fallows in his "Introduction" states: "[Llull's] agenda . . . is nothing less than total reform of the Order of Chivalry where knights are expected to regulate not only the world around them but also to look inward and regulate themselves."¹⁹⁵ Llull's manual is both didactic and prescriptive, offering inspiration, teaching, and caution for the individual knight and the Order of Chivalry as a whole. Consequential to its popularity and influence, *Book of the Order of Chivalry* also creates a foundation for socially informed criticism of the Order of Chivalry. Considered an "ideal" knight, Geoffroi de Charny

¹⁹⁴ Noel Fallows, "Introduction" in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 1. Emphasis mine. For more on *L'Ordene's* influence on medieval and modern society see Amy M. Austin and Mark D. Johnston, eds., *A Companion to Ramon Llull and Llullism*, trans. Austin, Ibarz, and Johnston (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2018) where the editors describe the impetus of their volume a desire to "describe synthetically or analyze in detail major examples of its cultivation within the philosophical, religious, and literary cultures of the Renaissance, early modern, and modern eras, so that students of those periods can appreciate the diverse manifestations of Llull's work and thought from the late Middle Ages through the Enlightenment" (VII).

¹⁹⁵ Fallows, 3.

writes *The Book of Chivalry* “to examine the various conditions of men-at-arms.” He considers the category of knights who are worthy of praise to be “physically strong and skillful (agile) . . . conduct themselves properly and pleasantly . . . gentle, courteous and well-mannered toward others, who have no desire to engage in any evil undertaking . . . eager to perform deeds of arms [and] will usually win their contest or be in the running for the prize” (85, 87). Geoffroi’s manual eschews much of the religious symbolism and vernacular present in Lull’s. Instead, *The Book of Chivalry* offers a practical assessment of the physical and social behavior expected of the Chivalric Order and blankets these expectations with an assumption of heavenly approval. Geoffroi peppers his manual with social cues like “[Y]ou should love, value, praise, and honor all those whom God by his grace has granted several good days on the battlefield” making reference to Christ’s involvement in the Order of Chivalry, but tempers the religious fervor by circling back to the social obligations of chivalry: “for it is from good battles that great honors arise and are increased . . .” (50. 19-20, 22-3). Because the social burden of chivalry evolves and shifts alongside the socially reified expectations of society both manuals help to contextualize changing perceptions of what constitutes chivalric success and highlight the facets of the chivalric code that remain influential and important through the centuries.

Romance and *lais*— a short form poem of 600-1,000 lines usually meant to be sung and containing references to the supernatural or Celtic faery world—often temper chivalric tales of physical prowess and social acclaim with passing invocations of Christ and Mary. Like Lull and Geoffroi’s manuals the level of religious engagement varies and shifts depending on requests by patrons and authorial intention. Marie de France’s *lais Lanval* focuses primarily on chivalry’s social expectations as it examines Lanval’s struggle for acceptance in Arthur’s court. Arthur’s neglect of his own chivalric duties influences the Round Table knights in his service and Lanval

finds himself a social outcast. The social burden of chivalry settles upon Lanval as he wrestles with his desire to fit into Arthur's Order of Chivalry and his rejection therein. Lanval's predicament reveals his, and ostensibly knights like him, limited options when trying to rid themselves of their social burden: He can return to his home country and explain his failure to family, friends, and court. He can challenge his treatment in Arthur's court; he can find another patron and swear his fealty to them, or he can retire from chivalric service. None of these options completely remove social burden. Returning home without achieving notoriety in Arthur's ranks humiliates the knight and by proxy his family. Challenging ostracizing and ignoble treatment by Arthur and his retinue is a risky proposition and tiptoes into the realms of dishonor. Finding another patron still requires an exemplary chivalric performance—the venue changes but the social expectations remain. Finally, retiring from chivalric service is tantamount to an admission of failure, perhaps the most socially burdensome outcome a knight can face. Lanval manages to sluff off the weight that trammels him by the supernatural intervention from the faery-world—an option not readily available to most knights. He succeeds in finding an alternative patron, illuminating the egregious social abuses present in Arthur's court, and removing himself from the piercing gaze of Arthur's court through his devotion and fealty to a faery queen. The text of Lanval reveals the insidiously permanent nature of social burden: a knight may change patrons, places, and performances but without a supernatural intervention his burden stubbornly remains.

Lanval's repudiation from the Order of Chivalry begins with Arthur's poor chivalric performance. Ramon Llull's chivalric manual attempts to circumvent experiences like Lanval's by speaking directly to kings about their obligation within the Order of Chivalry. The best kings, according to Llull are former knights who can "uphold the Order of Chivalry [because] according to the dignity of his office the knight is more worthy of ruling the people than anyone

else . . . he has nobility of heart and . . . is slower than other men to be inclined to malfeasance, deceit and evil deeds” (45-6). Arthur, a former knight himself, should fall neatly into Lull’s idealized description of kingship. In addition, Arthur should be at least aware of the burdensome load borne by knights as they navigate chivalric society’s judgmental gaze. Wace’s *Roman de Brut*, written around 1150, describes fifteen-year-old knight Arthur on his coronation day as “a stout knight . . . a passing crafty captain . . . skill and courage were his servants at need: and large of his giving. He was one of Love’s lovers; a lover also of glory . . . He ordained the courtesies of courts, and observed high state in a very splendid fashion.”¹⁹⁶ Arthur, according to Wace, epitomizes the social obligations of the chivalric code and substantiates Lull’s thesis about knights making excellent kings finding that “So long as he lived and reigned he stood head and shoulders above all princes of the earth, both for courtesy and prowess, as for valour and liberality” (44). In addition to military strategy, diplomacy, legacy creation, wealth accumulation, flawless leadership, devotion to God, and fidelity to Guinevere, Arthur must continue to model the social behavior he mastered as a young knight: “craft;” “skill and courage;” “lover of glory.” Most importantly: this behavior must be witnessed and worthy of recording.¹⁹⁷ According to Lull and affirmed by Wace, Arthur’s court should have been the seat of chivalry where foreign knights looking for mentorship and experience found myriad opportunities. Demonstrating the fragility of the chivalric code, foreign knight Lanval finds Arthur’s court and his chivalric leadership to be anything but exemplary prompting Lanval’s exposure to the social burden of chivalry.

¹⁹⁶ Wace, *Roman de Brut* in *Arthurian Chronicles* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 1996), 43.

¹⁹⁷ Wace recounts Arthur’s social reputation and the importance of verifiable visibility by all estates: “”He was a very virtuous knight, right worthy of praise, whose fame was much in the mouths of men” (43).

The son of a king sent to apprentice under Arthur and his world-famous Knights of the Round Table, Lanval comes from a noble family tree.¹⁹⁸ According to the social codes of chivalry often depicted in chivalric manuals, romances, and histories Lanval holds all of the cards for success in his hands: He has “valor . . . generosity . . . beauty . . . prowess . . . [and] [h]e was a king’s son” (163.21-2; 27).¹⁹⁹ Wace describes foreign knights’ experience with Arthur’s social chivalry in lavish detail:

To those stranger knights . . . the king gave armour and destrier and golden ornaments . . . Arthur divided amongst them freely of his wealth. He granted lordship and delights, greyhound and brachet, furred gown and raiment, beaker and hanap, sendal and signet, bhaut and mantle, lance and sword and quivers of sharp barbed arrows. He bestowed harness and buckler and weapons featly fashioned by the smith. He gave largesse . . . of palfreys and hackneys, of chargers with saddles thereon. . . (70).

Unfortunately for the young knight in Marie’s tale, the King Arthur Lanval encounters is nothing like the regent Wace describes. Arthur disregards Lanval completely: “To the members of the Round Table . . . he shared out wives and land/ among all except Lanval, whom he does not remember (163. 15,17-19).²⁰⁰ None of the other knights or attending courtiers remind Arthur to reward Lanval because “a great many people envied him;/ many a one pretended to love him” (163. 23-4).²⁰¹ Finally the narrator reveals that the social elite surrounding Lanval and filling Arthur’s court “wouldn’t have complained for a moment/ if something bad had befallen the knight” (163. 25-6).²⁰² Forgotten by Arthur; backstabbed by his fellow knights; rejected by chivalric society Lanval struggles to find his footing within the Order of Chivalry.

¹⁹⁸ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. Claire M. Walters (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2018) 163.3. Lanval’s narrator calls him “a very noble vassal”/ “*mut gentil vassal.*”

¹⁹⁹ “*valor . . . largesse . . . beauté . . . pruesce . . . [et] [f]iz a rei fu de haut parage.*”

²⁰⁰ “*A ceus de la table runde . . . Femmes e tere departi/ Par tut, fors un ki l’ot servi*” (162.15, 17-18)

²⁰¹ “*L’envioent tut li plusur;/ Tel li mustra semblant d’amur*” (162. 23-4).

²⁰² “*Tel li mustra semblant d’amur,/ Si al chevalier mesavenist,/ Ja une feiz ne l’en pleinsist*” (162. 25-6).

Lanval's rejection by omission causes depression, social isolation, and an eventual need to remove himself from society. His alterity as a foreigner renders him "sorrowful and anxious" and completely disenchanted (164. 34).²⁰³ The narrator offers an aside in an effort to validate Lanval's depressive state: "Lords, do not wonder:/ a foreign man without support/ is very sorrowful in another land" (165. 35-7).²⁰⁴ David William Cohen cautions that "interest and power run through the entire topography of 'forgetting' and that as 'the forgetting' is processed an "enlarged and refocused alterity" occurs for the person once rejected by omission."²⁰⁵ Arthur's forgetting to dispense his customary largesse to only Lanval implies a power-move or special interest maneuver on the king's part. Lanval's stellar chivalric performance should delight and further inflate the Round Table reputation—which in turn should inflate Arthur's reputation. The jealousy of Arthur's court reveals the insidious fragility of the chivalric structure. A knight can possess valor, wealth, beauty, and nobility but fail to find a favorable gaze from society. If the court's interests are not piqued, they will exercise their power to reject a knight. This is Lanval's experience and as such he becomes burdened with the task of creating his "enlarged" and "refocused" alterity. He must become something other than a knight of the Round Table.

Lanval's first step towards shedding his chivalric burden and creating a new identity involves location: He abandons Arthur's court in favor of the countryside. The countryside offers refuge and protection from the perils of Arthur's court for Lanval. The countryside functions outside of Arthurian courtly rule, even if it is part of Arthur's kingdom, and as such offers

²⁰³ "*Mut est dolent e mut pensis*" (164.37).

²⁰⁴ 164. 35-7). "*Seignurs, ne vos esmerveillez:/ Hume estrange descunseillez/ Mut est dolent en autre tere.*"

²⁰⁵ David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), xxiv.

ambiguous boundaries and myriad opportunities for the disheartened knight.²⁰⁶ After reaching a stream Lanval makes the second in a series of decisions destined to rid him of chivalric burden and identity. He walks away from one of his main chivalric signifiers: his destrier or war horse. Marie writes that “He unsaddles it [the horse] and goes off;/ he lets it roll around in the middle of the meadow 165.47-8).”²⁰⁷ An image of the mounted warrior typifies chivalric imagery; sets him apart from other soldiers and members of society, and helps justify the intrusive and judgmental gaze directed his way. Lull equates a knight’s possession of a warhorse with nobility drawing a simple 1:1 inference: the noblest beast for the noblest man.²⁰⁸ Conversely the dismount and unsaddling of the horse destabilizes Lanval’s commitment to his chivalric identity and social perceptions of his nobility and chivalric worth.²⁰⁹ He reclines in the meadow contemplating his fate while his most valuable equine asset rolls about in the grass unfettered.²¹⁰ As Lanval sets his destrier free he severs the bond between knight and horse. With this bond severed he turns his back on the “selfhood” that requires the optics and image of him astride the horse in order to solidify his status as chivalrous knight and opens himself up to the opportunities presented by the

²⁰⁶ Albrecht Classen and Christopher R. Clason, eds. *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: The Spatial Turn in Premodern Studies* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012). For more on the significance of rural spaces in medieval literature see Albrecht Classen’s “Introduction” where he finds “Marie voiced criticism of the court at large, ignored urban settings altogether, and presented, quite regularly, the forest or countryside as an almost ideal refuge from the dangers involved with life at court . . .” (39).

²⁰⁷ “*Il le descengle, so s’en vait;/ En mi le pre vuiltrer le lait*” (164. 47-8).

²⁰⁸ 40. 3. “Among all the beasts, the finest, swiftest and most capable of enduring the most amount of work, and the most suitable for serving man was sought out; and since the horse [cavall] is the noblest beast and the most suitable for serving man, thus of all the beasts the horse was chosen . . .”

²⁰⁹ For more on the medieval military uses of horses in Western Europe and beyond see: Andrew Ayton, “Arms, Armour, and Horses,” in *Medieval Warfare*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 186.

²¹⁰ Ayton, 191. By the late twelfth century/early thirteenth century the scarcity of suitable warhorses to breed in England created structured “programmes of warhorse acquisition and breeding” with horses being imported from “Lombardy, and the Low Country” by the late thirteenth century. Only stallions were used as warhorses because of their aggression, stamina, mobility, and “noble-bearing.” Marie, 165. 48- 50: “[H]e lets it [the horse] roll around in the middle of the meadow./ He folded the end of his mantle/ and lay down with it under his head . . .” “*En mi le pre vuiltrer le lait./ Le pan de sun mantel plia/ Dersuz sun chief puis le cucha*” (164. 48-50).

countryside. While completely counter to social expectations Lanval now frees himself from chivalry's social burdens.

Patronage weighs heavy on Lanval's mind as he lies by the stream. As one of the social expectations of chivalry withheld from him by Arthur, Lanval's lack of financial support places him in a "difficult situation" (165.51).²¹¹ Patronage, according to June Hall McCash, reinforces "an asymmetry of power [and] socially, patronage affirmed the need for humans to work together to accomplish, dimly, what God could do alone."²¹² If interest and power are the prevailing forces behind Arthur's convenient "forgetting" of Lanval in his patronage obligations, then the asymmetrical power relationship inherent in the patronage system renders Lanval powerless and outside of the creative force present in the patronage relationship. He cannot perform chivalry; he cannot create chivalric cache or reputation therefore he must create something new. Without access to funds and rejection from courtly society Lanval faces a precarious future in Christendom.

While Lanval contemplates his precariousness two girls approach him "richly dressed;" "tightly laced" in clothing of aristocratic purple while he lays staring at the sky (165.53-61).²¹³ They deliver a message that their lady wishes to see him. Lanval goes with the girls without a second thought, leaving his horse behind. Inside the decadently appointed tent of the lady whose beauty "surpassed . . . the lily and the new rose/ when they appear in summertime" Lanval hears a solution to his patronage woes (167.95-6).²¹⁴ In a reversal of Lanval's situation within Arthur's

²¹¹ 165.51. "Mut est pensis pur sa mesaise . . ." (164.51).

²¹² June Hall McCash, "The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women: An Overview," in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996,) xiv.

²¹³ "Vestues ierent richement,/ Lacie[es] mut estreiment/ En deus blians de purpre bis . . ." (164. 57-9).
"La u il gist en teu manière,/ Garda aval lez la riviere,/ Vit venir deus dameiseles . . ." (55-56).

²¹⁴ "Flur de lis, rose nuvele,/ Quant ele pert al tens d'esté,/ Trespassot ele de beauté" (166. 94-6).

court the lady explains that she has “come from afar to look for” Lanval. Outside of the strictures of Arthur’s court the patron seeks out the foreign knight rather than the foreign knight seeking out the patron. The mysterious lady’s offer guarantees *largesse* and favor for Lanval where he receives neither in service of Arthur. She offers him her love, her body, and a guarantee that he “will never again want for anything” in exchange for “his secrecy” (169.133, 145).²¹⁵ Amy Vines contextualizes female patronage explaining “in order for the patronage system to be successful, men must both recognize and value the counsel and support of the women who seek to advise them.”²¹⁶ Additionally, these men must acknowledge that the patronage system functions as a closed system: for sponsorship to continue the sponsored knight must “enact in their own chivalric career” the lessons they learn from their female sponsor.²¹⁷ In Lanval’s case he both recognizes and values his otherworldly lady’s patronage. He pledges fealty to her, promising “I will do what you command;/ for you I will give up everyone” (169. 127-8).²¹⁸ More difficult, however, is her caution to keep the terms of their patronage relationship a secret. Lanval wishes to never leave her side—a simple way to keep their relationship confidential— but in doing so he would fail to replicate the lessons of generosity her patronage provides. He must return to Arthur’s court and place himself under the scrutiny of chivalric society once again.

Just as Lanval’s rejection of his horse signified his rejection of chivalric norms, the return of his horse signifies the start of his “refocused alterity” potentially free of the social burden of chivalry.²¹⁹ Redressed in “rich clothes” astride a horse saddled and cared for by his patron’s staff

²¹⁵ “*S’amur e sun cors li otreie . . . Ne vos descobrez a nul humme!*” (168. 133, 145).

²¹⁶ Amy N. Vines, *Women’s Power in Late Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 115.

²¹⁷ Vines, 115.

²¹⁸ “*Jeo frai voz comandemenz;/ Pur vos guerpirai tutes genz*” (168. 127-8).

²¹⁹ “Refocused alterity” refers to the David Cohen quote on page 7 of this chapter where Cohen explains that one consequence of forgetting is a “refocused and enlarged” alterity for the person forgotten.

Lanval faces the first test of his oath. He must replicate his lady's generosity without divulging the source of his fortune's reversal. Unlike Arthur, whose *largesse* at the beginning of the *lais* demonstrates capriciousness and an inherent need to perpetuate jealousy and social burden within his ranks as he deals out women, land, and exotic animals—all items with limited supply—Lanval distributes useful commodities regardless of estate. Modeling his *largesse* on his faery patron's he "gave rich gifts . . . ransomed prisoners . . . clothed minstrels . . . there was no stranger or dear friend/ to whom Lanval would not give" (173. 209-11, 213-15).²²⁰ Piotr Spyra asserts that Lanval's *largesse* "usurps the regal prerogatives of Arthur" that he, in effect, acts "like a king without being one . . . which is how the narrative communicates that [Arthur's] court is politically indolent and defective."²²¹ While there is veracity to Spyra's assertions, social burden pushes the intention behind Lanval's distribution of wealth further than just signposting Arthurian court corruption: Arthur's actions burden Lanval to the point of destitution and despondency. Because of this despondency he slips silently away to the outlying areas of Arthur's kingdom and out of the eye of society. Now, freed as he is from his social burden due to his lady's patronage and his new allegiance to her, Lanval effectively goads the king by his open-handedness and egalitarian embodiment of his patron's *largesse*. In acts designed to attract attention, Lanval defies socially reified forms of Arthurian chivalry even as he pantomimes them. Instead of other chivalric knights receiving gifts and grants, Lanval blesses the foreigner, the traveler, and the outcast continuing his lady's form of patronage. He demonstrates his freedom from the social burden of chivalry by freely giving.

²²⁰ "Lanval donout les riches duns . . . aquitout les prisuns . . . vesteit les juleurs . . . N'I ot estrange ne privé/ A ki Lanval nen ust done" (172. 209-11, 213-14).

²²¹ Piotr Spyra, *The Liminality of Fairies: Reading in Late Medieval English* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 202.

Lanval's tactics succeed in catching the attention of courtly society and reveal the strategic neglect perpetuated by Arthur's retinue. Gawain and Yvain, along with thirty other knights celebrate the feast of St. John in an orchard below Guinevere's tower. Gawain addresses the courtly cadre, lamenting: "we did wrong/ by our companion Lanval . . . when we did not bring him with us" (175. 229-30, 233).²²² His lament is optic in its origin rather than the result of any kind of chivalric compunction. Gawain notes Lanval's generosity and courteousness and equates these chivalric characteristics to Lanval's family fortune.²²³ Gawain, Yvain and the thirty other knights in attendance turn *en masse* to find Lanval. Successfully collecting Lanval, the knights return prompting Guinevere to also see the knight in a new socially-resplendent light. She and thirty of her ladies head down from her tower and into the orchard.

Set upon by upwards of sixty members of a chivalric social system previously inclined to dismiss him, Lanval "goes off by himself" and thinks of his patron and love (175. 253).²²⁴ Guinevere seeks him out and attempts her own form of patronage albeit one reliant only on a poorly delineated promise of "all my love" and a self-aggrandizing assessment: "you should be delighted with me" (175. 265, 268).²²⁵ Freedom from the social burden of chivalry, alternative patronage, and the agency provided by his "reformed alterity" give Lanval the confidence to challenge Arthurian forms of chivalric *largesse*. He gets the attention of Arthur's knights and his wife and rather than suffer their rejection once more Lanval rejects them. His rejection of Arthur's wife, retinue, and social structure, however, causes the reintroduction of social burden

²²² "[N]us feimes mal/ De nostre cumpainum Lanval . . . Que od nus ne l'avum [a]mené" (174. 230-1, 234).

²²³ "[W]ho is so rich and courteous/ and whose father is a rich king." "Que tant est larges e curteis,/ E sis peres est riches, reis" (174. 232-3).

²²⁴ "Lanval s'en vait une part" (174. 254).

²²⁵ "Et mut cheri e mut amé" (174. 265). "Mut devez ester lié de mei" (174. 268).

to the hapless knight. Guinevere's reaction to Lanval's rejection signals the renewal of his burden.

Guinevere's attraction to Lanval clearly demonstrates the evolutionary qualities inherent in chivalry's social codes. Guinevere and the Round Table knights define and redefine social worth not so much by *what* they see, but by *how* what they see benefits them. Prior to finding his new patron Lanval still practiced generosity and a mastery of chivalrous expectations. The addition of freedom from the social burden of chivalry allows Lanval to increase his generosity with a level of confidence heretofore reserved for kings. Guinevere and Arthur's knights find this attractive and a lifetime of reifiable social cache mistakenly convinces them that they will be just as attractive to Lanval as they are to Arthur. Once her advances are spurned, Guinevere reapplies the social pressure. She attacks Lanval's masculinity, prowess, and religious devotion accusing him of homosexuality, pederasty, cowardice, and heresy.²²⁶ Within her social circle, Guinevere creates truth. Her threat moves beyond socially humiliating Lanval: With Lanval's rejection of her comes the removal of his potential social currency for Guinevere and by proxy her court; lacking value and finding no social value within her or her station—Lanval becomes a liability that must be removed. Lanval, who now thrives outside of Arthurian models of social chivalry which Guinevere replicates, cannot coexist with the royal family and their retinue. Lanval must be removed from the gaze of society lest his outsider brand of chivalry influences others to reject the Arthurian model. In order to destroy the potential positive optics Lanval's unburdened existence demonstrates Guinevere must systematically deconstruct the knight through the

²²⁶ “[P]eople have often told me/ that you have no desire for women/ You have shapely young men/ and take your pleasure with them. Base coward, infamous wretch,/ My lord is greatly harmed/ by having allowed you near him;/ I believe that he will lose God by it!” “*Vuz n’amez gueres cel delit./ Asez le m’ad hummed it sovent/ Que des femmez n’avez talent. Vallez avez bien afeitiez;/ Ensemble od eus vos deduiez*” (176. 279-83).

application of untenable burden. Therefore, along with moral and social accusations of turpitude Guinevere alleges that Lanval's continued existence within the social structure of chivalry endangers the very soul of the king stating "[M]y lord is greatly harmed/ by allowing you near him;/ I believe that he will lose God by it!" (177. 284-6).²²⁷ If Lanval's existence soils the king, all are soiled.²²⁸ In the face of Guinevere's social condemnation Lanval breaks the oath sworn to his faery patron and bends once more beneath the social burden Arthurian forms of chivalry produce.

Lanval's faery patron offers a counter-structure to Arthurian models of social chivalry including her insistence on secrecy. Where Arthur's court and its ranks of knights resplendent in chivalric reputation thrive and require public spectacle and the constant gaze of the public, the faery patron's court exists outside of public view—in fact, outside of even the textual margins since it is never described by the narrator. She cloaks her queendom in secrecy, requiring only Lanval's singular devotion in exchange for her unflagging support. Guinevere's indictment of his character forces a rash reaction from Lanval. In response to Guinevere's contention that Lanval's behavior damns Arthur by proxy Lanval's response reveals exactly how far outside of the social boundaries of chivalry he has stepped. He assumes the role of the heretic claiming devotion to and salvation by someone other than Christ: "I love and am the beloved of/ one who should be valued more highly / than all the women I know" (177. 293-5).²²⁹ Not only does Lanval no

²²⁷ "*Viliens cüarz, mauvais failliz,/ Mut est mi sires maubaillez/ Que pres de lui vus ad suffer!*" (176. 284-6).

²²⁸ Lull affirms Guinevere's "guilt by association" premise in his section "On the Office That Pertains to the Knight" stating "The king or prince who unmake the Order of Chivalry itself not only unmake himself as a knight, but also the knights who are subordinate to him who, because of the bad example set by their lord and so that they will be loved by him and follow his evil ways, do what does not pertain to Chivalry or its Order. And thus, malfeasant princes are not only contrary in themselves to the Order of Chivalry, but also in their vassals in whom they unmake the Order of Chivalry" (48.14).

²²⁹ "*Mes jo aim, si suis amis/ Cele ke deit aver le pris/ Sur tutes celes que jeo sais*" (176. 294-6).

longer serve God as required by the Order of Chivalry, the entity he claims to serve is both unknown and threatening to Guinevere's reputation. Lanval's upended version of Song of Solomon 6:3 where the bride of Christ vows "I to my beloved, and my beloved to me" bodes poorly for the social structure of Christendom for it threatens the protective measures a unified understanding of heaven's support of the Order of Chivalry bring.²³⁰ Lanval forays with scandalous heresy, but quickly accelerates to acerbic specificity: "[And] any one of the girls who serve her,/ even the very poorest maid,/ is worth more than you . . . in body, face, and beauty" (177. 298-31).²³¹ He adds one final comparison only this time to the social aspects Guinevere holds so dear, commenting that his Lady supersedes her "in manners and in goodness" (177. 302).²³² In his effort to throw off the social burden of chivalry applied by Guinevere, Lanval inadvertently creates a far more burdensome predicament: a trial for his life in Arthur's court and the ire of his faery patron.²³³

Alone in his lodgings Lanval realizes the damage wrought by his reapplication of social burden. Once again, he feels "anxious and distraught" like he did when Arthur forgot him. He "calls on his beloved over and over" but she does not come. He faints; he laments; he sighs; he supplicates himself calling out for mercy a hundred times.²³⁴ True to her word, his queen refuses

²³⁰ *Douay-Rheims*.

²³¹ "Tute la plus povre meschine,/ Vaut meuz de vus . . . De cors, de vis e de beauté . . ." (176. 300-02).

²³² "D'enseignement e de bunté." (176. 303).

²³³ After Lanval's rejection Guinevere twists the story of Lanval's rejection accusing him of propositioning her and then insulting her when she spurned his advances. In his anger Arthur "swore his oath . . . if Lanval cannot defend himself in court,/ he will have him burnt or hanged" (179. 326-28). "Juré en ad sun serment . . . S'il ne s'en peot en curt defender,/ Il le ferrat arder u pendre" (178. 327-29).

²³⁴ 179. 338-43. "[H]e was anxious and distraught;/ he calls on his beloved over and over,/ but it did him no good at all./ He lamented and sighed,/ He fainted repeatedly;/ then a hundred times he begs her to have mercy . . ." "Pensis esteit e anguissus;/ S'amie apele mut sovent,/ Mes ceo ne li valut neent./ Il se pleigneit e suspirot,/ D'ures en autres se pasmot;/ Puis li crie cent feiz merci . . ." (178. 339-44).

his call. Once again, Lanval is alone but this time he is doubly burdened: castigated and accused by Arthur; rejected and punished by his faery lover and patron.

In court Lanval subjects himself to Arthur's place of social and courtly preeminence. He tells Arthur that he will acquiesce to any decision Arthur makes regarding his life and reputation. Arthur's response to Lanval demonstrates the social burden of chivalry's heft. Even a king cannot escape burden's reach. Although Lanval creates an opportunity for Arthur to exercise his autonomy and social station by rendering an immediate verdict, the king chooses to send for his knights. He is "furious" with Lanval for the position in which Lanval places him and he wants his men to "say rightly what he should do . . . so that no one can blame him for it" (181. 31-83).²³⁵ Arthur fears the censorious gaze of his own people so much that he doubts the veracity of his decisions. Pavlac and Lott explain the powerful influence optics and the critical opinion of chivalric society: "Chivalry shaped the customs and habits that grew out of the image of what kind of person a knight was supposed to be. Laws did not enforce chivalry: social pressure and custom did."²³⁶ Even Arthur, in his capacity as law maker and judge, is hamstrung by the pressure of social burden. Arthur's solution requires Lanval to produce a guarantor and return to an expanded court where he will receive his sentence.

Gawain and his companions pledge themselves as guarantors for Lanval. It is not clear from the text if they do this because they believe his assertions that he serves a patron more beautiful and generous than Guinevere, or if his chivalrous behavior within the mechanism of the court room convinces them he is innocent of an affront to Arthur's lordship, or if they know about

²³⁵ "*Li reis fu mut vers li irez;/ Tuz ses hummes ad enveiez/ Pur dire dreit quei il en deit faire,/ [Que] [hum] ne li puis[se]a mal retraire*" (180. 382-85).

²³⁶ Brian A. Pavlac and Elizabeth S. Lott, "Chivalry," in *The Holy Roman Empire* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2019), 108.

Guinevere's ability to twist the truth of a situation in her favor, or if they simply wish to acquire Lanval and his previously observed endless amount of wealth. Whatever the reason, their guarantees are empty. Only the faery patron can act as Lanval's guarantor because his sentencing rests on her appearance and the socially confirmed opinion that she is, indeed, more beautiful than Guinevere. The court is divided and Lanval's fate hangs in the balance. The Count of Cornwall attempts to adjudicate the impasse by subpoenaing Lanval's lady: "[I]f his lady should come forward/ and it is true what he said about her . . . then he will certainly receive mercy" (185. 452-3, 455).²³⁷ Right at the determination of Lanval's fate two maidens ride into court and demand hospitality for an yet to arrive "lady." Arthur delays the trial while his court performs the *largesse* requested by strangers—albeit beautiful ones—ironically highlighting the lack of *largesse* Lanval received. Other women arrive preparing the way for the mysterious lady; time and again Lanval's trial, ostensibly a demonstration chivalry's social mores, is delayed. The spectacle of the courtroom replaces the spectacle of questing, tourneying, lavish spending, and feting under the watchful eye of a society ravenous for chivalric performance. After an extended buildup the narrator describes the faery patron's entrance.

Comprising seventy of *Lanval's* 645 lines of poetry, the faery patron's arrival offers in minute detail her physical characteristics and the impressive pageantry she performs on her path to collect Lanval. The maidens who precede her arrival seem to appear out of thin air already in Arthur's court, but the faery patron's procession begins on the outskirts. She must be seen and her beauty judged by peasants, merchants, commoners, and nobility alike. She moves slowly and deliberately; "there was no one in the town, great or small,/ not the old men nor the children,/

²³⁷ "E s'amie venist avant/ E ceo fust veir k'il en deist . . . De ceo avera il bien merci" (184. 453-4,56).

who did not go to look at her” (191. 575-7).²³⁸ Everyone who sees her, regardless of their social status, find her to be “the loveliest in the world/ of all the women there are” (191. 591-2).²³⁹ Just as Lanval challenges the Arthurian model of *largesse* and therefore the Arthurian model of chivalry, the faery patron challenges the Arthurian legal system and the social structure of chivalry the law bolsters. The court room scene in *Lanval* demonstrates the accuracy of Pavlac and Lott’s assertion that social pressure and custom enforce chivalry more so than laws. The charges against Lanval are specific: The king, and only the king, accuses Lanval of “wrongdoing;” the general consensus is that Arthur only pursues the charges because Lanval angered Guinevere; Lanval’s lady can act as a guarantor for him. The catch is that Lanval’s faery patron must also be evaluated by the court and determined to be more beautiful than Guinevere. All of the movements leading up to the sentencing of Lanval are legal and concrete parts of chivalric society. The acquittal of Lanval, however, must be determined by a subjective and socially constructed definition of “beauty.” Consequently, Lanval’s faery patron wisely creates a stir outside the court as well as inside the court. An agreement as to her superior beauty from across the entire social strata creates the social pressure necessary for Lanval’s acquittal. Even while Lanval struggles beneath the social burden of chivalry standing in Arthur’s court the optics of his faery patron’s entrance work to exonerate him. Freed from the charges of dishonoring Arthur, Lanval faces a decision: continue on as a member of the Round Table and accept the social burden of chivalry that is part-and-parcel of life in Arthur’s court, or reaffirm his fealty to his faery patron. A reprisal of their relationship, while free from burden, will require Lanval to reject his chivalric identity and exchange the human realm for the faery world. Abandoning all

²³⁸ “*Il n’ot al burc petit ne grant/ Ne li veillard ne li enfant/ Que ne l’alassent esgarder*”(190. 576-8).

²³⁹ “*Ceo ’st la plus bele del mund,/ De tutes celes ke i sunt*” (190. 592-3).

visual signifiers of his chivalric identity, he becomes unrecognizable to Arthur's court. He exchanges his warhorse for her palfrey; he sits behind her in the saddle as she directs his future. Rather than leading the charge against Arthur's enemies, Lanval clings to his lady's waist hurdling away from Arthur towards the unknown island of Avalon and burdenless obscurity. The introduction of the supernatural, in the form of a beautiful faery patron, allows Lanval to remove the social burden of chivalry and create "refocused alterity" where he moves from a forgotten Other to a beloved member of the Otherworld.

Where Lanval acknowledges and then intentionally removes his social burden of chivalry after his alignment with a faery patron and lover, Lybeaus does not. The titular character in *Lybeaus Desconus*, a mid-fourteenth-century romance sometimes attributed to Thomas Chestre, Lybeaus wends his way to Arthur's court and through his willful and wild self-regard circumvents the education process codified into the chivalric code by becoming a knight without any mentorship or education. Lybeaus ignores the connection between chivalry and the expectations of the society he serves, shirking his socially chivalric duties and focusing only on demonstrations of prowess as a means to win personal honor, glory, respect, and reputational value. The result of his single-minded and selfish application of the chivalric code is that he puts himself, his wards, the Lady Sounadyn, and any knights with whom he has contact into far more danger than necessary. In *Lanval* Arthur's "forgetting" of Lanval sends the knight on a journey that ultimately leads him to his faery patron and lover and sets in motion the "refocused alterity" that sheds both his burden and his identity as chivalric knight. In *Lybeaus Desconus* Arthur fast-tracks Lybeaus' knighthood, skipping all of the necessary mentorship described in manuals such as Geoffroi de Charny's *The Book of Chivalry*. Arthur's decisions regarding Lybeaus act in defiance of the chivalric code delineated in manuals both contemporary to *Lybeaus Desconus*

and written prior to the romance forcing those with whom Lybeaus comes into contact to shoulder the social burden of mentorship often at their own peril. Also like in *Lanval*, Lybeaus' interactions with the supernatural inform and off-set his social burden although they do not fully remove it. Maugrins the giant enacts a baptism scene ushering in Lybeaus' awareness of his social burden and setting him on the proper path to knighthood. The Lady Sounadyn removes the stigma of Lybeaus' illegitimacy, provides the young knight with wealth and land, but only succeeds in partially alleviating his social burden. *Lybeaus Desconus* ends with the knight in an unsettled space. His awareness of the social burden of chivalry awakens him to the knowledge of his failures, fragility, and tenuous place within chivalric society.

Lybeaus Desconus recounts the tale of a mysterious and devastatingly handsome stranger who comes to King Arthur's court desperate for inclusion into the Order of Chivalry.²⁴⁰ Of the eight extant *Lybeaus Desconus* manuscripts only MS Lambeth includes a subtitle mentioning Lybeaus's parentage: "A treytys of one Gyngelayne other wyse namyd by Kyng Arthure Lybeus Dysconeus that was bastard son to Sir Gaweyne."²⁴¹ The inference of the subtitle is that Lybeaus, regardless of his unclaimed bastard status, somehow possesses the inherent chivalric qualities of a knight like Gawain. Without proximity to his father or to Arthurian forms of chivalric court culture the reader is meant to believe that Lybeaus is somehow more worthy and more capable than other men due to Gawain's blood coursing through his veins. Nigel Saul explains the medieval love of lineage: "One widely held belief . . . was . . . a man's worth was inseparable

²⁴⁰ There are several different spellings of Lybeaus Desconus. For a complete list see: Eve Salisbury and James Weldon, eds. "Lybeaus Desconus: List of Names, Places, and Variant Spellings" in *TEAMS Middle English Texts*, (Robbins Library Digital Projects, 2013). Last accessed 21 September 2012. For the purposes of this chapter, I chose the variant Lybeaus Desconus.

²⁴¹ This chapter uses the Lambeth Palace, Manuscript 306. *Lybeaus Desconus*, in *TEAMS Middle English Texts*, eds. Eve Salisbury and James Weldon (Robbins Library Digital Projects: 2013). Last accessed 21 September 2021.

from that of his kin. His very being as honourable had been transmitted to him through the blood of his ancestors, themselves honourable men.”²⁴² However, Andreas (Capellanus) the Chaplain cautions against this bloodline inheritance logic in *The Art of Courtly Love (De arte honeste amandi)* (ca. 1184-6).²⁴³ In a dialogue between a man and a woman regarding the essence of nobility the man postulates “In the beginning the same nature created all men, and to this day they would have remained equal had not greatness of soul and worth of character commenced to set men apart . . .” (38). He expands on his nascent “nature versus nurture” theory finding “[O]ne gets his nobility from his ancient stock and his noble father and derives it as a sort of inheritance . . .the other gets his nobility only from himself . . . from the best qualities of his mind” (38). According to the man the second form of nobility, one earned and demonstrated through greatness of character, is far more desirable. Blood lines transfer only surface nobility while the learned represent virtuous, true nobility earned through strength of character. Lybeaus embodies the concept of nobility transference through parentage. When Arthur “sees” nobility in Lybeaus’s face perhaps what he sees are the features of his beloved and most trusted knight, Gawain. Medieval clerics like Andreas the Chaplain’s perspective that virtuous nobility is learned and earned while bloodline nobility is merely carnal plays out through the narrative of *Lybeaus Desconus* as the reader sees Lybeaus consistently act in a manner contrary to the social chivalric code while continually demonstrating physical prowess. *Lybeaus Desconus* is certainly not alone in its characterization of the clerical concerns of the mid to late fourteenth century.

²⁴² 172.

²⁴³ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960). For more on the proposed date of publication see page 21 of Parry’s “Introduction” where he discusses the marriage of King Bela III of Hungary’s wedding to Marguerite, daughter of King Louis as a marker for when *The Art of Courtly Love* was written. For more on *The Art of Courtly Love*’s influence love see pages 21-24 of the “Introduction.”

Dante's *Convivio* addresses blood inheritance with succinct chiasmus: "The stock does not make the individual noble, but the individuals ennoble the stock."²⁴⁴ Chaucer on the other hand reworks the "Loathly Lady" trope in his "The Wife of Bath's Tale" emphasizing through encomium: "For he [the knight in the tale] was bored of a gentil hous . . . And nel hymselfen do no gentil dedis, / Ne folwen his gentil auncestre that deed is, / He nys nat gentil, be he duc or erl."²⁴⁵ The noble house, according to both liturgical and secular texts, does not necessarily ennoble the man.

When Lybeaus appears in the king's court requesting a knighthood, he lacks even the barest provenance. Arthur dubs him "Lybeaus Desconus" or "The Fair Unknown" referencing both his *gentil* visage and his social invisibility. In an effort to assure the reader that the romance contains a story of chivalric growth into eventual acclaim, the narrator frames the tale with a description of the matured Lybeaus who has already "come of age" and established a reputation. The narrator calls Lybeaus: "a conquerour,/ Wise of witt and wight wereour/ And doughty man of dede" (4-6).²⁴⁶ Additionally the reader is told Lybeaus's real name: "Sir Gyngelayne" at the start, and that "Gotten he was of Sir Gaweyne,/ Under a forest syde" (7-9). The narrator

²⁴⁴ Dante Alighieri, *The Convivio (Lansing Translation)* (Digital Dante) <http://digitaldante.columbia.edu>. Last Accessed: 2 November 2021.

²⁴⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer* 3rd edition, general ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987). The Wife of Bath discusses this same clerical philosophy in her encomium of marriage but also women's agency and "authoritee." She uses a modification of the "loathly lady" trope but adds a discussion on the fragility of inheritable gentillesse versus education: "But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse/ As it descended out of old richesse,/ Than therefore sholden ye be gentil men,/ Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen." In her tale the loathly lady suggests that the rapist knight claims "gentillesse" due to inheritance when, really, he is savage. The real virtue comes from those who perform noble deeds publicly and privately: "Look who that is moost virtuous always,/ Pryvee and aprt, and moost entendeth ay/ To do the gentil dedes that he kan;/ Taake hym for the grettest gentil man." This clerical opinion however opposes biblical tradition of tracing one's bloodline to Christ as Guenievere does when she meets Galahad (Lancelot's illegitimate son). See the Old Testament prophecies linking the Son of God to King David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6 and the New Testament blood-line confirmation of Jesus' linkage to David: Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 15:15-16; Hebrews 1:5.

²⁴⁶ 4-6. Parallel translation: "a conqueror, intelligent and a skillful warrior and a man of valiant deeds."

immediately follows this revelation with another assurance of Lybeaus's socially chivalric worth: "A better knyght was never prophitable/ With Arthur at the Roun Table" (10-11). This rhetorical tactic by the narrator sets Lybeaus up to be viewed, socially, in the best light possible.

Lybeaus's beauty features prominently in the opening stanzas. He is considered "fayre of sight,/ Gentyll of body and of face bryght,/Bastard though he were" (13-15). The narrator uses Lybeaus's outward beauty to convince readers of his social acceptability, relying on normative assumptions that exist even into the twenty-first century: beauty on the outside somehow equates to good character.²⁴⁷ David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder examine the proclivity of human nature to assume: "If the 'external effect' led directly to a knowledge of the 'internal faculty' then those who inhabited bodies deemed 'outside the norm' proved most ripe for a scrutiny of their moral or intellectual content."²⁴⁸ The description of Lybeaus offers the antithesis of Mitchell and Snyder's finding. His physicality: fair, handsome, hale, and hearty places him inside the normative perceptions of beauty and therefore he avoids scrutiny of his moral and intellectual content by chivalric society. Lybeaus's mother, understandably jaded in her opinion of knights, goes to extraordinary lengths to keep Lybeaus away from chivalric society: "His moder hym kepte with hir myght/ That he shulde se no knyght/ I-armed in no maner" (16-18). Lybeaus has never seen a knight, never picked up a knight's weapon, and remains remarkably feral. He is so "full savage" that his mother keeps him close "for dred of wycke loose" or a wicked reputation.²⁴⁹ While his mother keeps him isolated, he avoids scrutiny, yet even his mother notes that his wildness may

²⁴⁷ For more on twenty-first century perceptions of outer beauty and inner character see: Naomi Wolf, *Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Patrizia Gentile, *Queen of the Maple Leaf: Beauty Contests and Settler Femininity*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2020).

²⁴⁸ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 59.

²⁴⁹ 22. Parallel translation.

be his downfall. Lybeaus has no opportunity to interact with chivalric society and although his mother's decisions are ostensibly well-intentioned, she sets her son up to bear the social burden of chivalry by providing him with very little opportunity to develop "greatness of soul and worth of character"—qualities indicative of earned nobility rather than bloodline inheritance.

Lybeaus's uncultivated character along with his hubristic desire for adventure and accolades make him a prime target for social burden.

His mother's best laid plans to shelter her son from what she sees as chivalry's corrupting forces fail. Out in the forest amusing himself, Lybeaus finds a slain knight, strips him of his armor and dons it.²⁵⁰ Traditional methods of armor acquisition include gifts from patrons, rewards for stellar performance in jousts and tournaments and compensation for chivalric service.²⁵¹ Ramon Llull suggests a squire wishing to become a knight be examined to find out if he can afford the gear associated with knighthood because "a squire who has no armour or does not possess sufficient wealth to be able to uphold Chivalry cannot be a knight" (15). Geoffroi de Charny outlines the acquisition of armor in his *Book of Chivalry*. One method of acquiring a horse and armor is to receive them as pay for services rendered in the name of chivalry: "[T]hey leave and go to . . . other lands where pay or other rewards can be earned, and there they stay and are provided with horses and armor is included in the pay and rewards they receive" (51. 8-11). Geoffroi also cautions against the wearing of armor without any of the chivalric skills armor signifies: "There might be some who would prefer to give the appearance of being a good man-at-arms rather than the reality, but no one . . . would doubt that when it comes to achieving

²⁵⁰ 34-39. "He fond a knyght there he lay,/ In armes stoute and gaye,/ Slayne and made ful tame./ He toke off that knyghtis wede;/ Hym sylffe therin well fayre can shrede,/ All in that bryght armour."

²⁵¹ Jean-Denis G.G. Lepage, *Medieval Armies and Weapons in Western Europe* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Incorporated, 2005).

something . . . in or out of armor, it is those who perform the greatest deeds . . . who are most honored” (102. 198-203). Lybeaus’s plundering of the dead knight underscores his immaturity and vanity: he equates the appearance of chivalric prowess with actual chivalric prowess. The trappings of knighthood without the “greatest deeds” render the wearer in direct opposition to the Order of Chivalry which Geoffroi classifies as an Order where “he who does the best is most worthy” (55. 28,9). Following his gauche acquisition of armor, Lybeaus heads off to Arthur’s court at Glastonbury.²⁵² Storming the court, he kneels down in front of Arthur, demonstrating that while he is savage about the practicalities of chivalry—like stealing the armor off of dead man—he holds within him an innate understanding of the respect associated with nobility.

From his place of supplication Lybeaus asks Arthur to immediately knight him. His request flies in the face of conventional knighting practices and ceremonies laid out in chivalric manuals and demonstrated in literature.²⁵³ By his own admission Lybeaus is both a “child” and “unkowthe.” He is young and ill-mannered, proving both with his plundering and impatience: “Lord, I pray thee nowthe, / With thi mery mouthe, / To graunte me anone right” (52-4). Yet, he instinctively knows how to supplicate and perform the socially acceptable motions of fealty and chivalry when in the presence of Arthur.

²⁵² The reader must participate in a bit of “willing suspension of disbelief” here because if Lybeaus had never seen a knight and his mother took great pains to disguise even the legacy associated with his name and his parentage, how would he know about Arthur, his court, where the court was located, or that Glastonbury is a thing?

²⁵³ Lull devotes several sections on the process through which a young squire becomes a knight. Among the developmental steps he outlines are: there needs to be an appropriate examiner to determine if the squire will be suitable for knighthood (III.1); does the squire “love and fear God . . . fear makes him avoid committing the misdeeds for which Chivalry receives dishonor . . . knighthood receives dishonor in the squire who receives it without honouring God” (III.2). The squire must also demonstrate the “nobility of courage” (III.3); “[I]t is appropriate that [the squire] be asked about his ways and habits, for if evil ways and bad habits expel bad knights from the Order” its important to find out early (III.11); “find out with what intention the squire wishes to be a knight (III.13); he should question and investigate a potential knight to “see if he has committed a wicked deed” (III.17) Geoffroi de Charny outlines the symbolic steps taken prior to knighting, these are similar to *L’Ordene’s* process of knighting wherein each article of clothing and armor has a spiritual connection and significance. According to Geoffroi those who follow the prescribed steps “are blessed by fortune” and “If anyone does the contrary [to these prescribed steps], it would have been better for him never to have been made a knight” (92. 57-8; 59-60).

This is the moment of truth for Arthur: the chivalric code, as well as chivalric social expectations, insist that prior to knighting a young man receive physical training, religious formation, and social apprenticing in the order of chivalry. Ramon Llull discusses the importance of a squire's age prior to knighthood in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*: "[I]f the squire who wishes to become a knight is too young, he cannot have learned the manners that pertain to the squire before he becomes a knight . . ." (57). Geoffroi de Charny outlines a path to knighthood that begins with a child's fixation on "talk of military deeds" and the child's close proximity to "men-at-arms," their weaponry, and their horses. He finds that "as they increase in years, so they increase in prowess and in skill." Once a squire is old enough to leave their apprenticeship they must "learn the true way to practice the military arts" through rigorous participation in jousting and tourneying until finally when they are ready "to achieve the highest honor in prowess" they "take up armed combat in war" (55-7). Initially Lybeaus' mother bars his access to men-at-arms' mentorship, but Arthur has the opportunity to instigate Lybeaus' apprenticeship and training. In doing so Arthur could alleviate the destructive ramifications of social burden displaced as Lybeaus rides roughshod all over Christendom continuing to conflate the trappings and title of knight with actual chivalry.

Instead of refusing, Arthur equates the boy's "seemly" features with his nobility, naming the lad "Lybeaus Disconus" or "The Fair Unknown" and immediately knight's the boy without interview, examination, or demonstration of skill (85-6).²⁵⁴ The whole process is quite antithetical to traditional knighting methodology. Llull cautions, using hyperbole seasoned with

²⁵⁴ "Kyng Arthur anone right/ Con make him a knight . . ." History and literature document multiple styles and traditions for dubbing, and like any ceremony existing throughout multiple centuries trends come and go. So, it is not the fact that Arthur does not go through the myriad secular and ecclesiastical steps laid out in the chivalric manuals that makes Lybeaus's knighting so controversial. The controversy and objection arise from Arthur's unwillingness to find out anything about the young boy before naming and dubbing him..

humor, about the human predisposition to equate beauty with nobility: “If the squire should be dubbed a knight because of fineness of features or a well-built, well-proportioned body, or because he . . . carries a mirror in his purse, you could make a knight of the fine son of a peasant farmer, or of a fine woman” (57.7). Mistaking handsomeness for virtue, nobility, and courage dishonors and scorns both the individual and the Order of Chivalry.²⁵⁵ Arthur justifies rejecting traditional knighting routes by Lybeaus’s outward appearance while at the same time acknowledging that Lybeaus is “to Yonge/ To do gode fyghtyng,/ Be ought that I can see” (103-5). Arthur does not ask what intentions lie beneath Lybeaus’s demand to be knighted, nor does he examine the boy as to what he knows about the social responsibilities of chivalry. The argument that Arthur is the king and can do what he likes notwithstanding, chivalric manuals clearly place the onus of screening knighthood candidates on the examiner. A knight examiner who does not present all of the physical, religious, and social expectations to the squire seeking knighthood is culpable for the “great burden of Chivalry and the great perils that await”²⁵⁶ Eve Salisbury insists that Arthur only “provisionally” accepts Lybeaus into the Order of Knighthood, stating twice in the opening paragraph of her article “Lybeaus Desconus: Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine” “the renamed young knight . . . is provisionally enfolded into a signifying system until he gains full recognition by the chivalric community.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ “[A]nd if you do so, you dishonor and scorn the antiquity of an honorable lineage and diminish to baseness the greater nobility that God has bestowed upon man than woman. And for such scorn and dishonor you debase and diminish the Order of Chivalry.”

²⁵⁶ Lull, 59-60. 14. Social expectation/peril: “[T]he knight should hesitate more before the vituperation of the people than before death . . .” Physical expectation/peril: “[S]hame must cause greater suffering to his courage than hunger, thirst, heat, cold or any other suffering or hardship to the body.” Religious expectation: 61.19 discusses all of the venal and mortal sins that the squire must avoid in order to be knighted; “The prideful, ill-mannered squire who speaks and dresses crudely, has a cruel heart, is avaricious, mendacious, disloyal, slothful, irascible, lustful, drunken, gluttonous or perjurious is not suited to the Order of Chivalry.”

²⁵⁷ Eve Salisbury, “Lybeaus Desconus: Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine.” *Arthuriana* 24, no. 1 (2014): 66-85. [doi:10.1353/art.2014.0017](https://doi.org/10.1353/art.2014.0017).

The narrative does not support the assertion that Arthur intentionally offers Lybeaus provisional knighthood. Nowhere in the text does Arthur state or even subtly imply that the boy must prove himself in order to be accepted as a knight. In fact, when Lybeaus's skill is questioned Arthur defends him shouting "Thou gettist none other knight/ By Him that bought me dere!" (218-19). By stating "none other knight" Arthur, in a bastardized form of *paralepsis*, solidifies the bastard's chivalric identity as knight. Arthur's stubborn prejudices toward Lybeaus' attractiveness coupled with Lybeaus's own heightened sense of self-worth and entitlement combine, creating the social burden of chivalry inherent in a knight without the education, substance, and social value to protect and sustain his reputation.

In addition to the unorthodox knighting ceremony, Lybeaus demands a boon from Arthur, who immediately assents. Lybeaus requests "The first fyghtinge that ye hadded/ That men will aske of thee" (98-9). Before supper's end a wealthy "mayde" and her dwarf attendant, Theodeley, arrive with a tale of kidnapping, imprisonment, and woe. The maid's lady (the Lady of Synadoun) is imprisoned and her maid Elyene begs Arthur to "sond hir a knight/ That is of wer wyse and wight/ To wynne hir with honoure" (163-5). Elyene specifically asks Arthur for a battle-tested, wise knight so that her lady may be rescued with honour. Lybeaus is neither battle tested, socially aware, or in possession of any chivalric wisdom. He may be canny and he may possess some innate understanding of noble hierarchies, but he has never swung a sword; he is dressed in plundered armor; he demonstrates foolhardiness by making demands of the king. In an unqualified demonstration of immaturity and coarseness Lybeaus springs up at the mention of the maid's request and in front of everyone present calls Arthur's honor into question: "I shall do that fight/ And wyn that lady with might, / If ye be trewe of worde" (169-71). Too savage to feel

a sense of chivalry's social burden or expectation, Lybeaus insists on holding Arthur to his promise even though he is untested and untrained.

Elyene voices what several of the seasoned knights in the dining hall cannot or dare not: Lybeaus is a ridiculous choice. Choosing him flies in the face of every codified bit of socially supported chivalric methodology. If every lad who was "fayre of face" could be knighted upon request and immediately tasked with martial service the institution of knighthood crumbles. She says knowledge of Arthur's decision to send her with a "witles and wylde" child will spread far and wide and as it does it will tarnish his chivalrically honorable reputation.²⁵⁸ She also mentions Perceval and Gawain's presence at court as well as others "abled in turment" (188-89). Perceval and Gawain have proven themselves in front of witnesses. Their prowess and honor have been socially rewarded with reputational value and it is now their social obligation to serve at the behest of the very society that delineates their worth. This is chivalry's social responsibility carried by lauded knights of the Round Table; in exchange each receives a place of social preeminence. Elyene, in her criticism of Arthur, points out that the king meddles with the chivalric system of exchange, in effect asking her to accept Lybeaus's chivalric worth on credit. Elyene's attendant, Theodeley, takes her perspective even deeper into the mercantile world of social exchange by monetizing Lybeaus's labor.²⁵⁹ He tells Arthur that Lybeaus, the feral child warrior, is "not worth a ferthinge" (195). By demanding and receiving his knighthood Lybeaus enters into the social contract levied between knights and their communities. Insisting upon boons without any experience and placing the King's reputational value at stake creates a social burden whether Lybeaus knows it or not. Lybeaus has two options: he can learn as he travels

²⁵⁸ "Thy worde shall sprynge wide:/ Forlorne is thy pryde/ And thi lose shentt,/ When thou wilt send a childe/ That is witles and wylde . . ." (181-85).

²⁵⁹ 193-4. "This childe to be weroure/ And to do suche labour/ Is not worthe a ferthinge . . ."

with Elyene and submit himself to the social order of chivalry even if his ignorance burdens him unduly, or he can continue to cavalierly disregard social expectations of chivalry and in doing so displace the burden of chivalry onto others. Lybeaus chooses the latter.²⁶⁰

Lybeaus's first opportunity to learn about the social order of chivalry comes when he meets Sir William Delaraunche at the Chapel Auntours. When Lybeaus comes face to face with Sir William he hears the specifics of the knight's challenge: Whoever rides in Sir William's territory must either fight him or surrender his weaponry.²⁶¹ With the more experienced knight in front of him, Lybeaus loses some of his bluster. Instead of immediately trying to unseat the knight, he tries some rudimentary chivalric diplomacy. First, he appeals to the knights' common position in Christendom: "For the love of Jhesus, / Lette us nowe passe here" (319-20). Lybeaus also invokes the service of a lady who is in peril: "We be fer from any frende/ And have wylde wey to wende, / I and this mayden in fere" (321-23). He appeals to the courtly aspects of Sir William's chivalric identity, even if he is not aware he does so. Sir William, however, performs the expected and socially chivalric role of the protector of his land. The same Code of Chivalry that should govern Lybeaus's actions governs Sir William's. When Geoffroi de Charny writes about "Conduct Toward Friends and Enemies" he does so for the benefit of all knights who wish to be "worthy of praise." Sir William falls within this category, as does Lybeaus. This paradoxical relationship between knights creates confusion over the application of violence and who, indeed, is the enemy:

There is a supreme rule of conduct required in these good men-at-arms . . . they should be humble among their friends, proud and bold against their foes, tender and merciful toward those who need assistance, cruel avengers against their enemies, pleasant and

²⁶⁰ One cannot help but find Arthur culpable in all of this. He seems intentionally oblivious to the part he plays in undermining the order of chivalry while concurrently inflating Lybeaus's sense of superiority.

²⁶¹ 315-17. "Whoso ridis here day or nyght/ He most nedys with me fight/ Or leven his arms here."

amiable with all others . . . Do not desire to take away another's honour, but above all else safeguard your own (129).

Sir William circumvents social burden brought about by paradoxical chivalry by offering Lybeaus a choice rather than attacking him at the outset: lay down his arms to pass through, or fight.²⁶²

Sir William realizes his social burden of chivalry created by the paradox of two knights of Christendom at odds with one another but not in enmity. If he allows Lybeaus through based on his shallow appeals to Jesus and women in distress Sir William does a disservice to his people, his title, and the chivalric code by shirking his duty. Instead, he chooses to put himself in danger, fighting any knight who refuses to disarm in order to pass through his lands. Lybeaus's refusal to lay down his weapons in order to peacefully escort Elyene and Theodeley through Sir William's lands places everyone in danger thus increasing his and Sir William's social burden of chivalry. Cognition does not predicate burden; social burden exists with or without Lybeaus's knowledge. Lybeaus doubly burdens Sir William, forcing the senior knight into a mentor role even as Lybeaus relentlessly hacks away at him.

Lybeaus appears to need very little martial instruction. Like his natural horseback riding skills, Lybeaus proves himself to be a natural fighter. The two men engage in combat within the bounds of chivalry, but only because Sir William sees to it that chivalric standards are maintained. He sets a specific time and place for the battle; and orchestrates the use of appropriate weaponry when horsed and unhorsed. While on horseback they use spears: "Lybeaus Disconus that tide/ Smote William under the syde/ With a spere felloune" (339-41). After

²⁶² 315-17. According to the conduct manuals like Geoffroi's, Sir William's preamble displays his unwillingness to consider Lybeaus an actual enemy. Knights deal with enemies swiftly, cruelly, and without prior conversation: 129. "[F]or the men of worth will tell you that you should not converse at any length nor hold speech with your enemies . . ."

Lybeaus unhorses Sir William the young knight continues to pursue battle astride his horse. Matthew Westminster gives an account of a tournament in 1274 between Edward I and the Count de Chalons. The unhorsing of the Count by Henry I, rather than signaling the end of the tournament, prompts the Count's men to attack and continue the fighting. Matthew of Westminster records the behavior by the French knights as "lawless and brutal."²⁶³ If he pursued knighthood through the proper channels: apprenticing, participating in jousts and then in tournaments, Lybeaus would understand that unhorsing William signaled an end to the *pas d'armes* and a victory for himself. Since he has no training, Lybeaus attempts a "lawless and brutal" attack on the horseless William. The older knight rises from the ground and tells Lybeaus: "Sir fyght on fote also, / Yff thou be a gentyll knight" (355-56). Far from "gentyll" Lybeaus obviously extends the skirmish: "Togeder con they dyngge/ And fauchones oute to flynge . . .Dyntis con they dyngge/ Through his shelde on high" (361-62, 64, 68). William's final lesson to Lybeaus is the socially and religiously chivalric expectation of mercy.²⁶⁴

Lybeaus soundly defeats Sir William but shows no sign of administering mercy. The narrative clearly points to Lybeaus's raw physical talent. A knight is so much more than the constant application of raw physicality however. Finally, William frustratedly invokes the name of Mary to get Lybeaus to stop his constant assault: "For the love of Mary, / On lyve now let me passe!" He adds "Hit were a grete vylonye/ To do a knight to dye" (381-85). Lybeaus has no idea that there are social codes when it comes to challenges and battles. He has never been taught. So

²⁶³ Matthew of Westminster, "La Petite Bataille de Chalons," in *The Medieval Tournament*, ed. R. Coltman Clephan (New York: Dover Publications, Incorporated, 1995), 16.

²⁶⁴ Lull on mercy: "For if the knight has no charity towards God and his fellow man, how can he love God, and how can he take pity on the helpless and be merciful to the vanquished who beg for mercy?" (72.6). Geoffroi on mercy: "Were they [knights] created to be cruel, without pity and without mercy? Indeed no!" (75.89-90).

eager was he to prove his skill to Arthur and the knights in the court that he failed to consider any of the social mores of his new role in society.²⁶⁵ Sir William is another Christian knight performing his social duty. There is no need for Lybeaus to kill him. Unconsciously perhaps at first and then definitely without his consent, Sir William has been burdened with the role of mentor—a role that arguably should belong to either Gawain: the lad’s father, or Arthur who decided to knight Lybeaus by virtue of his good looks.

Lybeaus’s identity as a knight cannot rest on Arthur’s attraction alone, he must build up a socially verifiable chivalric reputation. Geoffroi de Charny emphasizes the risky nature of knights “who have risen rapidly above others by good fortune, not merit, for this will not last: they can fall as quickly as they rise” (131). Lybeaus agrees to spare Sir William’s life if he will swear fealty; travel to Arthur’s court; and testify as to Lybeaus’s victory. Sir William cannot, in good faith, vouch for Lybeaus’s adherence to the social aspects chivalric code. He has an opportunity to speak of Lybeaus’s chivalric qualities on the road to Glastonbury, and only comments on Lybeaus’s martial skill: “To fell his fone in fight/ He nys nothings to leren” (424-25). Sir William’s refusal to comment about anything resembling the young man’s chivalric qualities of nobility, gentillesse, or honor speaks to the social burden Lybeaus’ ignorance reproduces for others. Lybeaus wants the kind of respect reserved for seasoned knights skilled in the martial and the social expectations of the chivalric code. He makes the older knight “knele thu downe/ and swere on my falchon . . .” an act of submissive defeat (393-94). Sir William is defeated, certainly, but the *pas d’armes* demonstrated how little Lybeaus understands about his

²⁶⁵ Lull, 72. 6, “A knight without charity cannot be without cruelty and ill will, and since cruelty and ill will do not befit the office of knighthood, therefore charity befits the knight. For if the knight has no charity towards God and his fellow man . . . how can he . . . be merciful to the vanquished who beg for mercy?” Geoffroi counsels the knight to model his actions after Christ. The knight is told to “Pray to Him for mercy: He will pardon you” (106). It stands to reason then that what the knight expects from Christ for his own soul should be modeled to others.

social obligations within the Order of Chivalry. Lawless, clueless, and unmerciful, Lybeaus demands more social capital than he has earned.

Further along the road to rescue the Lady of Synadoun, Lybeaus, Elyene and Theodeley (Elyene's companion) come across two giants who have taken a young maiden, Violet, captive. The giants, like Lybeaus, emerge from the "wild." They are savage, fierce, and spend their time on the borders of society.²⁶⁶ Also like Lybeaus they only venture towards civilization out of desire. In Lybeaus's case he desires knighthood and a boon, and Arthur reciprocates. Lybeaus's desire aids in his civilization; the giants' desire stands outside of the boundaries of civilization: they want a maiden to ravage. They kidnap and restrain Violet who cries out to Mary for deliverance.²⁶⁷ Lybeaus's civility and courteousness awakens, perhaps because of his newfound familiarity with the use of "Mary!" as an appeal. He knows he must protect the girl. He thinks to himself "To save this maiden from shame, / Hit were enpure enprice" (623-24). Neither the narrative nor the narrator indicates that the giants intend to rape Violet, yet Lybeaus immediately takes the situation into the realm where the physical price he will pay to rescue the girl is worth the exchange for her purity. Drawing on the optics of the situation as well as a body of cultural knowledge depicting giants as rapacious and lewd, Lybeaus psyches himself up for a battle with terrible odds.²⁶⁸ A battle he describes as "no childe game" (625-26). The "giants with the

²⁶⁶ 580-81; 591. Lybeaus, Elyene, and Theodeley stop for the night at a cabin in the woods ("In the grene greves/ Thei dight a loge of leves . . ." (580-81)). The giants are "halfe a myle" deeper into the woods (591).

²⁶⁷ 616-21. "Wayle-a-waye!/ That ever I shulde bide this daye/ With two devylles to sitt!/ Helpe me, Mary mylde,/ For love of thine childe,/ That I be nought forget!" When Lybeaus rides up to the giants the black giant has the "mayde i-clipped in his barme." This "clutching to his bosom" is the only physical contact the narrative provides. It is only through Lybeaus's lens that the giants intend to rape the maiden. The giants represent enough of a threat to the social order just by snatching the girl, so Lybeaus is certainly expected to and justified in his attack on the giants.

²⁶⁸ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, trans. Neil Wright, ed. Michael D. Reeve (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), 224-25. Geoffrey of Monmouth records the tale of Arthur, his steward Kaius, and his butler Beduerus's revenge on a giant from Spain who kidnapped Duke Hoelus' niece Helena and her nurse. Helena dies as the giant attempts to rape her and the enraged giant turns and rapes the elderly nurse. The giant also forces

maiden” vignette demonstrates the physical limitations of “blood-line inheritance.” Lybeaus possesses martial instinct that allows him victories over other knights, but these giants represent far more than just another challenge. The giants are an affront to civility and chivalry as they maraud and assault. Lybeaus has very little practice with either civility or chivalrousness, hailing as he does from the wilderness. Rather than a result of his “blood-line inheritance,” Lybeaus actually learns about a knight’s chivalric duty to risk his body in protection of a woman from Elyene. Her travel to Glastonbury to plead for a knight to rescue her Lady Synadoun exemplifies the importance of a knight’s service to a lady. Lybeaus commits himself to rescue the Lady Synadoun and realizes he must commit himself to the rescue of Violet as well.

When his socially chivalric responsibility dawns on him he contemplates the best way to fight two giants at once and save Violet. This conundrum with the giants advances his chivalric education. The trajectory of Lybeaus’s unconventional education manages to follow the route

the nurse to the same violation each night: “*Vt igitur illam, quae erat michi alter spiritus, altera uita, altera dulcedo iocunditatis, foedo coitu suo deturpare nequiuuit, detestanda uenere succensus michi inuitae . . . uim ey uiolentiam ingressit. Fuge, dilecte mi, fuge, ne si more suo mecum coiturus aduenerit te hoc modo repertum miserabili caede dilaniet.*” Translated: “When he could not inflict his foul desires on her . . . maddened by vile lust, he raped me, against my will, by God and my old age. Flee, my friend flee, for should he come, as is his habit, to have sex with me, he will wretchedly tear you to pieces . . .” Robert Mannyng, *The Story of England by Robert Manning of Brunne, A.D. 1338*, Volume 1, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 429-30. This tale is reproduced multiple times including Robert Mannyng of Brunne’s rendition in 1338 where Ohel’s niece Eleyne and her nurse are kidnapped by the giant Dynabrok. Like Helena, Eleyne dies as the giant tries to rape her (“Eleyne he wolde haue furlayn” (12,271).). The nurse is forced to stay and satisfy the giant sexually which drives her mad: “When y sey Eleyne so schameley deye,/ My with was lorn, & al a-weye;/ Wyp firce he died me leue stille,/ His lecherie in me to fulfille” (12,285-88). It is Arthur, Kay, and Beduer who save the nurse and defeat Dynabrok in Mannyng’s version. For more on the violence associated with giants in the Middle Ages see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 111. Cohen provides a list of medieval tales featuring giants threatening and assaulting women, destroying property, and enacting violence on the courteous and civilized in his chapter “The Giant of Self-Figuration”: “The Saracen monster Amourantin Guy of Warwick wants Guy’s head for his ‘leman’; the giant Araganour of Octavian wages war to ensure that a sultan’s daughter becomes his own possession. The unnamed giant in Sir Bevis of Hampton . . . keeps a woman captive in her tower, as does the treacherous Angolafer in Huon of Bordeaux . . .” Cohen also discusses the giants in Torrent of Portyngale, *Yvain Knight of the Lion*, and *Lybeaus Desconous*. *Sir Bevis of Hampton* offers an almost singular story of a giant and humans living together peacefully. Sir Bevis fights the giant Ascapard who has come to take Lady Josian. Just as Sir Bevis is about to cut off Ascapard’s head Josian intercedes for the giant. Josian puts herself up as “bond” for Ascapard’s faithfulness. The giant swears fealty to Sir Bevis and they even try to baptize him in a wine tun, but the giant says he “is of too ungodly size ever to make a Christian.” The giant, in effect, embodies damnation.

laid out by Geoffroi de Charny, but in a far more burdensome manner than necessary. Each combat opportunity he faces grows in complication and danger. Still, learning by doing and “freedom to fail” have incredibly high stakes for Lybeaus. Having demanded and received a premature boon, he must battle the giants alone. Lybeaus faces death and a legacy of shame if he fails to rescue Violet: The giants will succeed in raping Violet; Eleyne and Theodeley will witness Lybeaus’s failure, thus whenever anyone speaks of Lybeaus his name will be synonymous with rape and failure.

The difficulty of his task does force him to think strategically rather than just wade in falchion flailing. Lybeaus utilizes the element of surprise, slaying one giant immediately and securing the girl safely with Elyene and Theodeley who are watching from further back in the forest. He then battles it out with the other giant until he finally cuts off its arm.²⁶⁹ Lybeaus does not have to exercise mercy with the giants, since they are neither socially valued or human. Therefore, Lybeaus chops off their heads and takes the heads for trophies. It is only post-giant-slaying that the narrator begins to call Lybeaus “noble” and “gentil,” two terms associated with the social aspects of chivalry rather than the physical (717). The giants are Lybeaus’ first encounter with the supernatural, and at first it appears that, as with Lanval, the supernatural functions to offset or at least inform social burden. Unfortunately for all those still in Lybeaus’ path, the young poseur’s nobility and respect of the social obligations of the Order of Chivalry is short lived.

²⁶⁹ Giants tend to get their arms chopped off in romance. Sir Guy chops off the giant Colbrand’s arm with his own axe in *Guy of Warwick*. Tristem cuts off the giant Urgan’s hand above the wrist forcing the giant to retreat in *Tristem and Isolde*. Yvain severs the arm of the giant menacing Gawain’s niece and nephews, at the shoulder in *Yvain the Knight of the Lion*. In *Lancelot of the Lake* Yvain witnesses a knight kill two giants, one by running him through the body with a lance and the other by cutting off his hand and foot.

Violet's father, Syr Anctour, rewards Lybeaus with "Shelde and armes bright, / And also a noble stede/ That was gode . . . In turnament and in fyght" (720-22). Syr Anctour's rewards signify that a nobleman other than Arthur formally recognizes Lybeaus's status as a knight. Also, this is the first time Lybeaus acquires armor in accordance with chivalric norms and as a reward for his chivalric performance. Previously his armor and horses belonged to others and were presented to him unearned or plundered, allowing Lybeaus to misrepresent himself as a knight versed in the social as well as the physical obligations of chivalry. With his successful rescue of Violet and a public recognition of his chivalric success Lybeaus's reputational value increases and with it his social obligation, but at the same time so does his social burden. He now represents Arthur, Violet's father the Earl, and the Chivalric Order everywhere he travels and through every interaction. Rather than honor his chivalric obligation to fulfill the boon given by Arthur and generate social capital based on the Earl's investment into his chivalric reputation Lybeaus luxuriates in his newfound glory, acting only in his self-interest.

Lybeaus' harrowing rescue of Violet is his first successfully selfless act of chivalry, one for which he is handsomely rewarded. Since his boon requires the rescue of another lady it would stand to reason that Lybeaus would at least equate rescue with reward and hasten towards the successful conclusion of his quest. Rather than fulfill his obligation to deliver the Lady Synadoun from danger, Lybeaus chooses to place Eleyne in danger. He once again rejects the social mores of chivalry in favor of capricious and burdensome self-service. In the tale of the gerfalcon, Eleyne takes on Lybeaus' social burden of chivalry, acting as his mentor while suffering humiliation and threat. The tale of the gerfalcon centers around a knight, Jeffron, who makes a public challenge: If anyone finds a "fayrer" woman than his, he can have a flawless

“gerfawkon, white as swanne.”²⁷⁰ The gerfalcon is the most prized hunting bird for a medieval falconer.²⁷¹ Jeffron’s gerfalcon represents the most beautiful and valuable specimen of the most beautiful and valuable hunting bird a nobleman could acquire. It is the avian equivalent of Geoffroi de Charny’s perfect knight: “the noblest way rises above all others, and those who have the greatest heart for it go constantly forward to reach and achieve the highest honour . . .” (85). Lybeaus covets the gerfalcon and wants to send it back to Arthur—another in a series of tokens meant to prove Lybeaus’ chivalric skill. Lybeaus also believes possession of the gerfalcon and the chivalric perfection it represents are his “right.”²⁷² Jeffron believes his lady’s beauty and grace matches his priceless bird. The caveat of the challenge requires Jeffron and the challenger to fight if Jeffron’s lady wins the beauty contest. If Jeffron is victorious, the challenger’s “hede shall him be rafte/ And sett upon a shafte/ To seen in lenthe and brede” (751-53). Fresh off of his victory against the giant and inflated by pride, Lybeaus swears that he will challenge Jeffron for the gerfalcon.²⁷³ Once again, lack of education and even the most rudimentary forms of courteousness socially burden the young knight. Disregarding Theodeley’s cautionary criticisms, he volunteers Eleyne for scrutiny by a group of strangers in a challenge about which he has no real clarity and for a prize bearing no intrinsic value to his real quest.²⁷⁴ Lybeaus ignores Theodeley’s warnings scoffing “Thereof have I no care” (772). Lybeaus lacks discernment,

²⁷⁰ 746. Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, *The Art of Falconry*, trans. Casey A. Wood and F. Marjorie Fyfe (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 121, 111. considers the “rare white varieties from remote regions . . . the best” (121). The gerfalcon is also considered by Frederick II to be among the “true noble falcons” and “Out of respect for their size, strength, audacity, and swiftness, the gerfalcon shall be given first place in our treatise” (111).

²⁷¹ Frederick II, 111. Difficult to capture, the gerfalcon fledges on “high cliffs, often in crannies, caves, and holes on mountainsides, either near to or distant from the seacoast; the farther the birthplace from the ocean the more beautiful and noble they are.”

²⁷² 810-12. “Therfor the gerfaukon/ To Arthur kyng with crowne/ Bring I shall with right.”

²⁷³ 793-4. The narrator notes Lybeaus’s prideful demeanor, commenting that Jeffron sees the young knight approaching “prickande with pryde!” (794).

²⁷⁴ 765, 767. Theodeley swears at Lybeaus underscoring how upset the young knight makes him: “By Jhesus! . . . Thou puttest thee in grete perille.”

impulse control, and humility. All exceptionally important qualities in a knight and qualities by which he is judged socially.²⁷⁵

Geoffroi de Charny outlines the consequences of a knight acting arrogantly and without humility in the section of his manual “Advice on Conduct Towards Friends and Enemies.” In this section he cautions “[Y]ou should know that from arrogance grow many branches from which evils come, so many as may cause the loss of soul and body, honor and wealth” (73. 107-10). With spectacular arrogance Lybeaus forestalls the fulfillment of his quest, places himself and his travelling companions in danger, humiliates Eleyne through comparative public display, and dishonors himself as the branches of his unacknowledged social burden extend outwards.²⁷⁶ The two men agree to put the women on display in the city marketplace where “eche man my hir see . . . to loke on, bonde and free” (818, 820). Horrified at the whole affair Theodelye tries once more to mentor Lybeaus, pointing out the knight’s return to his former “savage” state. He spares no feelings and gives Lybeaus no recourse for excuses. According to Theodelye “Thow doste a savage dede, / For any man i-borne” (851-52).²⁷⁷ He also castigates Lybeaus for his irrational behavior and unwillingness to take advice: “Thow wilt not do be rede/ But faryst with thi madd hede/ As lorde that will be lorne” (852-54). The narrator also seems intent on emphasizing the usurious and exploitative tactics Lybeaus employs to gain another in a string of self-serving tokens. Compared to Jeffron’s lady, the people call Eleyne nothing “but lawder:/ Of her no loose

²⁷⁵ 73. 101-3: “[W]here there is arrogance, there reigns anger and all kinds of folly; and where humility is to be found, there reigns good sense and happiness”

²⁷⁶ Lybeaus chooses Elyene based on her sartorial sensibilities: he thinks she looks good when she dresses up: “And sey I have one in towne/ A lemman two so bright;/ And when he will hir a-see,/ I shalle shewe him thee” (760-63) and “I have one in towne/ Well fayre of fassyon,/ In clothis when she is dight” (807-9).

²⁷⁷ Geoffroi de Charny also addresses knights who will not take counsel and are irrational finding: “[T]here are some who are skilled in handling weapons . . . but . . . when they are in action, they do not consider the benefit or advantage for their friends or the harm done to their enemies, but, without giving or taking advice, they spur forward in a disorderly way” (151).

make I” (930-320). The narrator’s use of “lawder/laundress” to describe the difference between the two women’s appearances contextualizes Lybeaus’s conflation of finery with “fayre[ness].” He hopes to use Eleyne to improve his social standing within the Order of Chivalry, as if she were laundering him for a public appearance.

Jeffron and Lybeaus proceed to a designated battlefield with a “grete partye” a social necessity since witnessing chivalric performance reifies chivalric reputation (947). The violent match between Lybeaus and the seasoned veteran enralls the crowd. Almost immediately the social verification process begins. After enjoying the battle, the narrator describes the methods in which the spectators participate in collaborative social reification: Cadas, a knight, takes the gerfalcon to Arthur’s court along with a written account of Lybeaus’ victory over Jeffron thus producing material evidence of martial skill. Heralds, raconteurs, trumpeters, and drummers also verbally reproduce the battle everywhere they travel.²⁷⁸ Jeffron, on the other hand, suffers arguably one of the greatest impacts of Lybeaus’ misplaced social burden: complete erasure. Lybeaus absorbs a hard hit from Jeffron and the shock topples the veteran knight along with his horse. This fall breaks Jeffron’s back, terminates the battle, and places Lybeaus in the role of victor. Jeffron, if he survives his injuries, will never reprise his role in society as an effective chivalric knight. He loses his identity as a member of the Order of Chivalry along with his social worth because both are predicated on reputational value. He can no longer generate reputational value through public displays of chivalry and thus he fades into the margins of the text and society itself. Lybeaus’ battle for the gerfalcon is superfluous and while the end result gains Lybeaus accolades and an increased reputation it comes at the expense of Theodeley’s wasted

²⁷⁸ 1002-7. “The gerfaukon isent was/ By a knyght that hight Cadas/ To Arthur, kyng with crowne./ And wretyn alle the dede/ With him he can to lede/ The hauk tho Lybeous wan.”

counsel, Eleyne's dignity, and in a spectacular misapplication of social burden: Jeffron's entire existence within the Order of Chivalry.

When Arthur receives the gerfalcon, the manuscript detailing Lybeaus's victory, and the verbal reproduction of Lybeaus's exploits, he evaluates the exchange rate for "four fightis;" the gerfalcon; and Lybeaus's verified ability to wage "well wer" and determines that it is worth "an hondered ponde honeste/ Of floreyens" (1012, 1010, 1017-18). Lybeaus now has social cache, reputational value, and financial compensation. Whether he realizes it or not, the system of exchange requires Lybeaus to perform within the parameters of the chivalric code. This performance includes completing his mission to rescue the Lady Synadoun even if he would prefer to slash his way across the countryside collecting souvenirs. Rather than resume the mission he demanded of Arthur, Lybeaus takes the one hundred pounds of florins and throws a forty-day party in Cardill for "Duke, erle, and baroun" (1025). He once again delays rescue of the Lady Synadoun to perform his limited idea of chivalry.

Lybeaus encounters another giant, this one named Maugys. Instead of bypassing the castle tormented by Maugys, Lybeaus forces the rescue mission to stop so he can fight. The giant asks Lybeaus what (not who) he is and tells him it really would be smarter to turn away. Whether a narrative machination or clairvoyance on the part of the giant, Maugys' use of the interrogative "what" rather than "who" proffers the only question regarding identity Lybeaus can answer. He knows "what" he is: one of Arthur's knights, but not "who" he is. His parentage is still a mystery and he remains "the fair unknown." Obsessed with his physical/martial chivalric reputation, Lybeaus must engage in every possible fight even at the expense of his other, more socially chivalric, duties. "Bothe lordis and ladyes" travel to witness the battle between Maugys and Lybeaus (1356-58). Everyone eagerly waits to see the giant vanquished, and the spectators

assume Lybeaus' chivalric superiority based on the ballads and legends produced by Arthur's court.

Maugys and Lybeaus are well matched, both physically and in their rejection of chivalrically encoded battle tactics. The narrator describes Maugys as "qweynt and qwede" or "cunning and cruel" when he "smote Lybeous stede on the hede/ And dasshid oute the brayne" killing the warhorse (1377-80). Yet Lybeaus immediately reciprocates "forkarve bone and lyre" as he beheads the giant's horse" (1387). Each make light of their wounds until Lybeaus finally begs mercy to stop and have a drink.²⁷⁹ The giant allows Lybeaus to drink by the riverbank but while Lybeaus sips from his helmet the giant unchivalrously strikes him. Lybeaus and the giant must not be viewed by the crowd as chivalrically equal therefore it is imperative that the giant distinguish himself through unchivalrous behavior. Additionally, Maugys is a Saracen and although unaware of his "infidel" status, Lybeaus has a chivalric obligation to rid Christendom of the interloper. The defeat of Maugys becomes less about collecting chivalric tokens of prowess and more about continuing Lybeaus' unorthodox mentorship in the ways of the Order of Chivalry.

Lybeaus's savagery and discourteousness has been defended, ignored, and reconfigured all throughout the tale in order to maintain the socially constructed ideal of chivalric knighthood. The giant, already vilified because of his aggressive assault on the Golden Castle, must be rendered unforgivably savage because he is a Saracen. The giant's slap sends Lybeaus into the river. When he bobs to the surface his armor is in "every dele/ Was wette and evilly dight" (1414-15). Lybeaus reaches the moment in his alternative path to knighthood where he is

²⁷⁹ 1392, 1398-90. "Bothe woundes they laughte . . . Sir Lybeous thrested soore/ And sayde, 'Maugis, thine ore!/ To drinke lett me goo.'"

ceremonially baptized and rises from the water a full-fledged member of the Order of Chivalry. His violent baptism by a Saracen giant resulting in disheveled, discombobulated, and dented armorial signifiers adds social burden to his companions rather than the impurity free conscience and soul the ceremonial baptism signifies.²⁸⁰ After his unorthodox baptism by the Saracen giant, Lybeaus defeats Maugys who holds Dame Amoure captive. The spectacle and experience of this battle should, once again, trigger a sense of urgency within the knight to complete his quest. Instead, now firmly in the gaze of courtly society, Lybeaus decides to take Dame Amoure, Maugys' former prisoner as his lover. Still a savage at heart he once again sidelines Elyene for wealth and pleasure. His unconventional and almost heretical baptism solidifies his public position as knight, but Elyene and Theodeley continue to bear his social burden. Rather than castigate Lybeaus for his unchivalrous treatment of Elyene, the shirking of his duty, or his sexual relationship with Dame Amoure, the narrative throws aspersions onto the woman calling her a witch.²⁸¹ Even Dame Amoure must carry the social burden of chivalry for Lybeaus; relegated to history as a sorceress who deserves misfortune in order to divert attention from the myriad affronts to the chivalric code performed by Lybeaus.

Elyene confronts Lybeaus accusing him of reneging on his oath to Arthur, failing in his protection of women, and dishonoring himself.²⁸² For the first time Lybeaus appears to feel the shameful gravity of his undisciplined and unchivalrous behavior. Lybeaus hears her case against

²⁸⁰ Geoffroi de Charny in "The Knighting Ceremony" describes the ceremonial bath and its intended significance: "[A]ll those who are to be knighted the next day should enter a bath and stay there for a long time, reflecting on the need to cleanse their bodies henceforth from all impurities in the water. Then they should come out of the water in the bath with a clear conscience . . ." (91.36).

²⁸¹ 1485-87; "For the faire lady/ Cowthe more of sorcerye/ Than other suche five . . ."

²⁸² "Knyght, thou arte false in thi laye/ Ageynes Kyng Arthure!/ For the love o woman/ That mekyll of sorcery canne/ Thow doste thee grete dissehonour/ My lady of Synadowne/ May longe lye in preso,/ And that is grete doloure!" (1501-8).

his knighthood and his “hert gan breke/ For sorowe and for shame” (1510-11). All of the social burdens of chivalry he created for others through his blatant disregard of his responsibilities transfer back onto the young knight. Rather than belligerently ignore them and his own culpability, he humbles himself; seeks to rectify his mistakes; and begins to walk out the preferred path to knighthood.

The group leave immediately for Synadoun where Lybeaus first must joust the Lady of Synadoun’s steward, Syr Lanwarde replicating the participation in jousting and tourneying that should come after observation and inspiration from more knowledgeable knights recommended by Geoffroi de Charny’s *Book of Chivalry* (1703-08, 1710-12). Taking the lesson demonstrated by Sir William in their *pas d’armes*, when the steward falls from his saddle Lybeaus stops the battle courteously asking “Wilt thou more?” (1702). Lanwarde yields, pledges fealty to Lybeaus, and draws a direct line between Lybeaus and Gawain: “Sethe the tyme that Y was borne/ Sawe I never me before/ So rydyng to my paye. . . Thowe arte of Sir Gawynes kynne . . .” (1703-08). Also, rather than force the steward to return to Arthur’s court with reproduced tales of Lybeaus’s chivalric might, he takes Lanwarde as a proper mentor, finally alleviating Eleyne and Theodeleye’s social burden of mentorship. Through the steward Lybeaus learns that two demonic necromancer clerks, Irayne and Mabon, hold the Lady of Synadoun prisoner. The courteous manner in which Lybeaus handles his challenge to Syr Lanwarde benefits the young knight greatly—he gains an immediate, tangible ally; tactical knowledge about the castle’s defenses, and encouragement.²⁸³ Because these benefits happen in private and create no social

²⁸³ The steward describes the palace where the Lady of Synadoun languishes as a fortress designed by necromancy and built by faerys. He says “wonder hit is to wynne” or it is extraordinarily difficult to breach, but he does not say it is impossible (1761-69). This discussion tracks with the mentorship and chivalric development model advocated by Geoffroi de Charny: “[T]hey will not be content until they have been present at and learned about the

spectacle, they do not immediately enhance Lybeaus's reputational value. Instead, they serve a far greater purpose: the physically chivalric education of Lybeaus in the manner he should have been taught when he first rides into Arthur's court. Lybeaus' experience now justifies his authority, and because of the knowledge gained through his tactical discussions with the steward, for the first time he considers not only his own chivalric reputation but also how his performance reflects upon Arthur and on the whole social system that is the Order of Chivalry. In the throes of battle Lybeaus takes a moment to assess his situation: "he had lorne his swerde, / And his stede was lamed/ And he shulde be defamed/ To Arthur kynge his lorde" (1991-94). He is about to fail on his sanctioned quest. He demanded knighthood; he demanded a boon; he demanded Arthur's blessing—every success he experienced on his way to fulfill his mission will be rendered meaningless and every lesson he learned from the unwitting bearers of his social burden will count as naught if he fails. He feels the social burden of chivalry in full.

Lybeaus subdues the necromancer, Mabon. Mabon offers to yield to Lybeaus but in the process he reveals that both he and Irayne's (the other clerk) swords were covered in venom so that they would be certain to kill Lybeaus even if the wound/s were superficial. Mabon's request for mercy presents a paradoxical social burden of chivalry. The clerks are not monsters like the giants who attacked Violet or imprisoned Dame Amoure and were slain without hesitation by Lybeaus. Yet they are not Christian knights like Sir William nor are they human. Still, the supernatural clerk yields and therefore Lybeaus contemplates his chivalric obligations of mercy. Lybeaus chooses to slay the necromancer clerk demonstrating his continuing chivalric evolution adopting the penultimate achievement of an honorable knight: Crusade-style warfare. Geoffroi

defense of castles and walled towns; how they can be held, guarded, and provisioned against both enemy attack and siege, and against all advances against them which can be made . . ." (58.6-8).

de Charny describes the chivalric obligation to fight overseas: “[I]t seems to them [knights] that they have seen and done nothing if they do not take part in such a noble form of military activity as a battle . . . through many countries across land and sea” (59. 29-31). The reward of fighting for and with the grace of God, according to Geoffroi, is social rather than religious: “[H]e who is the most fortunate in taking part in them [battles overseas] and in doing his duty well . . . is of that much greater worth than those who have done less” (58. 41-3). Lybeaus denies Mabon’s request for mercy, telling the supernatural clerk they will fight to death. The Fair Unknown now knows the social weight his chivalric identity holds. He must destroy the necromancer clerks who embody the enemies of Christendom, Arthur, the Lady Synadoun, Eleyne, and his own chivalric reputation. To give mercy; to come to a détente; to suffer defeat will “unmake” Lybeaus crushing him under the social burden of his failure/s. Lybeaus slices Mabon’s head in two and almost immediately Irayne disappears into thin air. Rather than revel in the completion of his mission, Lybeaus collapses under his social burden of chivalry:

And whan he fonde him noughted
He helde himselfe bekaughte
And byganne to syke sore,
And seide, in worde and thought,
“This will be dere bought
That he is fro me fare!
He will with sorcerye
Do me tormentry:
That is my moste care (2049-58).

At first glance this bemoaning seems like a return to the self-absorbed, narcissistic Lybeaus from the beginning of the tale. Here sits a young knight worrying about the social currency he will have to spend because he did not defeat both necromancer clerks. His first thought is for his own safety and comfort. The difference lies, for the most part, in his attitude. He does not lash out as he once did, demanding his own way and tearing off without thinking. He sits. He thinks. He

waits. . . and a dragon comes over and kisses him . . . which seems pretty unsurprising after fighting demonic necromancer clerks. The *fier baisier* disenchants the Lady of Synadoun and she appears before Lybeaus, safe, sound, and stark naked.

The Lady of Synadoun 's metamorphosis is the final supernatural encounter designed to offset Lybeaus' remaining social burden of chivalry: his illegitimacy. Unlike Lanval's faery patron/lover whose role as supernatural guarantor in Arthur's court allows Lanval to shed his social burden of chivalry along with his membership in the Order of Chivalry, the Lady of Synadoun moves from supernatural to human therefore she cannot fully alleviate Lybeaus' burden even if he desired such a thing. She assures Lybeaus that he has successfully completed his quest and the necromancer clerks are defeated. She says her enchantment was to remain intact until she was kissed by either Gawain or his kin and since Lybeaus's kiss disenchants Lady Synadoun the mystery of his provenance is solved. It is clear that he is the child of Gawain. In return for the fulfillment of his mission she offers him a reward of "Castellys fifty and five . . . And mysylfe to be thy wife" adding the caveat "Styll witheoute any stryfe, / And hit be Arthures will" (2010-14). However, her insistence also reveals the limitations of Lybeaus's autonomy as a knight. He cannot marry her without Arthur's intercession and no matter how many prophecies he fulfills or how many dragons kiss him, he is still a bastard unclaimed by his father. However, he is no longer "unknown." His bloodline inheritance provides him with an inferred chivalric prowess based on patrimony; his strength of character both ennoble his stock and supply him with the experience and authority he needs to be a powerful knight on his own. He goes into his marriage burdened but wiser.

The tenuousness of a knight's social acceptance, nobility, and virtuous reputation stems from their fragile relationship with society. Knights like Lybeaus find that after having fulfilled

their quests, fought their battles, and kissed their dragons the chivalric expectations of society do not end. Knights are never allowed to rest on their laurels. Instead, they are forced to maintain the image of social chivalry through spectacular performances at jousts, tournaments, and constructed melees, as well as extensive displays of wealth and legacy. Past social reputation brought about through crusading and questing combine with present displays of social worth to extend chivalry's social burden beyond the battlefield all the way to the grave. Both Lanval and Lybeaus bump up against the social expectations of the chivalric code and the resulting social burden of chivalry. Lanval tries his best within the conventional framework of chivalry to conform to its attendant social expectations. To no avail, however, as Arthur completely ignores him. Lybeaus completely ignores the conventional framework of chivalry forcing others to bear his social burden of chivalry until such time as he "comes of age." Still Arthur adores him and pays him an unhealthy amount of attention. At the end of *Lybeaus Desconus* the "fair unknown" stands aware of his lauded position in society and the social burden of chivalry he bears to maintain social favor; Lanval, aware of his socially chivalric burden from the onset of the *lais*, rejects society and chivalry's obligations, riding off into the sunset to become Avalon's "fair unknown."

CHAPTER V: “HE AIN’T HEAVY; HE’S MY BROTHER”: EASING CHIVALRY’S PHYSICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND SOCIAL BURDENS THROUGH “BROTHERHOOD TROUTHE”

The previous three chapters reveal physical, religious, and social burden troubling the performance of chivalry. Burden reveals itself through shame, fear of failure, insecurities about eternal life and salvation after a career of violence, earthy love overshadowing devotion to Christ, and ever-evolving social expectations determining a knight’s chivalric reputation. Knights find limited options when faced with the realities of their chivalric burden: work within the constraints posed by the burden; reject their burden by rejecting their chivalric identity; ignore their burden and in doing so force others to carry it. Often, however, knights prefer to offset their burden by attempting to lighten their chivalric load. This chapter examines the role that “brotherhood trouthes” play in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* (1387) and the thirteenth-century Middle English romance *Amis and Amiloun* to disburse the physical, religious, and social burdens of chivalry.²⁸⁴ For the purposes of this chapter the term “brotherhood” is exchangeable between actual biological brothers, cousins, and close family or friends.²⁸⁵ Additionally, I define the term “trouthe” as “fidelity and devotion to one’s friend/s involving an oath or pledge of

²⁸⁴ All quotes from the *Knight’s Tale* are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer* 3rd edition, general ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987) 37-66. All quotes without commentary will be interlinear citations in the form of (Fragment. Line).

²⁸⁵ Claudia Rapp, *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium: Monk, Laymen, and Christian Ritual*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30. In the section of her monograph dealing with the medieval West Rapp explains how brotherhood compacts or legal agreements “usually took the form of a solemn oath, was sometimes affirmed by the exchange of blood, and on occasion the actual act of agreement was followed by the celebration of the Eucharist.” The oath usually required the two participants to “take responsibility for each other on the battlefield, including the obligation to pay ransom . . . [they] inherited each other’s quarrels and feuds and were prepared to take care of each other’s kin.” Lars Herman, *Friendship, Love, and Brotherhood in Medieval Northern Europe, c. 1000-1200*, trans. Alan Crozier, (Boston: Brill, 2019). Herman credits the medieval “outlook of Christianity” helped them view “friendship as a utilitarian and a spiritual bond” and that the “Christian notion of brotherhood saw all believers as brothers” thus allowing for non-biological bonds of “brotherhood” (7).

loyalty that when plighted or sworn upholds the chivalric ideal and indicates a nobility of character” and use variants of “trouthe” interchangeably.²⁸⁶ For instance: Chaucer uses the term “ooth” and “ysworn” in the *Knight’s Tale* (1.1139, 1.1132) while the narrator of *Amis and Amiloun* describes the vows made between the two boys as “trouth plight” (20). At their most effective, brotherhood trouthes create spaces for honesty and candor; knights are able to express fear, anxiety, and disagreement to one another. The oath of fealty (faith) is vertical binding a vassal to his lord for his lord’s service. Since the oath of fealty utilizes a hierarchical binary of lord/vassal there is very little space for emotive, verbal, or behavioral honesty on the part of the vassal to his lord. Brotherhood trouthes, taken between equals and therefore functioning horizontally, enable knights to share their chivalric obligation, which is especially significant when facing conflicting vows of fealty and service. Oaths between brothers—or close friends—provide a sense of protection and security that extends beyond perceived mutual adherence to the chivalric code because brotherhood trouthes demand specificity of allegiance to one another. However, these same oaths can lead to a knight’s undoing. Spaces of honesty provide moments where the trouthe of brotherhood supersedes an oath of fealty and service to one’s brother becomes more important than service to the lord/Lord. The propensity for loyalty to one’s brother to overshadow the order/s of one’s lord is reflected in the pledge required for membership in the Fraternity of the Golden Apple (founded in Auvergne on 1 January 1394): “A guaranteed promise regardless or against other orders, debates or actions of any [man] born or yet to be born, in judgement or outside of [their judgement] etc. [this] constitutes etc. this

²⁸⁶ *The Middle English Dictionary* contextualizes the “slipperiness” of the term “truth” finding: “The word ‘treuth’ and the concepts it expresses defy rigid categorization. Frequently a specific gloss entails or implies yet another . . . The complex meaning of ‘treuth’ . . . are more a matter of literary than lexicographical . . .” As such the *MED* offers sixteen sections of “Definitions (Senses and Subsenses)” of the term. This chapter uses a combination of definitions taken from the first three Senses and Subsenses. Last accessed: 23 September 2021.

confession holds as a guaranteed promise that supersedes all others etc.”²⁸⁷ Also, trouthes enacted to ease chivalric burden may cause one brother comfort while putting the other brother at moral or physical risk. Finally, elevating the brotherhood over fealty places the knights squarely in the arena of “malfeasance” or the “knight who aids the people rather than his lord . . . [and therefore] by ceasing to love the office of knighthood, unmakes Chivalry itself.”²⁸⁸ An analysis of brotherhood trouthes sworn by Arcite and Palamon in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* as well as trouthes sworn by Amis and Amiloun found in their eponymous romance reveals the insidious impact of chivalric burden: vows between brothers may offer a temporary relief from physical, religious, and/or social burden but the burden cannot ever be alleviated altogether. The burdens are only deferred and often, as Palamon, Arcite, Amis and Amiloun discover, are compounded by their very attempt at deferral revealing that despite attempts to manage or offset the weight of chivalric performance, the physical, religious, and social burden of chivalry remains a permanent part of chivalric identity.

As with most burdens, there comes a need for relief—a displacement of the weight brought about by the unmanageable, “complex . . . organism” that is chivalry.²⁸⁹ Knights turn to the “brotherhood trouthe” as an opportunity to disburse the weight of chivalric burden that often reveals itself through disparate or diametrically opposed chivalric obligations to lord, Lord, and society. The study and analysis of brotherhood trouthes features in the work of multiple

²⁸⁷ Antoine Jacotin, *Preuves de la Maison de Polignac: Recueil de Documents Pour Servir a L’Histoire des Anciennes Provinces de Velay, Auvergne, Gevaudan, Vivarais, Forez, Etc.* Tome Troisieme (Ernest Leroux: Paris, 1899), 183. See the statutes of the fraternity of the Golden Apple where brothers swear “*ausquelez les a promis guarantor envers et contre tous des tous troubles, debtes, et actions quelconques, naiz et a naistre, en jugement et dehors etc., consitue etc., confesse tenir etc., et promis garantir envers et contre tous etc.*” (183).

²⁸⁸ Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 46, 48.

²⁸⁹ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 17. “Chivalry, as it is described in the treatises, is a way of life in which we can discern these three essential facets, the military, the noble, and the religious; but a way of life is a complex thing, like a living organism . . .”

twentieth and twenty-first-century medievalist scholars although none of them look at these oaths through the lens of burden abatement. Emphasis is placed on brotherhood as “a major theme of twelfth-century religious writing” and often viewed with skepticism or criticism: Amis and Amiloun prove their loyalty “by their willingness to violate all other bonds for the sake of their love;”²⁹⁰ Chaucer conflates “opportunism and naïveté. . . cool calculation and arrant folly” with brotherhood trouthes.²⁹¹ “[O]aths have become the exclusive tactic and refuge of scoundrels . . . a matter of admirable but finally untenable human aspiration”²⁹² A few critics soften their opinion of these oaths taking into consideration the idealist motivation behind them, and how records of these compacts shed “light not only on the complex situations of chivalrous romances, but also on the kind of personal bonds which, in the later middle ages, men of gentle birth understood and wished to contract.”²⁹³ Maurice Keen devotes a chapter in his monograph *Nobles, Knights, and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* to the concept of brotherhood. Keen describes the bond these oaths create as relational and reciprocal, “based . . . upon the faith of their body and their honor” (43). As such, the oath is “all pervading” but also paradoxical when love and loyalty butted heads (44). According to Keen, knights becoming brothers involved taking on the risks one’s brother experienced in battle as well as anything that “affected his honour, his fortune and his emotional entanglements” and was legally enforceable (45).²⁹⁴ Keen’s description of the purpose behind brotherhood trouthes elides nicely with my assertion in

²⁹⁰ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 97.

²⁹¹ Alcuin Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, & Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 31.

²⁹² Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 102.

²⁹³ Maurice Keen, *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London: The Hambleton Press, 1996), 43.

²⁹⁴ “Under military law the sworn companion genuinely was a brother, and as such he became heir to his companion’s military fortune.”

this chapter that these oaths served as an attempt to lessen the burden of chivalry felt by knights. If the brotherhood oath creates an avenue for knights to share martial responsibility on the battlefield as well as defend the fortune, the heart, and the soul of his brother, then the oath functions as a means to displace the weight of one knight carrying these responsibilities alone.²⁹⁵

While few extant documents remain describing the process of brotherhood trouthes in the Middle Ages, the common link between historical and literary descriptions is that the bond created between two men comes in the form of a sworn oath or covenant.²⁹⁶ One of the earliest historical references to brotherhood oaths can be found in the *Historia Anglorum* recorded by Henry of Huntington (ca. 1088-1156/64). Faced with the insurmountable and unending battle between the Danes and the English, King Canute and King Edmund agree to face each other in single combat. The kings are well matched but King Canute's strength begins to fail him: he can no longer manage the physical perfection required by his station. In order to save face in front of "his nation" King Canute cries out to King Edmund "Bravest of youths, why should either of us risk his life for the sake of a crown? Let us be brothers by adoption, and divide the kingdom, so governing that I may rule your affairs, and you mine . . . I submit to your disposal."²⁹⁷ King Canute's brotherhood oath puts an end to both the war and the single combat at which he was about to fail.²⁹⁸ The kingdom of Wessex is allotted to Edmund and the kingdom of Mercia to

²⁹⁵ Oaths involved taking on the brother's risks in battle: body/physical; affected his honour: religious/social; his fortune: religious (due to expectations of tithing)/social (status within the community; his emotional entanglements: heart/religious/social/physical (since love is often expressed through illness and pain in romance.

²⁹⁶ This chapter only analyzes oaths sworn between two nobles/knights in literature of the Middle Ages. This is not to say that brotherhood trouthes did not exist between groups of nobles/knights, that they did not differ in form or application in historical documentation, or that trouthes are singularly masculine.

²⁹⁷ Henry of Huntington, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English from A.C. 55 to A.D. 1154*, ed. Thomas Arnold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 196.

²⁹⁸ The *Anglo Saxon Chronicles* describes the peace accord of 1016 between King Canute and King Edmund as a meeting "together at Olney, south of Deerhurst" where the two men "became allies and sworn

Canute. However, the oath merely defers the burden placed upon King Canute as his strength quails in front of his people. The son of Edric the alderman slays King Edmund in an attempt to unify the two kingdoms under King Canute's rule; Canute in turn has the boy, his father, and all the lords loyal to Edric beheaded or banished. He also "levied an enormous tax throughout the whole of England" (197). The resulting fallout of King Canute's brotherhood oath compounds his burden: physically he must now root out and destroy his former enemy's enemies in order to maintain society's constructed image of an honest, oath-abiding ruler. He must also bear the weight of history as the narrator conflates King Canute's actions against Edmund's murderers with God's divine justice delivered through the hands of nobility: "So severe a task-master [Canute] did the justice of God inflict on the English" (197). King Canute's inability to adhere to a nascent chivalric code during his battle with King Edmund, both elevates him to English mythology and further burdens him with social expectations linked to divine intention. An epilogue to his history recalled by the narrator of the *Historia* demonstrates King Canute's awareness of the fragility of his station regardless of social cache. Seated by the sea-shore King Canute commands the sea "not to flow over my land, nor presume to wet the feet and the robe of your lord" because, as king, the sea was presumably his subject (199). When the tide flows over King Canute's feet "without respect to his royal person" Canute announces "Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom heaven, earth, and sea obey eternal laws" (199). Canute instinctively knows that the

brothers. There they confirmed their friendship both with pledges and with oaths, and settled the pay of the army" (98).

reputational value afforded to him by his victories, his piety, and his social status is worthless regardless of chivalric performance or oaths.²⁹⁹

Even though the swearing of the brotherhood oath in the *Historia Anglorum* happens between two nobles the result of burden deferred leading to burden compounded also applies to the experiences of knights in the Middle Ages. The evolution of the brotherhood trouthe also moves the oath from public declarations of allegiance and fraternity into private spaces.³⁰⁰ This evolution results, partially, from oaths moving away from a historically legal context into the pages of romance where trouthe becomes subjective and subject to examinations of intent. Historical records of public oaths happen in front of witnesses and sometimes even in front of church altars, however Robert Stretter concludes that literary depictions of the brotherhood oath take on a more “idealized form” and “are usually motivated not by questions of political, social, or economic advantage but by pure affection and a sense of honor.”³⁰¹ The addition of *fin’amors*, described as “perfect, true and complete love”; “eros”; or more broadly: “an ideal . . . directed toward a worthy equal” complicates relationships forged by brotherhood trouthes.³⁰² Where once

²⁹⁹ For an extensive examination of early historical forms of brotherhood oaths see Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “Brotherhood in Western Medieval Europe,” *Traditio*, Vol. 52 (1997): 357-381. Cambridge University Press. *JSTOR*. Last accessed 23 September 2021.

³⁰⁰ Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. Thomas Forester (Cambridge, Ontario: Medieval Latin Series, 2000), 77. Gerald of Wales describes public brotherhood oaths taken by the men of Ireland in order to bring peace between two enemies. The two men are assembled “in company at some holy place.” Performative in nature, the oath takers and their entourage “go in procession round the church, and afterwards they confederate themselves in an indissoluble alliance before the altar, with oaths prodigally multiplied upon the relics of saints.” The oaths are then cemented by the celebration of mass and the drinking of blood. Gerald of Wales adds that the oaths are often broken rather quickly by a “bloody divorce.” He offers this example of public brotherhood oaths as “proof of [Irish] wickedness” (77).

³⁰¹ Robert Stretter, “Engendering Obligation: Sworn Brotherhood and Love Rivalry in Medieval English Romance,” in *Friendship in the Middle Ages: Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 507.

³⁰² “Perfect true and complete”: L.T. Topsfield, *Troubadours and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 83; “eros”: Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978) 13; “an ideal”: June Hall McHash, “Mutual Love as a Medieval Ideal,” in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, eds Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990), 435.

worthy equals directed their fidelity towards each other through chivalric oaths and pledges now fidelity is directed outward to a worthy equal of the opposite sex who functions outside of the encoded structure of the Order of Chivalry. The complication of *fin'amors* leads to conflict and debate between brothers over the primacy of legal oaths or unavoidable heterosexual love.³⁰³ Albrecht Classen asserts that in the Late Middle Ages (ca. 1300-1500) religious and secular focus turned to concern over the problematic nature of heterosexual relationships and the “psychological pressure, melancholy, even depression” to which these relationships could lead.³⁰⁴ With emotion then taking pride of place over ritual and oath “brotherhood could no longer serve the public needs and was replaced by the topic of courtly love” (151). Chivalric romances like *Amis and Amiloun* or Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* written during the Late Middle Ages to which Classen refers depict brotherhood troubles troubled by concerns of the heart but not fully erased. Likewise, chivalric manuals address courtly love, so it would seem knights are aware of the religious expectations attached to their romantic relationships and possess an understanding as to how love links to social perceptions of chivalric honor and worth. Geoffroi

³⁰³ See Holly A. Crocker, *Chaucer’s Visions of Manhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Crocker finds that “women’s invisibility can fragment or consolidate the fiction of masculine empowerment” (15) in her chapter “Which Man; Which Woman.” Emelye’s presence while virtually invisible in the “Knight’s Tale” manages to fragment the relationship between Palamon and Arcite and destabilize their brotherhood trouthe. See also: Jean Jost, “Ambiguous Brotherhood in the Friar’s Tale and the Summoner’s Tale,” in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter Beidler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998). Like Crocker, Jost asserts “Often set up as an ideal paragon of the desired male relationship, of camaraderie and mutual respect, brotherhood is initially or subsequently undercut by a counter-relationship distinctly subversive” (80). Also: Robert Stretter, “Engendering Obligation: Sworn Brotherhood and Love Rivalry in Medieval English Romance,” in *Friendship in the Middle Ages: Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, eds. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2010). Stretter also informs Jost’s assertion that brotherhood fractures with the addition of an outside antagonist: “Brotherhood oaths prove remarkably fragile when brothers are confronted with the demands of love” (502). Both Stretter and Jost find that love rivalry destroys the brotherhood oath taken by Arcite and Palamon in the “Knight’s Tale”, but Stretter determines that Amis and Amiloun’s bond remains “indestructible” (502).

³⁰⁴ Albrecht Classen, “Introduction,” in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Explorations of Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, eds. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2010), 150.

de Charny in his chivalric manual *The Book of Chivalry* (ca. 1350) recommends that knights' "manners . . . behavior, and . . . personal bearing" in love "be so good, so noble, and so honorable that you and your great deeds are held in high esteem in your quarters and on the field."³⁰⁵ He also cautions his readers against allowing love to become too much in the forefront of their chivalric identity: "never boast of the love nor show such outward signs of it in your behavior that it would draw the attention of others . . . when such a relationship becomes known, no good is, in the end, likely to come of it . . ." (119). If the chivalric code is meant to hold knights accountable for their behavior in all circumstances in order to demonstrate honor and esteem, the brotherhood trouthe— sworn in addition to and outside of oaths of fealty and allegiance— is understandably less able to withstand the pressures of sexual attraction and love because it is not physically, religiously, or socially codified. The chivalric code, a set of rules and regulations of conduct, worship, and service demands adherence regardless of the sense of burden it creates.³⁰⁶ The brotherhood trouthe, meant to distribute or ease the burden of individual knights, by its very nature as an oath sworn outside of the boundaries of the chivalric code, cannot stand up to love's pressure. Therefore, as the *Knight's Tale* and *Amis and Amiloun* reveal,

³⁰⁵ See Geoffroi de Charny, "Love an Inspiration for Honorable Deeds," in *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny*, 119-121. Among Geoffroi's mandates given to knights regarding physical love: "love a lady truly and honorably, for it is the right position to be in for those who desire to achieve honor" (121).

³⁰⁶ Geoffroi counsels secrecy in matters of love because a man who wishes others to know about his lover commits actions that are "ill done" and dooms himself to a short-lived and false affair (119). He then links his statement to the public's perception of a knight's honor and to the kind of man with whom a lady would wish to fall in love, in effect stating that a knight cannot be loved if he does not possess the kind of chivalric honor that is "saluted, and celebrated by all manner of people and brought to favorable attention before ladies, damsels, knights and squires, and she observes the great renown and the glory attributed to him by everyone . . ." (121).

Ramon Llull does not address love in his *The Book of the Order of Chivalry* but because of the heavy religious significance he places upon chivalric knighthood he addresses lust. Lust fights against fortitude, according to Llull, and is the weapon of "youth, handsome features, overindulgence in food and drink, ornate vestment, opportunity, falsehood, treachery, injustice, scorn of God and paradise, disdain for the torments of hell, and other weapons such as these." He defines lust as "malicious and impure thoughts" which resist censure by God "and the people" (74). In matters of sexual attraction, Llull, unlike de Charny, condemns the knight for even thinking lustfully, conflates lustful thoughts with heresy, and offers the knight up to both the judgement of God and society.

love complicates brotherhood oaths meant to alleviate or offset the physical, religious, or social burdens of chivalry. Knights attempting to maintain the fidelity and devotion their pledge of loyalty requires while also negotiating the figurative battlefield of love find their burden compounded rather than relieved.

Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* opens with Duke Theseus of Athens' defeat of the Amazons and marriage to Hippolyta their defeated queen. Among the prisoners taken in battle are cousins Arcite and Palamon, both Theban lords who Theseus imprisons without the hope of ransom. Theseus' refusal to allow ransom payment for the two noble knights informs the use of "chivalric" to describe the cousin's burdensome prison-sentence. By the end of the thirteenth-century knights captured in "public wars," or wars sanctioned by sovereigns, expected their lives to be spared and their freedom purchased through the payment of ransom.³⁰⁷ Arguments by Paris of Pozzi, Angelo of Perugia and Christine de Pizan all support the assertion that the relationship between a captive and his captor "was akin to that of the lord and vassal" with expectations of loyalty on the part of the captive and a ransom request "not so cruell that the man . . . be distroied and brought to povert."³⁰⁸ Theseus' refusal to ransom Arcite and Palamon speaks to the Duke's cruelty and disregard for martial norms, and also to the encoded chivalric norms present in times of open warfare and in times of peace. As noblemen and knights Arcite and Palamon would have been acutely aware of the normative process of ransom therefore being held in perpetuity renders their purgatorial imprisonment a chivalric burden.

³⁰⁷ Rémy Ambuhl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

³⁰⁸ Michael Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century: Private Grief and Public Salvation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 126. Also, Anne Laskaya, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales*, (Woodbridge: DS Brewer, 1995), 62.

The knights refer to one another as “cosyn” and “brother” interchangeably and reference a sworn brotherhood oath taken sometime before the onset of the tale (1.1131). The assumption of their vow is that the shared aspect lessens the chivalric burden of ransom-less prison time. Palamon and Arcite’s oath takes place outside of the poem’s narration, but its existence is undeniable.³⁰⁹ The first reference to their sworn brotherhood appears after one May morning love “stongen” Palamon “unto the herte” when he sees Emelye, the sister of Queen Hippolyta, walking about in the adjoining garden (1.1079).³¹⁰ Palamon cries out and wakes Arcite. The intersection of *fin’amors* and brotherhood plays out for the reader in the moment of Arcite’s waking. Arcite, knowing only the shared tribulation of imprisonment, assumes that Palamon’s cry indicates his misery due to incarceration. In order to comfort Palamon, Arcite reminds him of one of the benefits of their brotherhood trouthe: “Why cridestow? . . . For Goddes love, talk al in pacience/ Our prisoun, for it may noon other be. / Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee” (1.1083-86). Prison affords them all the time in the world to comfort one another; Arcite sees their adversity as a benefit of brotherhood— they are together, sharing the burden of imprisonment. Arcite then reminds Palamon of the specificity of their trouthe: “Som wikke aspect or disposicioun/ Of Saturne, by som constellacioun, / Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn . . . We moste endure it; this is the short and playn” (1.1087-91). Their oath requires the two knights to endure their circumstances regardless of their origin or if they deserve them. The perceived benefit of their trouthe is that they endure these circumstances together.

³⁰⁹ The spelling of Palamon is not standardized in the “Knight’s Tale.” It appears as both Palamoun and Palamon. For the purposes of this essay, I chose the spelling “Palamon.”

³¹⁰ Like “Palamon” Emelye is spelled multiple ways: “Emelye,” “Emelya” and “Emelie.” I chose “Emelye.”

Arcite's interpretation of Palamon's shouted "A!" misses the mark. Palamon's vocalized discomfort does not come from frustration or melancholy in the face of extended imprisonment therefore the specifics of their brotherhood trouthe are irrelevant in this situation. Palamon explains that he "was hurt right now thurghout myn ye/ Into myn herte . . ." (1.1096-7). Palamon then adds a heavy-handed sense of foreshadowing exclaiming "[T]hat wol my bane be" (1.1097). While Arcite completely misreads the origin of Palamon's cry, Palamon still thinks of their relationship as a "we" rather than two individuals. So smitten by love, Palamon cannot tell if Emelye is a woman or the embodiment of the goddess Venus. Hedging his bets on "goddesse," Palamon falls to his knees and prays "Venus, if it be thy wil . . . Out of this prisoun help that we may scapen. / And if so be my destyne be shapen/ By eterne word to dyen in prisoun, / Of our linage have som compassioun . . ." (1.1104, 06-9). Palamon and Arcite's oaths spoken prior to imprisonment still represent the bonded relationship Keen calls "affinity" that surpasses the public feudal and moves into the private familial.³¹¹ Palamon prays for their mutual escape or the mutual continuation of their lineage.

So strong are the bonds of brotherhood between the two men that they can only be shaken by a destabilizing outside force. For Palamon and Arcite the destabilizing moment comes when Arcite is also smitten by the sight of Emelye. The privileged brotherhood relationship designed to support, uplift, and share burden suddenly fractures. The two knights respond to their quandary by explicating the specifics of their trouthe. Palamon first checks the veracity of Arcite's declaration: "The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly," asking "Wheither seistow this in earnest or in pley?" (1.1118, 1125). Arcite vows to God that what he says is in earnest. In doing

³¹¹ Keen, *Nobles*. "The mutual obligations of brothers-in-arms resemble not those of lord and vassal, but those of a man's affinity, his familiars, or his private retinue . . . Once again the parallel is with the family or the household, for within their scheme there is room for both equal and unequal relations" (56).

so he models legal oath swearing, but swearing his oath in private with no witnesses opens the door to a subjective interpretation of the brotherhood trouthe. R. F. Green notes: “Unless the parties were already well known to one another and the agreement relatively unimportant, witnesses [*videntes et audientes*] were essential”³¹² Palamon and Arcite certainly know each other well, but Arcite’s pledge of love for Emelye is far from unimportant—the fidelity between the two knights signified by their trouthe hangs in the balance due to this oath. Therefore, even if Arcite’s oath is only verbal its magnitude requires witnesses; without these witnesses the oath becomes “a doubtful undertaking” and subject to interpretation (102).

Doubt immediately surfaces as Palamon responds angrily, calling Arcite “fals” and “a traitour/ to me that am thy cosyn and thy brother/ Ysworn ful deepe” (1.1130-32). Palamon links the term “fals” or “given to the practice of deception; guilty of breach of trust; one who bears false witness” to “traitour” a term with reprehensible physical, religious, and social meaning. In short, all of the definitions of “traitour” from the Late Middle Ages fall within the parameters delineated by the chivalric code.³¹³ The primary definition of traitor denotes

³¹² Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 64. Green references Baldonet’s stipulation of *videntes et audientes* or those who see and hear when a trouthe is plighted (59).

³¹³ Ramon Llull employs anacoenosis, asking the knights reading his chivalric manual questions regarding the responsibility of knights towards those deemed traitorous: “If it is the office of the knight to impeach or fight the traitor, and if it is the office of the treacherous knight to defend himself and fight the loyal knight, what is the office of the knight? And if a courage as evil as the courage of a treacherous knight seeks to vanquish the courage of a loyal knight, what is it that the lofty courage of a knight who fights out of loyalty is seeking to vanquish and overcome? And if the knight who is a friend of Chivalry and loyalty is vanquished, what is the sin that he has committed and where has the honor of Chivalry gone? (53). He also addresses traitors directly in “On the Office that Pertains to the Knight”: “Traitors, thieves and robbers must be persecuted by the knights, for just like the axe that has been made to cut down trees, so the knight professes his office to cut down malefactors. If the knight himself is a robber, a thief or a traitor . . . he should arrest or kill himself . . . [but as] it is unlawful for any man to kill himself, in which case . . . a traitor . . . must be destroyed and killed by another knight” (51). Geoffroi de Charny employs the same anacoenosis technique in section 24 of his manual. He lists a full page of oppositional qualities in the form of questions. At the end of each question, he answers: “Indeed no!” Example: “Were they chosen to lead dishonest and ill-famed lives? Indeed no! . . . Were they chosen to lie and to break their promises, oaths, and sealed agreements? Indeed no! Were they chosen to commit, have others commit, or give consent to any misdeed? Indeed no! etc. “ (139).

physicality: “guilty of high treason against king (or ruler), realm, or people with “high treason” described as plotting death, aiding enemies, betraying military secrets, levying war, counterfeiting, thieving etc. “Traitor” can also be interpreted religiously: a sinner, an evil doer. Finally, “traitour” holds a negative social significance and one that is specific to the brotherhood oath and chivalry itself: a betrayer of kinship, friendship, or trust; someone who reneges on a deal; an oath-breaker; a traitor to chivalry, an unchivalrous knight.³¹⁴ Palamon’s intertwining of “fals” with “traitour” effectively places Arcite not only in breach of his brotherhood oath but also within the ranks of the chivalrically malfeasant. At this point the brotherhood oath Arcite understood as an easement of their chivalric burden of unlawful imprisonment becomes a compounding force. Where once the two knights faced tribulation as a team, they now face each other as adversaries.

Palamon continues the rhetorical analysis of their oath in the hopes of discouraging Arcite. He highlights the ecclesiastical and legal spaces in which the trouthe resides:

That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,
Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,
Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother,
But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me
In every cas, as I shal forthren thee (1133-38)

The brother’s inclusion of “Neither of us in love to hyndre oother”— specific language dealing with *fin’ amors*— bears noting. Their trouthe resembles that of King Canute and King Edmund’s in *Historia Anglorum* by virtue of the fact that it is reciprocal and places adjudicatory responsibility on both knights. But, unlike historical brotherhood oaths, theirs binds them for life in language usually reserved for marriage contracts and specifies their behavior towards each

³¹⁴ All definitions taken from the *Middle English Dictionary* accessed online via UNCG library databases. Last date of access 10 May 2019.

other when they fall in love. Palamon and Arcite's brotherhood oath exemplifies the fragile state of oaths sworn outside of those instituted within the chivalric code. In other words, formal oaths of fealty taken in front of witnesses and detailed in chivalric manuals can only be broken by mutual agreement between lord and knight or by egregious behaviors deemed malfeasance by lord and/or society. Brotherhood oaths, on the other hand, fall prey to subjective deconstruction by either participant because, at least in literature, they are informal and happen in private without witnesses. While the intention of the brotherhood oath is to create a binding "support system" for knights, the reality is that their subjective state leaves brothers vulnerable, especially in the amorphous and fraught arena of love.

Palamon feels that he has the right to invoke the "love clause" in his and Arcite's oath: "I loved hire first, and told thee my wo . . ." (1.1146). He mentions both the bonds of their brotherhood and Arcite's position as a knight in his defense of their trouth's veracity: "As to my conseil and my brother sworn/ To forthre me . . . For which thou art ybounden as a knight/ To helpen me, if it lay in thy might . . ." (1.1147-50). Because the oath cannot withstand the additional pressure of each knight's love for Emelye and because of its informal status Arcite feels entitled to deconstruct the rhetoric of both the oath and Palamon's declaration of love. He utilizes the brotherhood oath defense equivalent of "I know you are but what am I?" needling Palamon with "Thow shalt . . . be rather fals than I; / And thou art fals . . . For paramour I loved her first er thow" (1.1153-55). Arcite bends the rhetoric of the brotherhood oath's specification on hindrance in love to suit his particular point of view. He loves Emelye as a paramour; Palamon worships her as a goddess. He differentiates between spiritual worship and physical attraction and in doing so turns the objective of the brotherhood oath on its head. It is no longer

about affinity and easement of burden; it is about individual sovereignty in love and the forward motion of one brother at the expense of the other.

Arcite further complicates the legitimacy of the clause: “Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,” by placing love outside the boundaries of law and adds that man is indefensible in the face of love.³¹⁵ Ending Arcite’s treatise on love and the legal system, the narrator Knight steps in cutting off the rhetorical deconstruction of the brotherhood oath stating “They fought al day . . .” (1.1178). At this point in the *Knight’s Tale* the temptation arises within the reader to determine that the brotherhood oath dissolves. The two knights allow the introduction of Emelye and *fin’amors* to tear apart their affinity towards one another. They are no longer a familial “we” but sovereign “me’s.” They each have accused the other of treason and falseness and in doing so they attempt to de-knight one another, thus compounding their own burden as they sit languishing in prison now at odds with one another. The erasure of their brotherhood feels obvious and many critics see it as such. William Wood finds that “both men have given up their blood-bond for the tighter bond of love for Emelye”³¹⁶ Lee Patterson calls the actions of Palamon and Arcite “romantic foolishness”; “mindless rivalry”, and a “story of meaningless competition conducted in terms of a chivalric selfhood that prevents individual development”³¹⁷ giving no notice whatsoever to their oath of brotherhood. Robert Stretter questions Chaucer’s intentions when he causes “oath-bound men to fall out over a woman and to ignore their duties to

³¹⁵ I. 1165-70. “Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan, / Than may be yeve to any erthely man; / And therefore positif lawe and swich decree/ Is broken al day for love in ech degree. / A man moot nedes love, maugree his heed; / He may not fleen it, thogh he sholde be deed”

³¹⁶ William F. Wood, *Chaucerian Spaces: Spatial Poetics in Chaucer’s Opening Tales* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 26.

³¹⁷ Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 202, 226, 228. Patterson describes Palamon and Arcite in this manner not to disparage the “Knight’s Tale” but to support the thesis of his chapter that the Tale itself is “Chaucer’s farewell to the chivalric context of his earlier writing and his promise to himself that what chivalry had repressed—the individual subject in time and motion—was now about to return” (230).

one another for the sake of erotic passion.”³¹⁸ But, the text of the “Knight’s Tale” shows their brotherhood trouthe remaining largely intact and Palamon and Arcite unconsciously adhering to their oath even as they battle for Emelye’s hand.

Except for the love clause which due to its subjectivity is somewhat of an anomaly in brotherhood trouthes, the specifics of the cousin’s oath are clear. First, only death will separate them. Second, the obligation of help is reciprocal and holistic. Third, the oath is binding, sworn as both familial and chivalric. Fourth, and the glaring outlier, is the statement that neither brother will hinder the other in love. The first part of the oath represents a particularly martial and physical perspective. This oath was sworn between two knights who fought valiantly, side by side against Theseus. They are found together after the battle “Nat fully quyke, ne fully dede” (1.1015). They are imprisoned together and they fall in love together. The two are eventually separated by Duc Perotheus who “loved wel Arcite” and negotiates Arcite’s release from prison.³¹⁹ Rather than rejoice, Arcite mourns his freedom equating it to a death where he moves from the ascendent hope of purgatory to unescapable hell: “Now is my prisoun worse than biforn; / Now is me shape eternally to dwelle/ Noght in purgatorie, but in hell” (1.1224-26). Even in prison he was connected to the chivalric brotherhood of knights through his oath to Arcite and by the somewhat bastardized fealty relationship between captor and captive. His bond with Arcite gives him identity and purpose and momentarily alleviates the burdens of knighthood, however this easing of burden is temporary and in Arcite’s own words his situation “worsens” as time passes. Eventually he declares himself “deed” (1.1274). Still, the brothers are never truly separated just as Arcite is not truly dead. Arcite is always on Palamon’s mind. He

³¹⁸ Stretter, 501.

³¹⁹ I. 1202-06: “Duc Perotheus loved wel Arcite, / And hadde hym knowne at Thebes yeer by yeer, / And finally at requeste and preyere/ Of Perotheus, withouten any raunsoun, / Duc Theseus hym leet out of prisoun.”

worries that Arcite will gather troops to wage war on Theseus and take Emelye for his own. He imagines that Arcite may construct some sort of treaty by which he gains Emelye's hand in marriage.³²⁰ And like Arcite's "worsened condition," he confesses that now because he is alone in prison and without any possibility of Emelye's love his torment and woe "doubleth" (1.1298).

Palamon's escape from prison physically reunites the two brothers, although they remained connected emotionally through their same jealous love for Emelye. After coming out of hiding Palamon confronts Arcite, revealing that the terms of their brotherhood oath remain very much intact even while the brothers are at odds: "Arcite . . . For whom that I have al this peyne and wo, / And art my blood and to my conseil sworn, / As ful ofte have told thee heerbiforn . . ." (1580, 82-84). Palamon gives Arcite an ultimatum: stop loving Emelye or die.³²¹ In response Arcite swears an amendment to their original oath.

The original oath guarantees reciprocity between brothers in "every case." It invokes both familial and chivalric language; can only be broken by the death of one of the brothers, and will not hinder the other in pursuits of love. Even though Arcite claims to "defye the seurete and the bond/ Which that thou seist that I have maad to thee" his new oath merely amends the old one: "Have heer my trouthe; tomorwe I wol nat faille, / Withoute wityng of any oother wight, / That here I wol be founden as a knyght . . ." (1.1610-12). Arcite's new oath formalizes his promise calling it a "trouthe" and ensures its validity by guaranteeing that he will perform the actions within the oath as a knight and not the squire Philostrate. Arcite's trouthe continues, guaranteeing egalitarian footing between the two as they endeavor to settle the matter of Emelye:

³²⁰ I.1285-90. "Thou mayst, syn thou hast wisdom and manhede, / Assemblen all the folk of oure kynrede, / And make a were so sharp on this cite/ That by some aventure or some treetee/ Thou mayst have hire to lady and to wyf/ For whom that I moste nedes lese my lyf."

³²¹ I. 1593- 95. "I drede noght that outhere thou shalt dye, / Or thou ne shalt loven Emelye. / Chees which thou wolt, or thou shalt nat asterte!"

And [I will] bryngen harneys right ynough for thee;
And ches the beste, and leef the worste for me.
And mete and drynke this nyght wol I brynge
Ynough for thee, and clothes for thy beddyng (1.1613-19).

The original brotherhood oath with its idealized and general promise of: “thou sholdest trewely forthren me/ In every cas, as I shal forthren thee . . .” now involves so much specificity there can be no room for rhetorical machinations. Arcite vows to supply Palamon with everything he needs to “forthren” his cause, including a promise of the best armor. In this case the original oath’s love clause is also fulfilled. By feeding, facilitating rest, and equipping his brother completely there is nothing left standing in the way of either man’s quest for Emelye’s love. Although they remain chivalrous to one another through the specifics of their amended trouthe the outcome for the two brothers is still an increase in burden.

In the original trouthe the brothers face threats from the outside. Opposing knights come from other realms; the two brother’s unity mitigates any circumstances oppositional to their chivalric identity and their specific trouthe. Their brotherhood pact provides a unified and exclusive front designed to distribute the burden of their chivalric obligations. The new trouthe divides the united exclusive front and identifies each brother as the opposing outsider still united by the bonds of the chivalric code. They must bear the burden alone and view each other as both their enemy and their brother. Their trouthe facilitates a civil war encompassing all the rules of the chivalric code and all of the rules delineated in their private oath. Arcite concludes the new agreement with a solution to the Emelye détente: “And if so be that thou my lady wynne, / And sle me in this wode ther I am inne, / Thow mayst wel have the lady as for me” (1.1617-19). The addendum to the new trouthe gazes wistfully back to a time before either laid eyes upon Emelye; a time when the two knights truly viewed each other as brothers and friends. For Arcite the only other person worthy of Emelye is his sworn brother Palamon, but now the compounded burden

of chivalry demands that one of them die. Arcite swore this oath as a knight and “By God that sit above,” there will be no going back to shared burden (1.1599). There is only death for one or the other.

The brothers fight each other twice, the first time they arm each other “as friendly as he were his owene brother” and prove to be so well-matched that “up to the ancle foghte they in hir blood” (1.1652, 1.1660).” The brothers are as unified in battle against each other as they were in battle against Theseus; their trouthe demands that they each perform their best for each other, and they do. When they are caught battling by Theseus out for a hunt in the merry month of May, Palamon reifies the stipulations of the original oath except he asks for reciprocity in death: “This is thy mortal foo . . . That fro thy land is banysshed on his heed . . . Wherefore I axe deeth and my juwise; / But sle my felawe in the same wise, / For bothe han we deserved to be slayn” (I. 1724-25, 34-5, 39-41). Theseus’ first inclination is to kill the escaped prisoner and the imposter. After appeals by his wife Hippolyta and Emelye and some time spent remembering when he was a foolish servant of love, he reconsiders and decides to spare Arcite and Palamon.³²² However, Theseus’ pardon comes with conditions: the two kindred knights must swear an oath of fealty to him.³²³ Now the two knights who fought chivalrously against Theseus must bind themselves to him. The brotherhood oath meant to aid the two knights in their quest to defeat Theseus and others who would come against them leads them to this moment where their enemy becomes their lord.

³²² I. 1743-99.

³²³ I. 1821-25: “And ye shul bothe anon unto me swere/ That never emo ye shal my contree dere, / Ne make were upon my nyght ne day, / But been my freendes in all that ye may, / I yow foryeve this trespass every deel.”

Theseus' solution to the Emelye conundrum requires the brothers to return to the kingdom for a tournament in fifty weeks armed with a retinue of a hundred knights. Whoever kills or captures the other wins Emelye. However, both the original and the post-Emelye brotherhood trouthes require that either Palamon or Arcite die because only death can tear them apart. Survival determines chivalric prowess and access to *fin'amors*; death solidifies the diminished chivalric reputation of the loser and denies him access to heart's desire. In the melee Palamon is captured and Arcite is declared the winner of the tournament and thus the winner of Emelye's hand in marriage. If this were the culmination of all the trouthe swearing, debate, and blood-letting not only would the brothers fail to uphold the stipulations within their trouthe—thus calling into question the purpose of brotherhood trouthes in general, but more importantly the chivalric system would result in benefit not burden. Palamon and Arcite initially swear both of their trouthes to alleviate the burden the chivalric system places upon them. The physical, religious, and social expectations required by the chivalric code represent an unmanageable and untenable situation for the cousins and they swear to champion each other in all situations thus spreading the burden across their combined backs. Their trouthe binds them for life even when their contentious love of Emelye forces them apart. Up to the moment of Palamon's capture they meet every single stipulation of their trouthe although not in the manner they first intended. Their burden is not lessened or distributed more evenly, it is compounded by the ways in which love redefines the language and application of their trouthe. If Palamon and Arcite both live at the end of the Tournament for Emelye's Hand the stipulations of their oath remain unsatisfied rendering both knights in breach of contract and therefore malfeasant according to the Order of Chivalry. The Order of Chivalry, at its core, is a culture reliant on shared knowledge and understanding of the preeminence of honor, trustworthiness, and oath-keeping. Breaking one's word or failure to

honor one's commitment destabilizes the Order of Chivalry as a whole. Chivalric manuals agree that a knight's obligation is to uphold their oaths or they fall outside of the lauded office of Chivalry. Geoffroi de Charny cautions: "[I]t is necessary that in all . . . respects . . . can anything dishonorable be perceived nor said concerning [knights]; for there will be greater talk and notoriety about their shortcomings" (60.19). Ramon Llull warns sternly about the connection between oath swearing and the Office of Chivalry: "[I]f taking a vow, making a promise to God and swearing an oath truthfully are not proper to the knight, what state is Chivalry in?" (54.32). Christine de Pizan borrows from Valerius Maximus at the beginning of Part Two of her *Corps de policie* where she discusses the six virtues a knight should have. Fourth in the list is the admonition: "be truthful and uphold. . . fealty and oath."³²⁴ The capture of Palamon rather than his death would provide an end to the feud over Emelye. Both brothers would live; one would receive Emelye's hand in marriage; both would, ostensibly, grow in favor with Theseus given their prowess and skill, and the burden brought about by the "fight to the death" clause in their amended brotherhood trouthe would be negated. Each would return to the chivalric place of honor reserved for knights whose performance upholds the tenets of the chivalric code in the eyes of society. No one but the two cousins would know that they were oath-breakers.

The gods, however, see to it that the terms of the brotherhood oath are upheld. At the behest of Saturn, Pluto causes the ground to erupt with a "furie infernal" (I. 2684). Arcite and Emelye's eyes meet. His attention diverted, Arcite cracks his breastbone open on the pommel of his saddle as his horse leaps to avoid the explosion. Arcite's injury is mortal and like Palamon's hyperbolic gasp when he first sees Emelye, he is literally slain through the eyes. His death fulfills

³²⁴ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. and trans. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 75.

both the terms of their original trouthe— that neither brother be separated except by death, and the terms of their amended trouthe— “And if so be that thou my lady wynne, / And sle me in this wode ther I am inne, / Thow mayst wel have the lady as for me”(1.1617-19). That Palamon survives and his cousin perishes also fulfills Arcite’s foreshadowing prophecies. When he gazes at Emelye from his prison tower he exclaims: “The fresshe beautee sleeth me soddenly . . . I nam but deed . . .” (1.1118, 22). Later as he bemoans his diminished station from prince to lowly steward he complains: “Ye sleen me with youre eyen, Emelye! Ye been the cause wherefore that I dye” (1.1567-8). Arcite’s dying wish fulfills the oath sworn by the two many years and many buckets of blood before: “As in this world right now ne knowe I non/ So worthy to ben loved as Palamon . . . if that evere ye shul ben a wyf, / Forget not Palamon, the gentil man” (1.2793-96). True to their bond in the end Arcite refuses to hinder his brother in love and only death causes their parting. The completion of the brotherhood oath sends one knight to his grave and the other into a marriage where the only description given by the narrator implies service by Palamon and silence from Emelye: “And Emelye hym loveth so tenderly, / And he hire serveth so gentilly/ That nevere was ther no word hem bitwene” (3103-5). Palamon now lives a chivalric life of service to Emelye with no guarantee of reciprocated tenderness, service, or gentillesse. He remains chivalrically bound to Theseus—his conqueror and captor through both fealty and marriage. His brotherhood oath meant to ease his chivalric burden crumbles with the addition of *fin’amors* resulting in a compounding of his troubles and the death of his brother.

Like Arcite and Palamon in Chaucer’s the *Knight’s Tale*, Amis and Amiloun, from the late thirteenth-century Middle English romance of the same name, experience the pitfalls of a brotherhood trouthe designed to alleviate the chivalric code’s physical, religious, and social

burdens.³²⁵ Born on the same night but from different mothers, the boys are inseparable and indistinguishable from each other. Their bond creates an erstwhile “blood-brother” identity that tragically moves from figurative visions of shared biology to the literal covering of the boys in blood. Amis and Amiloun reject oaths of fealty and chivalric conduct for a pact of their own design. They allow the needs of one another to supersede secular and ecclesiastical law. The corrupting influence of their oath transforms them into knights unrecognizable through the lens of chivalry as each willingly deceives, murders, and marauds to benefit the other. Amis and Amiloun’s trouthe exists solely for the benefit of themselves at the expense of all other oaths and the structure of the Office of Chivalry. Unwavering adherence to the terms of their vow so burdens each brother that they become the antithesis of the idealized chivalric knight.

Sometime between their twelfth and fifteenth year, identical friends Amis and Amiloun pledge their trouthe to one another. Striking in its specificity, their trouthe addresses the physical, religious and social aspects of the chivalric code they will soon be expected to uphold:

While thai might live and stond
That bothe bi day and bi night,
In wele and wo, in wrong and right,
That thai schuld frely fond
To hold togider at everi need,
In word, in werk, in wille, in dede,
Where that thai were in lond,
Fro that day forward never mo
Failen other for wele no wo:
Therto thai held up her hond.³²⁶

³²⁵ *Amis and Amiloun*’s spelling of “trewthe” differs from the “ou” variant in the *Knight’s Tale*, however in the interest of continuity within this chapter I will continue to use the “ou” spelling unless directly quoting the text of *Amis and Amiloun*.

³²⁶ Non-discursive citations will be interlinear in the form of: (line number). “Amis and Amiloun,” in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. Edward E. Foster. (*TEAMS: Middle English Texts Series*, 2007), 147-156. All subsequent quotations will be drawn from this edition, which uses the Auchinleck version as its base text, supplementing lost and incomplete lines at the beginning and end of the text (ll. 1–52 and ll. 2441–2508 are missing, ll. 53–96 are damaged) with Egerton’s version of the text. At least twenty-seven versions of the story survive in eight different languages, dating from the eleventh through the sixteenth centuries. On the relationship

Physically the oath encompasses their lifespan: “While thai might live and stond.” It also addresses technical expectations of allegiance to one another: “[B]othe bi day and bi night.” And, it delineates the physical methods of defense: “In word, in werk, in wille, in dede.” Religiously the oath covers moral turpitude and finds that regardless of culpability the brothers will defend one another: “In wele and wo, in wrong and right.” This same clause addresses social expectations within the oath since “wele and wo, in wrong and right” can be socially constructed by the optics of any given situation. The structure of the oath is intricate, solid, and crafted to displace any potential burden the boys may experience as they grow in chivalric prowess and *gentillesse*.

The first test of their trouthe comes when the boys must separate. Amiloun’s parents die and he prepares to travel home to secure his family lands. Right before his departure Amiloun reminds Amis of their oath’s reciprocity: “Brother, be now trewe to me,/ And y schal ben as trewe to the . . .” (298-99). Amiloun also feels compelled to give Amis some specific examples of potential pitfalls. First, he compares their oath of fealty to the Duke they serve to Christ’s obligation to “bar the croun of thorn/ To save al mankende” (302-3). He adds that if Amis ever goes against the Duke in “trewthe [or] tresoun” he will be damned (305-6).³²⁷ Amiloun also warns Amis to be careful of “the fals steward”^a (jealous co-worker) and his overtures of friendship which Amiloun believes will harm Amis (310-12).³²⁸ Amiloun then visually marks their commitment with a golden goblet to which he holds the only match (313-18).³²⁹

between these, see the introduction to MacEdward Leach’s edition, *Amis and Amiloun*, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), ix–xxxii.

³²⁷ “And yif thou dost, thou art forlorn,/ Ever more withouten ende.”

³²⁸ “And, brother, yete y the forbede/ The fals steward felawerede/ Certes, he wil the schende!”

³²⁹ “As thai stode so, tho bretheren bold,/ Sir Amiloun drought forth tuay coupes of gold,/ Ware liche in al thing,/ And bad sir Amis that he schold/ Chese whether he have wold,/ Withouten more duelling,”

Amiloun rightly suspects that Amis will fall victim to the steward's jealousy. Almost immediately after Amiloun's departure the steward approaches Amis attempting to erase the boy's brotherhood trewthe and "be a better frende/ Than ever yete was" (358-60). The steward's suggested trouthe lacks specificity and offers no real benefit to Amis: "Be trewe to me in word and dede,/ And y schal to the, so God me spede,/ Be trewe to the also" (364-66). The steward frames his proposition as a contest between the two trouthes and by proxy himself and Amiloun. Amis rejects the steward's request, making an enemy of the man. Soon after, Belisaunt, the duke's daughter falls madly in love with Amis.

Love sick, Belisaunt finds herself with Amis in the castle garden under an apple tree as a nightingale sings portending their inevitable sexual relationship.³³⁰ Seizing her opportunity, Belisaunt tells Amis how deeply she loves him and begs him to: "Plight me thi trewthe thou schalt be trewe . . . And y plight the mi treuthe also,/ Til God and deth dele ous ato,/ Y schal never be forsworn" (583, 586-88). Plighting his trouthe to Belisaunt poses no conflict to his brotherhood trouthe, nor does it pose the problem of throwing over an old absent friend for a new present one like the steward's oath requires. Instead, Amis's problem with Belisaunt's proposal arises out of practical chivalry: Belisaunt is above his station. Amis feels it will dishonor the Duke's daughter: "Thi love to lain upon a knight/ That nath noither lond no fe" (599-600). He is a young knight without lands, rents or reputation; he serves at the pleasure of her father the Duke without a single ally other than his absent cousin, Amiloun. Following the parting advice of

³³⁰ See Jeni Williams, *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender, Class, and Histories* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 58. Williams tracks the literary symbolism of the nightingale and finds that during the thirteenth century the nightingale "functions at the ambiguous boundary of a number of conflicting areas: court/nature; masculine/feminine; active/passive." Additionally, the nightingale is associated with the erotic (58).

Amiloun to under no circumstances cross the Duke, he rejects her kindly but firmly and implores her to: “think what wil com of this dede:/ Certes, no thin bot wo” (611-12).

The preeminence of Amis’ vow to Amiloun causes him to reject the steward’s and Belisaunt’s alternative offers. At this point in the romance the trouthe meant to alleviate potential burden brings about life changing “wo” for Amis and his yet to return blood-brother Amiloun. In response to Amis’ rejection Belisaunt mocks the young knight demanding to know if he is actually a celibate man of the cloth that he would “prechest” about such issues as fealty and chivalric propriety (616-18). Belisaunt pressures Amis admitting she would damn her own brother to hell if it was he who persuaded Amis to reject her. Since loyalty to the trouthe and advice of his blood-brother is the cause of Amis’ burden he realizes the gravity of Belisaunt’s ensuing threat: “Mi kerchief and mi clothes anon/ Y schal torende doun ichon/ And say with michel wrong,/ With strengthe though hast me todrawe” (631-35). The girl who would damn her own brother for standing in the way of her desires would rather accuse the man she desires of rape rather than face his rejection. Amis is in trouble. Belisaunt reminds him that according to “londes lawe” her accusation of rape will bring about his hanging (635-6).³³¹ Amiloun is too far away to help therefore the protective promises of their trouthe cannot ease his burden. The naivete of their trouthe, sworn in the idylls of youth, and clearly ill-prepared for the reality of chivalric adulthood renders Amis vulnerable. After deliberation Amis decides: “Better were to

³³¹ “Ytake thou schalt be londes lawe/ And dempt heighe to hong!” For more on the difference between literary and legal consequences of rape see: Kathryn Gravdal, “Replaying Rape: Feudal Law on Trial in *Le Roman de Renart*,” in *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). In this chapter Gravdal examines the convergence of medieval literature and law in the three trial scenes of the *Renart* (72-103). Or, Corrine Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001). Saunders uses literary texts, legal documents, surveys, accountancy, and influential scholarship in Old Testament studies to “elucidate the differences between medieval and modern notions of rape through the excavation of medieval cultural attitudes and the resulting contextualization of medieval writing”(4). Of particular note: Chapter 5 “Middle English Romance: Structures of Possession” (187-233).

graunt hir asking/ Thah his liif for to spille” (650-1). Acquiescing to Belisaunt’s demands Amis sinks beneath the burden of his compounding “wo.”

Amis’s trouthe to Belisaunt and rejection of Amiloun’s warnings to beware of the jealous steward and always seek to please the Duke require conflicting performances for the young knight. He cannot perform chivalrically with all three concurrently, and every option seems to lead to increased burden, and even death.³³² Amis surrenders to Belisaunt’s threats, taking them far more seriously than the steward’s. Belisaunt’s threat of hanging, riddled with specificity, troubles Amis far more than the steward’s vague “Thou schalt abigge this nay;” or: “You will atone for this refusal” (390). Amis’ rejection of the steward leaves the knight’s chivalric reputation intact while his submission to Belisaunt’s coercive trouthe burdens him with unchivalrous behavior. Once he suppresses his initial respect of her station he slips easily into the vice of lust and its “malicious and impure thoughts” the consequence of which is a descent from honor and “censure by the people.”³³³ The plighting of love quickly turns into the winning of “maidenhead,” with the jealous steward spying the whole affair (764-68).³³⁴ Immediately the consequential public censure of Amis’ unchivalrous lust begins: The steward reports Amis to Belisaunt’s father, framing the affair as a violation of Amis’s chivalric duty to the Duke: “[C]ertes, he is a traitour strong/ when he with tresoun and with wrong/ thi doughter hath forlain!” (790-92). The chivalric code demands loyalty to one’s lord, else the ceremony of fealty becomes worthless and with it the entire code crumbles. Richard Kaeuper codifies the medieval

³³² Along with making a mortal enemy out of the steward and the threat of hanging due to charges of rape Amis also fears being “[w]ith wilde hors and with strong/ Y schal be drawe also” by the knight if he discovers Belisaunt and Amis in a relationship (644-45). Later he fears her father will excommunicate him: “Of lond he wald me drive” (750).

³³³ Ramon Llull, “On the Habits that Pertain to the Knight,” 74.11.

³³⁴ “And in his armes he hir nam/ And kist that miri may;/ And so thai plaid in word and dede,/ That he wan hir maidenhead,/ Er that sche went oway.”

knight's sense of loyalty as "intensely personal" demanding "faithfulness to obligation" and steady reliability. He insists that a chivalrous knight is "never devious or untrustworthy."³³⁵ The steward expertly intertwines the physical, religious, and social burdens of chivalry borne by Amis with his accusation of sexual theft; moral turpitude; and catastrophic disrespect towards his lord.

The accusation of pre-meditated treason against the Duke sets events in motion that will test the limits of Amis and Amiloun's understanding of "wele and wo . . . in wrong and right . . ." Amis' burden brought about by conflicting expectations of chivalric behavior has already compromised him so he has very little trouble patently denying the charges of impropriety leveled against him by the steward. Although the steward's method of information gathering—listening and watching through a hole in the wall—creepily borders on the perverse, the essentials of his accusation are truthful. Amiloun's warning and Amis' fears regarding the Duke are realized and in order to save himself Amis adds additional weight to his ever-increasing burden. He demands to prove his innocence "in bataile/ To make ous quite and fre" essentially preparing to perjure himself through trial by combat (839-40). The more Amis protests his innocence and ostensibly his loyalty and fealty to the Duke, the more the steward insists that his eyes did not deceive him: "Y seighe it me self this ich day,/ Where that sche in thi chaumber lay,/ Your noither it may forsake!" (850-52). The Duke acquiesces to a battle between the steward and Amis to prove who speaks the truth.

With a fortnight to prepare, Amis decides to use Amiloun as his stand-in as recourse against the steward's allegations. Amis's transformation from naïve and untested to worldly-

³³⁵ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 46.

wise and compromised further complicates the already unexpectedly multivalent terms of the brotherhood trouthe. The steward's tactics are slimy but he speaks the truth.³³⁶ Amis is definitely in “wo” and definitely in the wrong— he admits as much —, but he hopes he has the oath on his side (940-41).³³⁷ He swears by Saint Gile that his brother Amiloun is so true to him that “his owen liif to lese to mede,/ He wold help me at this need . . .” (952, 958-9). Amiloun, obviously living out his early adulthood in a state of chivalric perfection, running his family estate and land, dispensing with the expected *largesse*, and married to a lovely wife knows nothing of his brother's plight. The narrative suggests, fortunately, that their trouthe creates a deep psychic and spiritual connection so that as Amis travels towards Amiloun to request his assistance, Amiloun dreams of his blood-brother's peril. He sets out alone to search for Amis and handily finds him asleep under a tree. Amis recounts the whole sorry tale and confesses his culpability. He also reveals that he bears the burden of Belisaunt and her mother's lives because they are acting as his seconds and vouching for his innocence. True to their oath, Amis's “wo” becomes Amiloun's and together the brothers descend into moral relativism at the expense of their chivalrically encoded identities.

Although Amiloun knows his brother is guilty he swears “Bi Him that Judas sold/ And died upon the Rode” invoking the name and sacrifice of Christ to solidify his willingness to “take bataile . . .[and] sen his hert blode!” (1109-11, 1116). After exchanging clothes Amiloun promises to “bigile” the “schrewe” or trick the “rascal, rogue, rotten evildoer” steward.³³⁸ The young knight's mechanism of deceit also tricks the Duke and all of the trial by combat's

³³⁶ Robert Stretter, *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, 552. Stretter uses brotherhood trouthes to explain how an individual like the steward can be in the moral right and speaking the truth but still be considered “fals” and reprehensible. His crime consists of making the private public.

³³⁷ “Ich have that wrong and he the right,/ Therefore icham aferd to fight.”

³³⁸ *Middle English Compendium*. Last accessed 26 October 2020.

spectators. Essentially, the only difference between the steward and the brothers is the justification they feel due to their oath. The steward acts outside of the protection of any such oath, a reality which fuels his vendetta against Amis. Foreshadowing bloody burden in both knight's future is the invocation of St. Giles. Amiloun swears "Bi Seyn Gile" mirroring Amis' use of the same saint as he and Belisaunt formulate their plan to seek out Amiloun for a stand in (952). Saint Giles protects lepers and those in childbirth.³³⁹ His presence on the lips of both Amis and Amiloun hints at the "wo" in the knight's future. Their burden creates an insular and amoral alternative to the Order of Chivalry. They need no saints, no protective hierarchical fealty, and no outside code to guide their decisions. They serve only each other to the rejection of all else.

In what seems to be a last-ditch attempt to restore the brothers into the fold of properly performed chivalric behavior, a warning angel appears to Amiloun as he wends his way towards his battle with the steward. The angel describes the consequences of he and Amis's subterfuge and unchivalrous deception towards their lord the Duke: If Amiloun fights the trial by combat in his brother's stead, the angel portends leprosy will afflict Amiloun so badly that "over al this world, fer and hende,/ Tho that be thine best frende . . . and thi wiif and alle thi kinne/ Schule fle . . ./ And forsake the . . ." (1259-60).³⁴⁰ As recompense for the corruption of the chivalric code Amiloun's body will become corrupted and he will be forsaken by everyone—including his best friend and his wife.³⁴¹ The admonition delivered by the angel references the physical, religious,

³³⁹ For more on Saint Giles see Peter Eade, *Saint Giles: a Sermon* (Norwich: Henry W. Stacy, Old Haymarket, 1870). Born in Athens (ca. 700) and migrating to France, St. Giles lived as a hermit and Anchorite. According to Eade's sermon St. Giles is the patron saint of beggars, cripples, lepers. Note 952 in Amis and Amiloun adds childbirth to the list of St. Giles patronage.

³⁴⁰ "Fouler mesel nas never non/ In the world, than thou schal be!" 1264-72.

³⁴¹ Ojars Kratins, "The Middle English Amis and Amiloun: Chivalric Romance or Secular Hagiography?" *PMLA* 81, no. 5 (1966): 347-54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/460823>. Last Accessed 27 October 2020 argues that "the angel does not threaten Amiloun with punishment" claiming "thou schalt have an euentour

and social burdens of chivalry to which the title of “knight” obligates Amiloun. The battle itself physically demonstrates Amiloun’s prowess as a knight. Because it is witnessed by the Duke, his seconds, and a crowd of people it is also a social marker of chivalry. Religiously the two battle for the disguised knight’s very soul—the outcome determines whether he will die a treasonous thief or emerge with his chivalric reputation validated. The consequence for the deceptive trial by combat also combines the tripartite burden of chivalry. Leprosy, itself a physical disease representing spiritual degradation renders the afflicted a social pariah. Amiloun, by shouldering his brother’s burden will find himself physically marred, religiously suspect, and socially exiled. His status as chivalric knight will be replaced by his status of leper and he will bear the physical, religious, and social burden of both his fall from grace and his diseased body/soul/reputation. Like Amis in the face of Belisaunt’s threats, Amiloun weighs his options: reveal the switch and shame his brother perhaps to death or hold his peace and defy God. Unlike Belisaunt who would damn her own flesh to hell if it served her purpose, and unlike Amis who chose sexual pleasure and his own neck over fealty and truth, Amiloun chooses to challenge God to “do His worst” in order to save Amis (1283-85).³⁴² The brotherhood oath takes precedence over all other vows, even to the transgression of the soul.³⁴³

strange” is a “morally neutral statement; rather, he puts Amiloun’s trewthe to the test by placing before him a choice” (351).

³⁴² 1283-85. “[F]or drede of care/ To hold mi trewthe schal y not spare,/ Lee God don alle His wille.”

³⁴³ Ken Eckert, “Amis and Amiloun: A Spiritual Journey and Failure of Trewthe.” *Literature and Theology* 27, no. 3 (2013): 285–96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23926906>. Last Accessed 3 November 2021: “Several critics asserted that the angel does not threaten Amiloun with punishment, but rather ‘puts Amiloun’s trewthe to the test by placing before him a choice.’ As a ‘visitation of divine grace’ the visitation is intended to intensify Amiloun’s virtue by placing before him one more in a series of trials . . .” (290). Eckert himself opines “Amis is no Gawain who can escape with the technical penalty of a nick; he has taken a life in battle under false pretenses” (290). However, Eckert then adds that the angel is perhaps “lovingly chastening” Amiloun with “ameliorative correction rather than retributive punishment” meant as “medicinal” to “humble” the knight (290).

Amiloun masquerading as Amis slays the steward and as a reward receives Belisaunt's hand in marriage along with the Duke's land to hold in perpetuity. He and Amis switch back and as they part, a grateful Amis deepens his commitment to their earlier vows. He adds greater specificity, swearing: "[Y]if it betide so . . . of mine help hast need,/ . . . send thi sond,/ And yschal never lenger withstond . . ." (1144-51). He physically commits himself to aiding his brother in "care or wo; peril never so strong" framing his promise with a religious oath and expectation that "God me spede." Socially, the amplification of their previous brotherhood trouthe raises the reputational stakes for Amis. He now owes his life to his brother; where before the two were chivalrically "square" now Amis is in Amiloun's debt. As a brother and as a chivalric knight his chivalric burden grows until he makes up the deficit between them. Additionally, Amiloun's rejection of the angel's warnings in favor of Amis problematizes using God to smooth the way if Amiloun is ever in need. Amiloun places Amis and their trouthe in primacy over God when he battles and beheads the steward. Concomitantly, Amis places himself and his farcical chivalric identity in primacy over Amiloun, else he would never have asked Amiloun to battle the steward in the first place. In this relationship the brotherhood trouthe as well as any kind of divine support rings hollow due to Amis's self-regard and Amiloun's blind, heretical loyalty. The burden the brothers carry compounds as their fortunes reverse.

Amis, absolved of all charges, marries Belisaunt. They have two children and Amis becomes duke after the death of his lord. His life looks perfect all thanks to Amiloun's shouldering of his chivalric burden. In stark contrast to Amis's bliss, Amiloun's life turns hellish as his marriage, fortunes, and body degenerate, just as the angel prophesied. After revealing he and Amis's subterfuge to his wife, his wife pulls no proverbial punches. Rather than adhering to Belisaunt's code of silence regarding the treacherous trial by combat, Amiloun's wife castigates

her husband. She calls their choices “ivel” because it led to the slaying of another knight (1492-94).³⁴⁴ In this moment Amiloun’s moral relativism and chivalric destabilization reaches a point of no return: Amiloun justifies the murder of the steward to his wife because the man caused Amis “wo” (1497-1500). He swears Amis “his owen liif to lesse to mede,/ He wald help me also” (1499-1500). While Amiloun’s marriage begins to unravel Amis’s heats up and while Amiloun’s body succumbs to the foretold leprosy Amis’s comrades fete him as “knight of gret renoun/ and lord of mani a tour and toun/ And douke ofgret pousté” (1537-39). As Amis’s star rises, Amiloun’s falls. The consequential leprosy wreaks such physical, religious, and social damage to Amiloun’s body and reputation that the narrator seems compelled to emphasize where the blame lies: “In gest to rede it is gret rewthe,/ What sorwe he hadde for his truthe . . .” (1546-48). While outside forces in the form of Belisaunt’s bribery, Amis’s cowardice, and the steward’s jealous application of the law contributed to Amiloun’s “moment of truth” as he faced the angel, ultimately only he is to blame for his current condition. He placed his brotherhood trouthe in primacy over his oath of fealty to the Duke, his status as Christian knight, and his social reputation as a practitioner of the chivalric code. Amiloun the leper now represents the absolute corruption of the body as well as the soul.³⁴⁵ Barring a miracle, leprosy permanently marks his choice to adhere to the brotherhood trouthe rather than either God’s law or basic moral conventions. Also, his wife, who is well within her right to do so, forces him to move out of their house and into a hut where his disease will be kept at bay.³⁴⁶ True to the angel’s warning he

³⁴⁴ “With wrong and michel unright/ Thou slough ther a gentil knight;/ Ywis, it was ivel ydo!”

³⁴⁵ Critic Kenneth Eckert sees Amiloun differently; he describes him as “a model of saintly patience” (291).

³⁴⁶ Biblically the decampment of those infected with leprosy stems from Leviticus 13. *Douay Rheims*: Leviticus 13: 44-46 states specifically: “Now whosoever shall be defiled with the leprosy, and is separated by the judgement of the priest, shall have his clothes hanging loose, his head bare, his mouth covered with a cloth, and he shall cry out that he is defiled and unclean. All the time that he is leper and unclean, he shall dwell alone without the

is friendless and rejected by all except for his faithful nephew Child Owaines (later renamed Amoraunt).

Begging in the street and accompanied only by Amoraunt, Amiloun chances to meet Amis. Due to identifying shoulder wounds, and the *deus ex machina* golden goblet reveal, Amiloun and Amis reunite. Initially Amis accuses Amiloun of treachery and thievery (just as the steward once accused him) owing to his disbelief that a leper could be in possession of the matching golden goblet for any reason other than malfeasance (2053-63).³⁴⁷ In the resulting tussle Amis first dunks the leper in the lake and then drags him through a mudhole. Both of these actions model biblical methods used to heal: In the Old Testament submersion in water heals a Syrian commander of leprosy and in the New Testament Jesus uses mud to restore sight.³⁴⁸ Amiloun's body is corrupted by leprosy and he is blind to his own culpability. Amis, while appearing bountifully blessed is blind to his own inner corruption and to the identity of the destitute leper in front of him. Still, neither the dunking or dragging are meant as restoratives when enacted by Amis. Instead, they are meant to punish the leper for soiling the chivalric

camp." The Third Lateran Council of 1179 AD relegates lepers to colonies, hospitals, or separate areas within monasteries. See Danica Summerlin, *The Canons of the Third Lateran Council of 1179* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 86-90. Henry de Bracton stipulates that lepers should be removed from their homes and links them with madmen, imbeciles and children in their exclusion from many of the rights and expectations of the church." See Henricus de Bracton, *On the Laws and Customs of England, trans. and ed. Sir Travers Twiss* (London: Longman and Company, 1880), 95. For more on the medieval perceptions of leprosy see David Marcombe, *Leprosy Knights: The Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem in England c. 1150-1544* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003). Marcombe describes the popular medieval belief that "lepers were fired by an inordinate sexual appetite" as stemming from medieval romance and that leprosy as a "punishment for sin" was widely held due to the Israelites' punishment of leprosy after worshipping the Golden Calf (140).

³⁴⁷ "Now certes . . . In al this world were coupes nomo/ So liche in al thing,/ Save min and mi brothers also,/ That was sett bituix ous to,/ Token of our parting;/ And yif it be so, with treason/ Mine hende brother, Sir Amiloun,/ Is slain, without lesing./ And yif ye have stollen his coupe oway;/ Y schal him sle me self this day . . ."

³⁴⁸ *Douay Rheims*: II Kings 5:9-10: "So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Eliseus: And Eliseus sent a messenger to him, saying Go, and was seven times in the Jordan, and they flesh shall recover health, and thou shalt be clean." John 9:1-7: "And Jesus passing by, saw a man, who was blind from his birth . . . He spat on the ground, and made a clay of the spittle, and spread the clay on his eyes, and said to him 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloe, which is interpreted, Sent. He went therefore, and washed, and he came seeing."

reputation and brotherhood bond represented by the goblet and the able-bodied, chivalrically encoded knight Amiloun. Even unknowingly, Amis's actions attempt to benefit his unrecognizable brother by upholding their trouth; instead, he burdens Amiloun with physical violence.

It is Amoraunt who stops Amis's violence against the unrecognizable Amiloun. He lays the blame of Amiloun's current state squarely at Amis's feet: "For the of blysse he ys bare . . . That he halp the at thi need,/ Well evell aquitest thou his mede,/ Alas whi farest thou so?" (2119, 2122-24). Realizing his error, Amis takes Amiloun in his arms and wails that Amiloun has saved his life and he "wrought him michel wo" (2142). He asks Amiloun to forgive him of "this rewely ded" taking responsibility for what he thinks is consequential retribution levied against Amiloun for faking the trial by combat and killing the steward in his stead (2144). Amis's apology and repentance fall short, however, because Amiloun's decision to kill the steward came after the angel's warning not to participate in their deception. Amis cannot repent for causing the leprosy because it is a punishment meant to transform Amiloun from the fair knight loved by everyone who secretly holds his brother above God into a visual representation of unrepentant sin. Amiloun's leperous body signifies the corruption of his soul.³⁴⁹

A restorative measure is provided by another visit from an angel: if Amis will slaughter his children on Christmas Eve, collect their blood in a basin, and anoint his brother—Amiloun

³⁴⁹ See Bryan Grigsby, *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 51-52. The medieval medical community's understanding of the symptoms and causes of leprosy underscore a connection between corruption of the body and the soul. Roland's *Cyurgia* published in the late thirteenth century finds that lepers have "mores mali" or bad morals and Theodoric claims that "lepers grow angry very easily, and more easily than was customary. Evil crafty habits appear; patients suspect everyone of wanting to hurt them. Finally, Guy de Chauliac expresses concern about the paranoid charlatan leper worrying that their attempts to hide their disease threatens the community at large.

will be healed (2200-08).³⁵⁰ Amiloun also dreams of an angel who tells him the exact same thing. Consistent with the assertion that the brotherhood trouthe compounds chivalric burden rather than displacing it, the curative measures suggested by this angel compound and bastardize the traditional cures (both biblical and secular) for leprosy. In II Kings Naaman's anger and pride cause him to contract leprosy. The prophet Elisha comes to Naaman's aid instructing him to bathe seven times in the Jordan river and his leprosy will be healed.³⁵¹ As early as the second century Aretaeus suggests "Continued baths are appropriate for humectating the body, and dispelling the depraved humors . . . there is further recommended natural hot baths of a sulphureous nature, a protracted residence in the waters and a sea voyage."³⁵² The Emperor Constantine is advised by his priests "to have three thousand children slaughtered and to bathe in their warm blood" however, Constantine's priests are pagan and the Emperor refuses their cure.³⁵³ By the twelfth century there are records such as Scottish philosopher, astrologer and erstwhile occultist Michael Scot's cure: "It ought to be known that the blood of dogs and infants two years old or under, when diffused through a bath of heated water, dispels leprosy without a doubt."³⁵⁴ While disconcerting and positively distasteful, Michael Scot's cure does not suggest the death of either the dog or the infant, after all bloodletting is a particularly prevalent medieval

³⁵⁰ "An angel com fram heven bright/ And stode biforn his bed ful right/ And to him thus gan say:/ Yif he wald rise on Cristes morn,/ Swiche time as Jhesu Crist was born,/ And slen his children tuay,/ And alien his brother with the blode,/ Thurch Godes grace, that is so gode,/ His wol schuld wende oway."

³⁵¹ *Douay Rheims*: 2 Kings 5:9-12: So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and stood at the door of Eliseus: And Eliseus sent a messenger to him, saying 'Go, and was seven times in the Jordan, and thy flesh shall recover health and thou shalt be clean. . . he went down and washed in the Jordan seven times: according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean."

³⁵² Aretaeus in George Thin, *Leprosy* (London: Percival and Company, 1891), 223.

³⁵³ Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 268.

³⁵⁴ Michael Scot, *Twentieth Century Practice* (New York: William Wood and Company, 1899), 578. For a more exhaustive review of the use of blood in curing leprosy both prior to and after the thirteenth century version of *Amis and Amiloun* see Brian Murdoch, "Innocent Blood: Redemption and the Leper," in *Adam's Grace: Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 102-125.

medical treatment. Amis and Amiloun's cure conflate the biblical, occultist, and medicinal. On the one hand: their own trouthe dictates that wherever they are, no matter what they are doing, and no matter if the other brother is in the right or wrong, they will go to every length possible to save each other. Amis even adds that he will give his life for Amiloun. On the other hand: with all the literal and promised shedding of blood, neither assumes that the other will need to slaughter their own children in order to save the other. Still, they each take their dreams seriously.

When Amiloun manages to broach the subject of the dream, no ethical discussion debating infanticide versus terms of trouthe takes place. The narrator gives a glimpse into the inner moral quandary Amis experiences, but even this passes in less than a stanza: "For to slene his childer so ying,/ It were a dedli sinne;/ And then thought he . . . His brother out of sorrow bring . . ." (2246-49). Just like Amiloun's justification regarding the challenge and subsequent slaying of the steward, Amis uses alleviating his brother's woe as an excuse to take another's life.³⁵⁵

Reminiscent of Abraham's carefully plotted out movements with his nearly-sacrificial son Isaac, Amis plans every detail of the murder.³⁵⁶ His wife and household head to Christmas

³⁵⁵ David Strong, "Amis and Amiloun," in *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*, ed. Reinhold F. Gleis, Mark Goth, and Nina Tomaszewski (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 43-60. Strong sees "great physical and emotional distress" on the part of Amiloun and "anguish" on Amis's part due to their decision to murder the children. He posits that the "will-act," (otherwise known as infanticide), "provides Amis the opportunity to realize more profoundly than ever before the wellspring of Amiloun's goodness and how it betters their friendship" (57). Julie Nelson Couch, "Figural Agency: Reading the Child in *Amis and Amiloun*," in *Literary Cultures and Medieval and Early Modern Childhoods*, eds. Naomi J. Miller and Diane Purkiss (Camden: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 153-168. Couch endeavors a psychoanalytic reading of the killing of the children finding "In the case of the child sacrifice, the act could also symbolize the killing of Amis' adult self . . . Killing his sons 'kills' his identity as the gazing adult who sees his posterity in his children, the way that Amis' and Amiloun's parents saw their posterity in their beautiful sons" (164).

³⁵⁶ Abraham's movements prior to this sacrifice of Isaac are deliberate and premeditated. *Douay Rheims*: Genesis 22:2-8 describes his steps in excruciatingly dispassionate detail: "So Abraham rising up in the night, saddled his ass: and took with him two young men, and Isaac his son: and when he had cut wood for the holocaust

mass to celebrate the birth of a child who will become the “Lamb That Was Slain” as Amis heads into the nursery to slay his children.³⁵⁷ He uses Amiloun’s shoulder wound received at the hands of the steward as further justification for shedding his children’s blood: “Mi brother was so kinde and gode,/ With grimly wounde he schad his blod . . . Whi schuld y than mi childer spare . . .” (2296-2300). Amiloun’s flesh wound becomes Amis’s holy relic—the tangible place he can touch to know the unconditional love of his trouthe bound brother-savior. The blood of his children, whose earthy savior and defender Amis should be is, instead, disposable and replaceable. It is at this point in the romance that Amis is sometimes viewed as a sacrificially devout father like Abraham, without an acknowledgement of one critical difference: Abraham’s hand was stayed by an angel and a ram was killed in Isaac’s place.³⁵⁸ This moment often transforms Amis in the eyes of the critics into a man loyal to God’s will above even his identity as a father.³⁵⁹ However, the text following the slaughter shows Amis as a brother first, a father second, and at best a skeptic about all things divine.

he went his way to the place God commanded.” The chapter goes on to describe Abraham’s ruses to get rid of his two companions and the lies he tells Isaac to keep the boy from figuring out that he is the intended victim.

³⁵⁷ *Douay Rheims*: Apocalypse (now referred to as Revelations) 4:12: “The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and gory, and benediction.”

³⁵⁸ Kathryn Hume, “Amis and Amiloun” and the Aesthetics of Middle English Romance,” *Studies in Philology* 70, no. 1 (1973): 19–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4173789>. Last accessed 3 November 2021. “Christ’s typological equivalent, Isaac, was also offered as a sacrifice” (29). Bryan Grigsby: “Parrallel to God’s sacrifice of Christ or Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, Amis is given the choice to slay his children so that their blood will alleviate Amiloun’s sin or to let Amiloun continue to suffer from leprosy” (96). Velma Bourgeois Richmond: “And the parent’s sacrifice of a child repeats the situation of Abraham and Isaac . . .” (97).

³⁵⁹ See Velma Bourgeois Richmond, “Friendship and Brotherhood,” in *The Popularity of Middle English Romance* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975): “Certainly Amis sacrifices for his brother (Amiloun), but in doing so he is following a specific injunction from heaven. This devout context is further indicated by his many prayers after the deed; it is significant that we are instantly told that Christ hears this request and answers his prayers” (98). Ken Eckert also suggests that “the harshness of the scene needs to be read in light of the genre. The audience knows they are hearing a romance and not a Greek tragedy, and that according to its rules the children are unlikely to remain dead for long” (292). Sharon E. Rhodes, “Legible Leprosy: Skin Disease in the Testament of Cresseid, Chaucer’s Summoner and Amis and Amiloun,” in *Writing on Skin in the Age of Chaucer*, ed. Nicole Nyffenegger and Katrin Rupp (Boston: DeGruyter, 2018), 77-96. Rhodes excuses the killing of the children because of the Christological outcome: “In the end, both Amis and Amiloun are linked to Christ: Amiloun because

Immediately after his children's "throtes he schar atuo" Amis attempts hide their bodies and delay their discovery (2310). He places the children back in their beds after having moved them in order to catch their blood in a basin and then he "hilde hem, that no wight schuld se," assumedly covering them with their blanket like a shroud (2314). He then locks the door to the nursery, hides the keys under a rock, and plans to say they "hadde ben forlorne" or murdered when the bodies are finally discovered (2317-22). In response to Amiloun's disbelief that he would ever kill his own children, Amis transforms both his frantic movements post infanticide and the foundational language of the brotherhood trouthe to explain away the crime of child sacrifice: "Jhesu, when it is His wille,/ May send me childer mo" (2336-37). Instead of invoking the name of God the father to solidify the seriousness and validity of their contract with one another as he did after the trial by combat, Amis now compels God's son to replace his own children as a reward for how seriously he manages to take his brotherhood trouthe. Jesus, according to Amis, should reward him for taking care of the leprosy brought about the rejection of both biblical mores and the literal words of Christ's messenger angel. Referencing and expecting the miracles of Jesus does not signify Amis's faith, obedience, or hagiographic evolution, it demonstrates his self-regard. Nor does his private moment of prayer in the chapel after anointing Amiloun with the children's blood indicate any kind of contrite action or pardon by God, Jesus, or Mary. Amis prays to be spared from "schame" (2359). His "rewely chere" does not stem from a physical, religious, or social response to slitting his own children's throats—the thought of being caught and shamed burdens him (2358). He wants to rejoice in the healing of

he takes on and suffers for the sin of another and Amis because, like God the father, he is willing to sacrifice his children to save Amiloun" (89).

Amiloun, the repayment of his debt to his brother, and the restoration of their trouthe. Heaven will provide more children; there is only one Amiloun.

Dropping Jesus' name works to assuage Belisaunt who arrives home from Christmas mass only to be told to be of good cheer "bi Him that this world wan,/ Bothe mi childer ich have slan . . ." (2381-82). It is at this point that Amis reveals his indifference to the temporal, divine or biblical: he nonchalantly mentions his doubt as to the veracity of his vision: "For mi *thought* in mi sweven/ That an angel com fram heven" ³⁶⁰ This doubt is especially bothersome since the children already lie exsanguinated in their beds. Amis so desperately wants to fulfill his trouthe to Amiloun and release him from the physical, religious and social burden of leprosy that even without an absolute certainty that the vision ever existed or that the blood will heal his brother or that his children will resurrect, he cuts their throats. In a painfully blasphemous application of water's curative properties in the Old Testament, John's baptism of his cousin Jesus in Matthew, ³⁶¹ and the blood and water flowing from Christ's side to cleanse the sins of humankind in John, ³⁶² Amis baptizes his brother in the blood of children without any assurance of efficacy.

Mercifully, Amiloun emerges healed. ³⁶³ At first glance the loyalty of the brothers to one another seems to have been rewarded and their transgressions washed whiter than snow. The blood heals Amiloun. The children, resurrected, play obliviously in their nursery. However, too much treachery, heresy, and law-breaking elapses for Amis and Amiloun to truly reprise their

³⁶⁰ (emphasis mine)

³⁶¹ *Douay Rheims*: Matthew 3:11-15 "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordon, unto John, to be baptized by him. But John stayed him, saying 'I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering, said to him: 'Suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfill all justice' Then he suffered him."

³⁶² *Douay Rheims*: John 19:33-35 "But after they [the Roman soldiers] were come to Jesus, when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear opened His side, and immediately there came out blood and water. And he that saw it, hath given testimony, and his testimony is true."

³⁶³ Eckert: Amis undergoes a "Saintly evolution" (292).

role as godly flowers of chivalry. The temptation to analyze the resurrection of the children as proof that God blesses the loyalty displayed by the brothers and honors Amis's trust in God requires a facile reading of the text.³⁶⁴ While Amis and Amiloun appear to be restored chivalrically and redeemed by God, their actions continue to display a total disregard for God's law, Christ's grace, social norms, and therefore the chivalric code itself. In fact, after the resurrection of the children they begin to display an erstwhile "god-complex."³⁶⁵ One might imagine that the two men lived out their days in grateful chivalric service due to their own miraculous pardons.³⁶⁶ Hardly.

When Amiloun is well enough to travel he, Amis, and five hundred of Amis's best knights set out to Amiloun's homeland to "quyte" his wife who called them both murderers and exiled the leperous Amiloun. She, like the steward, must be silenced in order for their brotherhood trouthe to thrive alongside their identities as chivalric knights. Even though after receiving his requested brace of donkeys Amiloun swears never to return to her, Amiloun breaks

³⁶⁴ Richmond, 87. "*Amis and Amiloun* argues movingly for the force and beauty of friendships between men, as well as other intense personal relationships." She finds, however, that the "dominant theme asserts the subordinate value of all these to man's love of God, so that even the most satisfying temporal affections are shown to be subsidiary to the eternal and the miraculous is used to make this vividly clear." Also: John Edwin Wells, "Legendary Romance for Didactic Intent," in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1400* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1923), 157. Wells calls Amis "a pious hero." Or: David Strong who not only sees God's blessing but finds Amis and Amiloun's brotherhood distinguishes "this romance from its predecessors and illuminate the will's nobility in privileging the profound goodness in another. By doing so, it asserts the fundamental optimism about what it means to be human and the basic desire to love and be loved" (57).

³⁶⁵ Leah Haught, "In Pursuit of 'Trewth': Ambiguity and Meaning in *Amis and Amiloun*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 114, no. 2 (2015): 240–60. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jenglgermphil.114.2.0240>. Last accessed 3 November 2021. Haught examines how the slippage of meaning in the word trouthe itself contributes to Amis and Amiloun's amoral chivalry finding "The tension between trewth as a vehicle for chivalric transcendence and as a marker of questionable morality is never quite resolved within the narrative proper; instead, it is amplified through the careful manipulation of expectation, especially the presumed correspondence between moral rightness and how the story ends . . ." (242).

³⁶⁶ Eckert. "God freely endows both Amis and Amiloun with the highest form of grace, unmerited, which they are now meant to emulate themselves" (293).

his word and storms his former homeland on his wife's wedding day (1759-64).³⁶⁷ "With swerd bright and broun" the brothers ride roughshod through the event and "[g]rete strokes there they caught,/ Bothe grete and smale . . ." (2465, 2468-70). After destroying the wedding party, Amiloun's former home, and taking the lives of anyone standing in their way they imprison Amiloun's wife in a stone mausoleum where she is fed bread and water until they "brought [her] to dede" (2482). Rather than off-set or alleviate their chivalric burden, their actions expose the impact of burden compounded: their trouthe blinds them to the evils they commit and justifies unchivalrous behavior without further consequence.

The romance of *Amis and Amiloun* reveals not only the limitations of a brotherhood trouthe but also the destructive and burden-compounding potential a strict and unwavering adherence to these trouthes can have on the knights who make them. In Amis and Amiloun's case, they become their own gods, their apotheosis completed through a baptism in blood, their moral corruption cloaked by chivalric performance. Arcite, Palamon, Amis, and Amiloun each try to circumvent the burdens placed upon them by their identity as chivalrous knights by swearing brotherhood trouthes. Each of these chivalric pairs swear their oaths during the halcyon days of their youth, yet the bonds are strong enough to act as a through-line into the complicated and burdensome landscape of chivalric adulthood. A tactic meant to alleviate burden, however, compounds it as each brotherhood pair finds themselves at odds with varying combinations of one other, chivalry, moral law, and ecclesiastical norms. Their trouthes result in estrangement, bloodshed, fealties pledged to mortal enemies, treachery, obfuscation, fratricide, infanticide, torture, and the blasphemous replacement of brother over earthly lord and Heavenly Lord.

³⁶⁷ "Send me so michel of al mi gode,/ An asse, on to ride,/ And out of lond we wil fare/ To begge our mete with sorwe and care/ No lenger we nil abide."

Arcite, Palamon, Amis, and Amiloun—despite their characteristics that are decidedly antithetical to the chivalric code remain lauded knights with glowing reputations, both in their romances and critically. Beneath the surface of their armor lurk men despoiled of their chivalric identity by their own attempts to navigate the chivalric code's physical, religious, and social expectations.

CHAPTER VI: “THERE’S A MONSTER INSIDE OF YOU; SOMEONE THAT YOU NEVER KNEW . . . HE WON’T LEAVE US ALONE”: VIOLENCE, MONSTROUS CHIVALRY AND AMERICAN MASCULINITY, AN EPILOGUE³⁶⁸

Humankind concurrently contains the desire for chivalric virtues of prowess, gentillesse, and honor along with the capability to perform acts of monstrous violence. Depictions of these oppositional characteristics pepper the pages of medieval literature and twenty-first century screens. Shame, religiously sanctioned violence, misplaced allegiance, fears of irrelevancy and obscurity, immature power grabs, narcissism, social pressure, god-complexes, jealousy, and bloodshed due to the physical, religious, and social burden of chivalry continue to influence and impact American masculine ideals today. What happens to the knight who immerses himself so deeply into his performance of chivalry that he loses the ability to relate to the very individuals he means to serve? When a knight diverges from the traditional physical, religious, and social expectations of chivalry he become something other— a “monster.” This divergence can stem from a willful overabundance of chivalric burden resulting in toxic hyper-masculinity. Divergence can also come from a failure to withstand the burden of chivalry resulting in a queered version of the knight: something not quite monster, but also definitely not chivalric knight.

In the twenty-first century these monsters can take the form of violent protestors storming government buildings, bludgeoning and beating their way into relevance; keyboard warriors espousing hate, “doxxing,” and calling for murderous retribution on the basis of skin-color, gender identity, or religious affiliation; pastors and preachers using a bully pulpit to convince

³⁶⁸ The Twilight Sad. “VTr”. Lyrics used with permission.

congregations of their primacy within “the body of Christ.” The Code of Chivalry, masculine performance, and imagery of the crusading knight act as through-lines between these political, religious, and social factions. The evolution of chivalric burden seems to manifest itself in an embodiment of masculine insecurity and a resultant extreme violence either *by* the knight/man attempting chivalric perfection or directed *towards* the knight/man performing chivalry less than perfectly. This is not to say that all knights or men fall prey to the monstrous side of chivalry, far from it! The burden of chivalry moves fluidly and creates myriad psychological and physical responses. Monstrous violence remains another in a bevy of burdensome possibilities. The [re]surge of Christian Nationalism, the Alt-Right/Alt-Lite, White Supremacists, evangelical coalitions, and men’s right’s movements in the twenty-first century spawn a fertile breeding ground for monstrous chivalric burden.

Jeffrey Cohen’s work with literary monsters and their social role acts as a natural springboard for an examination of embodied and externalized burden along with chivalry’s moral culpability.³⁶⁹ Cohen’s exposition on the qualities and causal characteristics of monsters informs my use of the terms “monster” and “monstrous” as they relate to both medieval knights and modern men: “The monster is that uncertain cultural body in which is condensed an intriguing simultaneity or doubleness . . .disturbing, repressed, but formative . . .The monster haunts”³⁷⁰ Integral to the linkage between chivalric burden and twenty-first century conceptions of masculinity is Cohen’s assertion that the monster “does not simply bring past and present together, but destroys the boundary that demanded their twinned foreclosure” (x). The

³⁶⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). *Of Giants, Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). *On Difficult Middles: Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

³⁷⁰ ix.

monster embodies the simultaneous possibilities of scrupulous chivalry and unconstrained violence. While the image of a knight enacting gratuitous and masochistic violence disturbs the carefully constructed chivalric image handed down through the centuries value lies in rejecting our desire to repress this image. Instead, the monster's ability to move freely from past to present and ostensibly to the future compels us to confront the violent legacy of chivalric burden head-on.

Cohen postulates that cultures can be read by the monsters they engender.³⁷¹ If this is the case then the ultra-violent, toxically-masculine man becomes the monstrous text upon which we read the legacy of chivalric burden.³⁷² Ideas and ideals of what chivalry was/is/will be defy epoch. The imagination associated with what it means to perform chivalry successfully bends the borders of space and time better than most models of behavior. In order to confront the violent legacy of chivalric burden "monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations . . . that generate them" (5). The matrix in this case is the relationship between the physical, religious, and social burden of chivalry, perceptions of masculinity, and performances of extreme violence by men claiming to support and uphold the chivalric code.

Medieval examples of "monstrous" response to chivalric burden appear in literature and history with far more frequency than the romantic imaginings of chivalry might propose. Responding to Henry II's "What parcel of fools and dastards have I nourished in my house, and not one of them will avenge me of this one upstart clerk" four knights cut down Thomas a

³⁷¹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). *Of Giants, Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 3.

³⁷² I use the term "ultra-violence" in the purest Burgessian sense: "cheerfully amoral performance of violence." For more on ultra-violence see: Dedria Bryfonski, ed., *Violence in Anthony Burgess's A Clockwork Orange*, (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2015).

Becket in the transept between the chapels of Our Lady and St. Benedict. Demonstrating an overabundance of violent attention seeking behavior, Hugh of Horsea returns to the archbishop's body "placed his foot on Thomas's neck to steady himself, then thrust his sword into the fallen man's skull and scattered his brains across the floor."³⁷³ "Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle" features "a powerful but monstrous lord . . . who took a vow to murder any knight lodged with him unless the unlucky guest should agree to the carl's every command, no matter how bizarre."³⁷⁴ A bishop accuses the carl of "evyll harbrowe" (137) and murder; the carl offers first his wife for Gawain's sexual pleasure and then his daughter asking "holst the well payde?" (481); and shows Gawain a veritable "house of horrors" filled with the hoarded bones and bloody heraldic clothing of knights he has murdered.³⁷⁵ Thomas Malory scatters violence and chivalric transgression throughout *Le Mort Darthur*: Breunis san Pit  tramples knights on foot under the hooves of his warhorse, Meleagant kidnaps and imprisons Guinevere, King Pellinore rapes a young maiden begetting Torre, who Arthur later knights. Sir Gowther, the titular character in the Breton *lais* of the same name rapes, rampages, mutilates and murders from the moment of his birth.³⁷⁶ His father, in an intentional application of chivalric burden, knights his son in the hopes that the heavy physical, religious, and social expectations of the chivalric code

³⁷³ Thomas J. Craughwell, *Saints Behaving Badly: The Cutthroats, Crooks, Trollops, Con-Men, and Devil-Worshippers Who Became Saints* (Doubleday, 2006) 115.

³⁷⁴ Thomas Hahn ed. *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle in Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, (Robbins Library Digital Projects: TEAMS Middle English Texts, 1995) 517-22. "Hit is twenty wynter gon . . . nowe/ That God I made a vow,/ Therefore I was fulle sad: Ther schulde never man logge in my wonys/ But he scholde be slayne, iwys,/ But he did as I hym bad." See: Walter Wadiak, *Savage Economy: The Returns of Middle English Romance*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017),

³⁷⁵ 532-7. "He lade Gawen ynto a wilsome wonys,/ There as lay ten fodir of dede men bonys./ Al yn blode, as I wene,/ Ther hyngre many a bloody serke,/ And ech of heme a dyvers marke."

³⁷⁶ "Sir Gowther," in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Robbins Library Digital Projects: TEAMS, 1995).

will curtail his son's violent monstrosity.³⁷⁷ Begotten of a demon, Sir Gowther's *lais* insists the knight is redeemed by the end of the tale, however the actions that ostensibly redeem him are equally as violent as those he enacts throughout most of the tale. The only difference between monstrous violence and moral violence for Gowther is the valorization provided by the chivalric code. Marie de France's Breton *lais Bisclavret* follows the trail of a lycanthropic knight.³⁷⁸ As a werewolf, the knight Bisclavret is a literal monster but the narrator takes great pains to try to promote his chivalric reputation. In order to buttress a reading of Bisclavret as a chivalrous werewolf any person who challenges his chivalrically idealized identity must be destroyed, maimed, and/or humiliated. Bisclavret enacts most of the violence in the tale, but because the wolf-man pantomimes the physical, social, and religious expectations of the chivalric code his actions are often accepted as justifiable and necessary to protect the Order of Chivalry. A reading rebranding assault, mutilation, torture, and death as chivalrous clearly demonstrates the burden of chivalry's ability to influence physical, religious, and social standards. Mirroring the entitled and immersive culture of violence performed by Gowther and Bisclavret modern men's movements emphasize their role as defenders of the faith, the family, and the flag. Like werewolf and demon knights they pantomime chivalry while running roughshod over those who challenge

³⁷⁷ The narrator describes Gowther as “[S]o wekyd in all kyn wyse/ Tho Duke hym might not chastise,/ But made hym knyght that tyde” (148-50). His father appears to knight him in the hopes that applying the strictures of the chivalric code will either reign in his wild and wicked son or legitimize his violence. I am inclined to think it is the latter. If Gowther is dubbed a knight to sanction his monstrosity and defer social castigation leveled at the family the burden of chivalry rests first on the father (because of his effort to chivalrically sanction his monster-son's violence) and then compounds with the son, leading Gowther to increase his violence and expand his victim base.

³⁷⁸ Marie de France, “Bisclavret,” in *The Lais of Marie de France*, ed. and trans. Claire M. Waters (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2018), 144, 145. Marie frames the tale with “Werewolf,” that is “wild beast”:/ as long as he is in that frenzy,/ he devours folks, does great evil,/ in the great forests dwells and goes” (145. 9-11). “*Garualf, c'est beste salvage:/ Tant cum il es ten cele rage,/ Hummes devure, grant mal fait*” (144. 9-11). Even though she explains that werewolves are wild, prone to frenzied violence, and evil the narrator expects Bisclavret to be perceived as incapable of these characteristics due to his performance of chivalry and the attestations of other knights and the lord to whom he “swears” fealty

their specific imagery of chivalric masculinity. Any man who does not perform their particular brand of chivalry must be emasculated and erased. Anything that challenges their performance must be discredited, destroyed, and dismantled.

Mostrous chivalric burden informs not only constructs of masculinity, patriotism and religion, it also seeks to police the borders and boundaries of gender, race, and class. Heldris de Cornualle's romance *Le Roman de Silence* recounts the adventures of Cador, the Earl of Cornwall and then those of his daughter Silence, alternately named Silencia (female)/Silentius (male)/Silence (gender neutral).³⁷⁹ Born female and raised as a male in order to inherit her father's lands and wealth, Silentius (as he is called) becomes the picture of chivalric perfection. Rejecting his nobility Silentius travels with minstrels and so impresses the Queen that she attempts to seduce him. When Silentius refuses her advances the Queen feigns rape, petitions the King of France for Silentius' beheading, and then sends him on a quest to capture Merlin. Returning to his position of chivalric knight Silentius succeeds in navigating the physical, social, and religious pitfalls of chivalry. However once held up for scrutiny in court, Silentius is not only revealed to be Silencia, a girl, but also subjected to a violent "detransitioning" and forced to conform to heteronormative models of chivalry in a forced marriage to King Evan (the late Queen's husband).³⁸⁰ Although *Silence* depicts the noble youth's chivalric perfection regardless

³⁷⁹ Heldris de Cornualle, *Le Roman de Silence*, trans. Sarah Roche-Madi (Minneapolis: Michigan State University Press, 1999).

³⁸⁰ I use the term "detransition" tentatively acknowledging the fluidity of language attaching and detaching itself from discussions about gender identity. Informing my choice to apply the word "detransition" to *Silence*'s denouement is: Jack L. Turbin, Stephanie S. Loo, Anthony N. Almazon et al, "Factors Leading to 'Detransition' Among Transgender and Gender Diverse People in the United States: A Mixed Method Analysis" in *LGBT Health* May/June 2021. Last Accessed 25 September 2021. Turbin et al explain "[T]he term 'detransition' has become less acceptable in TGD [Transgender and Gender Diverse], due to its incorrect implication that gender identity is contingent upon gender affirmation processes. In addition, the term 'detransition' has at times been conflated with regret . . . and the delegitimization of an individual's self-knowledge regarding their gender identity. It has subsequently become associated with politically motivated attempts to impede access to gender-affirming care for TGD people. Because this is the term most commonly used in the literature, and the term used in the 2015 U.S.

or despite (depending on the reading) of her female sex, the idea that a female could succeed at chivalry's exhausting expectations better than most males upsets the ingrained hierarchically constructed social order of the court. Not only must the knight's birth sex be revealed, the knight must also be removed as a threat to masculine conceptions of chivalric order. *Silence* depicts a paragon of chivalry relegated to the role of replacement wife and silent Queen. Verbal and physical assault, humiliation, and forced marriage are all inflicted as a panacea for perceived affronts to chivalry by the knight. These actions come as retribution for performing chivalry outside of masculine heteronormative models. Monstrous chivalry's burden lies in its obsession to obliterate anything or anyone that rejects its inherent violence. There is a core hatred within the twenty-first century movements listed above; a hatred based on fear of a loss of power and control. This fear of loss manifests itself in racial vitriol, misinformation, deep-seated mistrust of sexuality, sex, sexual pleasure outside of cis-gendered heteronormativity, and an inexplicable suspicion of education. Structural violence against minorities and the LGBTQ+ community is organized, promoted, and rhetorically crafted to support their particular models of masculine hierarchy as the final defense against moral turpitude and a Sodom and Gomorrah-esque destruction of manhood. Verbal and physical assault, humiliation, and forced returns to heteronormative models of gender and sexuality are all applauded. Lurking under all the bluster, bravado, and macho-performances are the same fears, prejudices, and insecurities *Silence* depicts in its final court scene.

Transgender Survey (USTS) that constitutes the basis of this study, we use the term “detransition” in this article, with the understanding that there is a need for more affirming terminology that has not yet been broadly adopted by TGD communities or in the literature.” Regarding my assertion of “forced detransitioning” at the hands of King Evan: I justify the somewhat metaphorical use of the term citing the same article above: “‘detransition,’ a process through which a person discontinues some or all aspects of gender affirmation.” Forcing Silentius into a cis-gendered female presentation and changing Silentius’ name to Silentia without consent essentially falls within the definition of detransitioning.

Monstrous chivalry requires a single-minded belief that all applications of violence are justified. In the minds of the men enacting their burdensome model of the chivalric code, violence cleanses, restores, punishes, and stabilizes. Like Gowther, Bisclavret, the court Silence faces, and King Pellinore, Amis and Amiloun (from Chapter Five) also slide into monstrous chivalry as a result of their hyper-violent application of the chivalric code. Amis and Amiloun profoundly exemplify a “god-complex” or feeling that because of their class, their bond, their belief system, and their social cache they can do what they like to whomever displeases or challenges them. Like politicians, pundits, and preachers determined to shore up models of burdensome monstrous chivalry, modern critics, rather than condemn Amis and Amiloun for their actions, laud the brothers as hagiographic, profoundly good, Abrahamic, and/or Christological. The ripples of their burdensome brotherhood-trouthe trickle into efforts by scholars to blame the victims of Amis and Amiloun’s self-aggrandizing God complexes, rather than the unchivalrous murderers themselves.

Rather than venture too far into the political, social, and religious territories of the twenty-first century men’s movements and chivalry’s role within them, I return to the pages of romance in order to examine critical responses to *Amis and Amiloun’s* murder of the steward and Amiloun’s wife. These responses will act as final examples of where the physical, religious, and social burden of chivalry takes us in the twenty-first century. Confusing the sliminess of the steward’s actions with actual evidence that justifies his death has become a popular misconception among twentieth and twenty-first century scholars. Still, sanctimonious legalism, jealousy, and guile should hardly equate to a death sentence. The steward’s attempts to destroy Amis and Amiloun’s brotherhood trouthe seem to be enough evidence for some scholars to support his death as both inevitable and proper. Tison Pugh focuses on the queered nature of the

steward's request for a trouthe of his own and finds that his jealousy, envy and desire to fracture the bonds between Amis and Amiloun and emasculate the cousins. Pugh asserts that the steward's death is justifiably retributive, functioning as a consequential "ultimate emasculator" implying that murder acts as a restorative measure to diminished perceptions of masculinity(120).³⁸¹ Ken Eckert determines that "the malevolent steward, who also seemingly constructs all relationships as ones of treaties and duties . . . [has] a debased treupe of self-interest and cold obligations and advantages" (287).³⁸² He compares the steward to Arthuriana's resident petulant: Sir Kay and justifies his death due to his "sanctimonious legalism" and refusal to adhere to the New Testament distinction between the letter and intent of the law (288-9). A final example of extended ripples of burden comes from Ojars Kratins who melds the motives of the steward with the actions of King Herod and Roman emperors: "[Sympathizing with the steward] because Amis rejects him would be as perverse as to sympathize with Herod because of fear of losing the throne or with the pagan emperors who martyred Christians because they offended pagan deities . . ."³⁸³ Kratins explains away Amis and Amiloun's fault in the steward's murder finding "his death serves a justice higher than the law in accordance with which he has accused Amis" (351). The justice higher than the law for Kratins is an ambiguous moral offense stemming from the steward's feigned feudal deference to the Duke when what he really wanted was revenge for his trouthe rejection. The burden of the chivalric code's untenable nature

³⁸¹ Tison Pugh, "From Boys to Men to Hermaphrodites to Eunuchs: Queer Formations of Romance Masculinity and the Hagiographic Death Drive in *Amis and Amiloun*," in *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

³⁸² Ken Eckert, "Amis and Amiloun: A Spiritual Journey and the Failure of Treuthe." *Literature and Theology Volume 27*, Number 3 (September 2013,) 285-296. Oxford University Press. JSTOR Last accessed 27 October 2020. Douay Rheims: II Corinthians 3:6: "Who also hath made us fit ministers of the New Testament, not in the letter but in the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth."

³⁸³ Ojars Kratins, "The Middle English Amis and Amiloun: Chivalric Romance or Secular Hagiography?" *PMLA*, October 1966, Vol. 81, No. 5, 347-354 (351). Last accessed 24 September 2021.

spreads from the Middle Ages into the Post-Modern driving scholars to vilify those who threaten its constructed ideal.

Equally, if not slightly more, perplexing and troubling than explaining away the murder of the steward is the heavy-handed campaign to denigrate Amiloun's wife. Several critics maintain that her death via captivity and depravation results from her "uncharitable" treatment of the knight Amiloun. Velma Bourgeois Richmond finds "The author of the romance has thus deliberately given us in Amiloun's wife a person of evil character . . . she refuses charity, both in thought and action" ³⁸⁴ Richmond labels Amiloun's wife "self-righteous," and gleefully refers to her imprisonment by Amiloun as "exquisite irony" (103). Amiloun is praised by Richmond for not directly putting his wife to death but instead offering her "spiritual renewal" imprisoned in a mausoleum. He does, however, put her to death only slowly— from malnutrition and torture and what Richmond burdens her readers with is the expectation that we celebrate her death due to her moral boundaries and unbridled criticism of the brother's choice to murder the steward. Tison Pugh, while graciously understanding to both Amis and Amiloun for their every breach of moral and ethical law, describes their attack on the wife at her wedding as a public reclaiming or "renewed manhood . . . demonstrating that their masculinities are joined together again . . ." (116). He finds destruction, torture, starvation, and death "a fitting punishment reminiscent of her treatment of Amiloun" indicating that homicidal violence against one's wife is somehow compensatory justice for the relegation of one's contagiously leprous and murderous spouse to their own quarters (116). More troubling and burdensome still is Pugh's continued blithe assertion that violence restores masculinity. Ken Eckert uses the same argument as Ojars

³⁸⁴ Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *The Popularity of Middle English Romance*, (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975) 103.

Kratins' aspersions against the steward: "The Christian distinction between obeying the intent and the letter of the law (Mark 3:1-6) also plays out in Amiloun's scolding wife, who sides with the steward and interprets Amiloun's leprosy as God's revenge . . . Although Amiloun's wife has a legal pretext in banishing him, she lacks any redeeming spiritual virtue such as mercy and compassion."³⁸⁵ Eckert acknowledges the wife's legal rights and comes close to admitting that Amiloun's leprosy is— if not God's revenge at least God's consequence, yet he still places the burden of death in defense of chivalric brotherhood squarely on the wife's shoulders. The wife and the steward are an obstacle to be overcome—not just by the brothers but by the twenty-first century readers and scholars faced with the conflicting and confounding ideals of chivalry.

So, what do we do with chivalric burden? What do we do with the shame the physical burden of chivalry generates? What do we do with the spiritual insecurity and sense of impending doom the religious burden of chivalry perpetuates? What do we do with the crippling pressure the social burden of chivalry applies? What do we do with the hyper-violence—the monster—lurking just beneath the surface of the men who believe that their model of chivalric masculinity is being challenged politically, religiously, and culturally? What do we do with our own predisposition to explain away these burdens of chivalry and blame the victims for their "otherness"? This dissertation stops short of an answer to these questions, resting in the uncomfortable interregnum of revealing a problem without revealing a solution. In the case of chivalric burden and its twenty-first century legacy the solution lies somewhere in the understanding of the chivalric code as an ever-evolving support of the physical, religious, and social roles men play rather than a litmus test of masculinity itself. It would be quite simple to

³⁸⁵ Eckert, 289.

look at this work and dismiss the idea of the chivalric code as a burden. There is an abiding need to think of the “unwinnable” nature of chivalry as an “everyone misses the mark, but the mark remains as a goal” moment. A longer look at the chivalric code, however, reveals the burden lurking just beneath the veneer of armor, devotion, and heraldry. Since the creation of the first estate and the chivalric code there have been stories “such as these . . .”: stories of men who face insurmountable odds put in place by lords, clergy and a society hell-bent on the production of physical and religious perfection; stories of men who find in their failure the need to reproduce that failure over and over again to the very audience who expected the unattainable chivalric behavior in the first place; stories of men who in their failure to succeed find eternal damnation rather than forgiveness. . . stories no longer just medieval but winding their way out of Glastonbury, the Crusades, Brocéliande, across the ocean, and into the back yards of the twenty-first century American male.

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