MAKE WE MERRY MORE AND LESS
An Anthology of Medieval English Popular Literature

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Conceived as a companion volume to the well-received Simple Forms: Essays on Medieval English Popular Literature (2015), Make We Merry More and Less is a comprehensive anthology of popular medieval literature from the twelfth century onwards. Uniquely, the book is divided by genre, allowing readers to make connections between texts usually presented individually.

This anthology offers a fruitful exploration of the boundary between literary and popular culture, and showcases an impressive breadth of literature, including songs, drama, and ballads. Familiar texts such as the visions of Margery Kempe and the Paston family letters are featured alongside lesser-known works, often oral. This striking diversity extends to the language: the anthology includes Scottish literature and original translations of Latin and French texts.

The illuminating introduction offers essential information that will enhance the reader’s enjoyment of the chosen texts. Each of the chapters is accompanied by a clear summary explaining the particular delights of the literature selected and the rationale behind the choices made. An invaluable resource to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture of the period, this is essential reading for any student or scholar of medieval English literature, and for anyone interested in folklore or popular material of the time.

The book was left unfinished at Gray’s death; it is here edited by Jane Bliss. As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is freely available to read on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com

Cover image: Jeanie Dean from John Francis Waller et al., Pictures From English Literature (1870), p. 142, https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetarchivebookimages/14801723273/
Romances

The romance is one of the most important and distinctive literary forms in the Middle Ages. ‘Romance’ is a French word, and as a literary form it developed in French courts and literary circles; although the antecedents of medieval romance go back to the Greek romance.¹ French romances could certainly be genuinely ‘courtly’, as in the twelfth-century poems of Chrétien de Troyes, but they were not all an exclusively élite form of literature: underneath the elegant narratives we can sometimes discern folktale patterns and motifs. Marie de France says that some of her sophisticated lais are related to ancient Breton stories. Even in medieval France we begin to feel that ‘courtly’ and ‘popular’ are terms which do not denote totally self-contained and mutually exclusive categories but, rather more vaguely, points on a continuous spectrum. This seems even more likely when we turn to Middle English romance, where many examples have survived, quite a few of them from French originals.

There is here a substantial body of what is commonly called ‘popular’ romance, probably one step away from the lost orally transmitted (sometimes orally created) romances of the minstrels, sometimes inheriting or imitating their stylistic patterns like a formulaic but expressive diction. Chaucer’s own tale of Sir Thopas is a brilliant burlesque of popular romances. It has a number of their common characteristics: division into ‘fits’ or sections each beginning with a call

¹ For example, the story of Apollonius of Tyre. Similar ‘romance-type’ tales are found around the world.
to attention; sudden, sometimes melodramatic, events and adventures (here involving an ‘elfqueene’ and a giant, Sir Olifaunt); very simple formulaic diction. Chaucer’s burlesque produces a narrative which is exquisitely awful, and is broken off by the Host with a remark about doggerel. However, the burlesque is not completely destructive. The popular romances and their shortcomings are lost to sight in a cloud of joyously impossible comedy. We are left with the strong feeling that Chaucer secretly loved these romances: he certainly has a detailed knowledge of them, and alludes to several (for example, Guy of Warwick). And in fact, most of the surviving popular romances are not as awful as Sir Thopas. They show distinct signs of literary quality, and the whole corpus reveals a remarkable variety. Some would find a place at one end or other of our spectrum. Emaré, with its repetitions and formulae, seems close to the ‘oral’ pole, whereas one has to look very closely at the Auchinleck copy of Sir Orfeo in order to see the formulae, which have been skilfully worked into a polished narrative style. Again in popular romances we find echoes of folktale motifs and patterns: Cinderella-type stories, for instance. Some have connections with later ballads (though the details of any connection often remain mysterious); and the occasional romance in quatrains, like The Knight of Curtesy (which uses the legend of the ‘eaten heart’\(^2\)) or Thomas of Erceldoune (clearly related to Thomas the Rhymer), sometimes sound like long ballads. Like the early outlaw ballads (see Chapter 2), most of these romances have a direct, formulaic and expressive style, often more impressive in the hearing, rather than in reading on the page. Typically, too, most share a liking for simple stanza forms, like couplets or the common twelve-line tail-rhyme stanza.

In order to illustrate briefly the variety of this extensive body of literature, I have decided to opt for extracts — two longer ones from Havelok and Sir Orfeo, romances admired by critics — and a series of shorter examples from less well-known works, which illustrate their treatment of individual scenes or dramatic moments in the narrative (many of them showing mortals in eerie and perilous situations). Adventures are an important and central feature of the romance, whether sophisticated and ‘literary’ or ‘popular’.

A romance of just over three thousand lines, written probably in the late thirteenth century, or possibly at the beginning of the fourteenth. Havelock story material was in circulation earlier: in the Anglo-Norman chronicler Gaimar’s *Estoire* (c. 1135–40) and in the French *Lai d’Havelok* (c. 1190–c. 1220) which is based on Gaimar. The Middle English romance is remarkable for its realism and for its interest in the lives of humbler folk. The parallel stories of Havelock and Goldeboru are well told. The author has been called ‘an unobtrusively sophisticated writer’.3

(a) King Ethelwold of England dies, leaving his daughter Goldeboru in the protection of Godrich, the Earl of Cornwall. The Danish king Birkabeyn also dies, and leaves his son Havelock in the protection of Earl Godard. Both protectors are treacherous. Godard seizes the throne of Denmark and imprisons Havelok and his sisters … [vv. 447–80]

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In *Middle English Verse Romances* (ed. Sands). Extracts and commentary (including other Havelock references) are in *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, eds Bennett and Smithers (revised edn. 1985): pp. 52–64 & 288–97. The spelling ‘Havelock’ denotes a range of romances and tales about this character.
Us hungreth, we aren ney\(^o\) ded.’

Goderd herde here wa;\(^o\)

Therof yaf he nouth a stra.\(^o\)

But tok the maydnes bothe samen,\(^o\)

Also it were upon his gamen,\(^o\)

Also he wolde\(^o\) with hem leyke,\(^o\)

That weren for hunger grene and bleike;\(^o\)

Of bothen he karf\(^o\) on two here throtes,

And sithen\(^o\) hem al to grotes.\(^o\)

Ther was sorwe, woso\(^o\) it sawe,

Hwan the children bi the wawe\(^o\)

Leyen and sprauleden\(^o\) in the blod;

Havelok it saw, and therbi stod.

Ful sori was that seli knave.\(^o\)

Mikel dred\(^o\) he mouthe\(^o\) have,

For at hise herte he saw a knif

Forto reven\(^o\) him hise lyf.

almost
misery
not a straw
together
sport
as if he wished
play
pale and sickly
cut
then
small pieces
whoever
wall
lay and sprawled
innocent boy
great fear
might well
deprive

(b) Godard hands over Havelock to Grim, a fisherman, and orders him to be killed. However, Grim sees a wonderful light shining from the boy’s mouth, and a royal birthmark, and realises he is the destined king; he flees with him and his own family to England, settling at the mouth of the Humber, where Grimsby now stands. As Havelock grows up, he realizes how difficult life is for Grim. [vv. 785–862]
Goddot, y wile with the gange, God knows go

Forto leren sum gode to gete; learn win

Swinken ich wolde for mi mete. win

It is no shame forto swinken;

The man may wel eten and drinken

That nouth ne have but on swink long; in proportion to his work

To liggen at hom it is ful strong. lie disgraceful

God yelde him, ther I ne may, reward

That haveth me fed to this day.

Gladlike I wile the panieres bere;

Ich woth ne shal it me nouth dere, harm

They ther be inne a birthene gret, although great burden

Also hevi as a neth. as ox

Shal ich nevere lengere dwelle; delay

Tomorwten shal Ich forth pelle. hasten

On the morwen, hwan it was day,

He stirt up sone and nouth ne lay, leapt up did not

And cast a panier on his bac,

With fish gaveled als a stac, heaped up haystack

Also michel he bar him one much by himself

So he foure, bi mine mone. as if he were opinion

Wel he it bar, and solde it wel.

The silver he brouthe hom il del. in full

Al that he therefore tok;

Withheld he nouth a ferthinges nok. a fraction of a farthing

So yede he forth ilke day,

That he neverne at home lay,

So wolde he his mester lere. trade learn

Bifel it so, a strong dere happened severe shortage

Bigan to rise of korn of bred,

That Grim ne couthe no god red way

Hw he sholde his meine fede. how household

Of Havelok havede he michel drede, for fear

For he was strong, and wel mouthe ete

More thanne hevere mouthe be gete, ever obtained
Ne he ne mouthe on the se take
Neyther lenge\textsuperscript{0} ne thornbake,\textsuperscript{9}
Ne non other fish that douthe,\textsuperscript{9}
His meyne feden with he mouthe.\textsuperscript{9}
Of Havelok he havede kare,\textsuperscript{9}
Hwilgat\textsuperscript{9} that he micthe fare;
Of his children was him nouth,\textsuperscript{9}
On Havelok was al his thouth,
And seyde, ‘Havelok, dere sone,
I wene that we deye mone\textsuperscript{9}
For hunger, this dere\textsuperscript{9} is so strong,
And hure mete is ute\textsuperscript{9} long.
Betere is that thu henne gonge\textsuperscript{0}
Than thu here dwelle longe;
Hethen\textsuperscript{9} thou mayt gangen to late.\textsuperscript{9}
Thou canst ful wel the ricthe gate\textsuperscript{9}
To Lincolne, the gode borw;\textsuperscript{9}
Thou havest it gon ful ofte thoru.
Of me ne is me nouth a slo.\textsuperscript{4}
Betere is that thu thider go,
For ther is mani god man inne;
Ther thou mayt thi mete winne.
But wo is me thou art so naked!
Of mi seyl y wolde the were maked
A cloth thou mithest inne gongen,\textsuperscript{9}
Sone, no cold that thu ne fonge,\textsuperscript{9}
He toke the sheres of\textsuperscript{9} the sayl.
And made him a couel of the sayl,
And Havelok dide it sone\textsuperscript{9} on;
Havede neyther hosen ne shon,\textsuperscript{9}
Ne none kines other wede;\textsuperscript{9}
To Lincolne barfot he yede.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{9} For me, it is not worth a sloe (= I can’t do anything).
(c) In England the traitor Godrich, who has promised a fine marriage for Goldeboru, is determined to end her claim to the English throne. Havelock, now a strong young man, has found work in Lincoln, and becomes a scullion in Godrich’s household. Godrich marries Goldeboru to the supposed scullion. Her sorrow is ended by a supernatural sight. [vv. 1247–74]

On the nith,\(^9\) als Goldeborw lay,
Sory and sorwful was she ay,\(^9\)
For she wende\(^9\) she were biswike,\(^9\)
That she [we]re yeven\(^9\) unkyndelike.\(^9\)
O nith saw she therinne a lith\(^9\)
A swithe fayr, a swathe bryth,\(^9\)
Also brith, also shir,\(^9\)
So it were a blase\(^9\) of fir.
She lokede north and ek south,
And saw it comen out of his mouth
That lay bi hire in the bed;
No ferlike\(^9\) thou she were adred!\(^9\)
Thouthe she, ‘Wat may this bimene?\(^9\)
He beth heyman\(^9\) yet, als y wene;
He beth heyman er\(^9\) he be ded.’
On hise shuldre of gold red
She saw a swithe noble croiz.\(^9\)
Of an angel she herd a voyz,
‘Goldeborw, lat thi sorwe be,
For Havelok, that haveth spuset the,\(^9\)
Is kings sone and kings eyr;\(^9\)
That bikenneth\(^9\) that croyz so fayr.
It bikenneth more, that he shal
Denemark haven\(^9\) and Englond al;
He shal ben king strong and stark\(^9\)
Of Engelond an Denemark:
That shalt thu wit thin eyne sen,
And thou shalt quen and levedi ben.’
Eventually, Grim takes Havelock and Goldborough to Denmark, where Havelock is recognised as the destined king by Earl Ubbe. He defeats Godard, becomes king of Denmark, then goes back to England where he defeats Godrich and becomes king of England.

ii) *Sir Orfeo*[^5]

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice was a favourite in the Middle Ages. The happy ending given to it here is not unique. Possibly Celtic stories also lie in the background (cf. the Irish tale of the *Wooing of Etainn*[^6]), and stories of the recovery of mortals from the otherworld or of those taken by the fairies.[^7] The Middle English romance was probably written in the later thirteenth century or the early fourteenth. This story, and other popular Orpheus stories, lived on — into a Scottish romance and a Shetland ballad recorded in the nineteenth century (Child No. 19). There is a reference to a French ‘lai d’Orphey’, but this has not survived. This romance is remarkable for its sensitivity to human emotion, its insistence on the virtues of faithfulness and courage, and its narrative skill. For all its literary art, it has many of the characteristics of popular romance. Interestingly, though Orfeo is a ‘heigh lording’, he is also a minstrel (we are given some details of performance in vv. 25 ff, 267 ff, 361 ff).

(a) Orfeo, a king and a great harper, is married to the beautiful Heurodis. One day at the beginning of May she goes out with her maidens, and falls asleep under a tree. When she awakes she shows signs of a terrible distress. Taken back to her chamber, she describes how in her sleep she was visited by a large company of mysterious knights and ladies, and was commanded by their king to return to the tree on the following day; if she offers any resistance she will be torn apart, and still carried off. The next day Orfeo with a body of men escorts her to the tree. But she is snatched away ‘with fairy forth ynume’. Orfeo is distraught, and decides to go alone into the wilderness, leaving his kingdom in the care of his steward … [vv. 219–330][^8]

[^5]: In *Middle English Verse Romances* (Sands; other editions are listed).
[^6]: See Kittredge, ‘Sir Orfeo’.
[^7]: For example, the first story from Walter Map, above.
[^8]: In Sands, the passage is vv. 195–306; there is a ‘prologue’ printed in some editions, which explains the differing line-numbers. But the passages are easy to identify, whichever edition the reader consults.
Tho was ther wepeing in the halle,
And grete cri among hem alle;
Unnethe⁹ might old or yong
For wepeing speke a word with tong.
Thai kneled adoun al yfere,⁹
And praid him, yif his wille were,
That he no schuld nought fram hem go.
‘Do way,’⁹ quath he, ‘it schal be so.’
Al his kingdome he forsoke;
Bot a sclavin⁹ on him he toke.
He no hadde kirtel no hode,⁹
Schert [no] non other gode,⁹
But his harp he toke algate⁹
And dede him⁹ barfot out atte yate;⁹
No man most with him go.
O way!⁹ What ther was wepe and wo,
Whan he that hadde ben king with croun
Went so poverlich⁹ out of toun.
Thurth wode and over heth⁹
Into the wildernes he geth.
Nothing he fint⁹ that him is ays,⁹
Bot ever he liveth in gret malaise.
He that hadde ywerd⁹ the fowe and griis⁹
And on bed the purpur biis;⁹
Now on hard hethe he lith;
With leves and gresse he him writh.⁹
He that hadde had castels and tours,
River, forest, frith with flours,⁹
Now, thei² it comenci to snewe and frees,⁹
This king mot make his bed in mese.⁹
He that had yhad knightes of priis⁹
Bifor him kneland, and levedis,⁹
Now seth⁹ he nothing that he liketh,

⁹ ‘variegated fur and grey fur’: this phrase indicates opulence (the striped fur may have been squirrel specially imported from Russia).
But wilde wormes bi him striketh. He that had yhad plente
Of mete and drink, of ich deynte, Now may he alday digge and wrote
Er he finde his fille of rote. In somer he liveth bi wild frut
In winter may he nothing finde Bot rote, grasses and the rinde, Al his bodi was oway duine
For missays, and al tochine, His here of his berd, blac and rowe, To his girdelstede was growe.
Lord! who may telle the sore? His harp, whereon was al his gle, He hidde in an holwe tre,
And when the weder was clere and bright, He toke his harp to him wel right,
And harped at his owhen wille, In alle the wode the soun gan schille, That alle the wilde bestes that ther beth
For joie abouten him thai teth, And alle the foules that ther were
Come and sete on ich a brere To here his harping affine, So miche melody was therin.
And when he his harping lete wold, No best bi him abide nold. He might se him besides
Oft in hot undertides The king o fairy with his rout
Com to hunt him al about With dim cri and bloweing,
And houndes also with him berking;

serpents

glide

every delicacy

all day long

grub

roots

very little

bark

wasted away

discomfort

scarred

rough

waist

distress

minstrelsy

own

resound

are

come

twig

to the end

leave

would not

noon times

company
ii) Sir Orfeo

Ac no best thai no nome,º
cought
No never he nistº whider thai bcome.º
knew not
And other while he might him se
went
As a gret ost bi him te,º
come
Wele atourned,º ten hundred knightes,
equipped
Ich yarmed to his rightes,º
properly
Of cuntenaunceº stoutº and fers,
appearance strong
With mani desplaid baners,
And ich his swerd ydraweº hold;
drawn
Ac never he nist whider thai wold.º
would go
And other while he seiye other thing:
Knightes and levedis com daunceing
In queyntº attire, gisely,º
elegant skilfully
Queynt pas and softly;
Tabours and trunpesº yede hem bi,º
drums and trumpets beside
And al maner menstraci.º
minstrelsy
And on a day he seiye him biside
Sexti levedis on hors ride,
Gentil and jolifº as brid on ris;º
merry spray
Nought o man amonges hem ther nis.º
is not
And ich a faucon on hond bere,
And ridden on haukin bi o rivere.
Of game thai founde wel gode haunt,º
plenty
Maulardes,º hayrounº and cormeraunt.
mallards heron
The foules of the water ariseth;
The faucons hem wele deviseth;º
aim at
Ich facon his pray slough.º
slew
That seiye Orfeo, and loughº
laughed
‘Parfay,’º quath he, ‘ther is fair game.
Indeed
Thider ichil,º bi Godes name;
I will go
Ich was ywonº swiche werk to se.’
accustomed
He aros and thider gan te.º
went
To a levedi he was ycome,
realised
Biheld, and hath wel undernomeº
And seth bi al thing that it is
Romances

His owhen quen, dam Heurodis.

Yernº he beheld hir and sche him eke,º

Acº neither to other a word no speke.

For messais that sche on him seye

That had ben so riche and so heye,

The teres fel out of her eiye.

The other levedis this yseiye.

And maked hir oway to ride;

Sche most with him no lenger abide.

(b) But the determined Orfeo takes up his harp and rides after the ladies, into a rock. He finds himself in a beautiful land with a fine castle. Introducing himself as a minstrel he enters, and plays for the king, who is entranced by his music. [vv. 435–74]

Bifor the king he sat adoun,

And tok his harp so miri of soun,

And temprethº it as he wele can,

And blisseful notes he ther gan.º

That al that in the palays were

Com to him forto here,

And liggethº adoun to his fete,

Hem thenketh his melody so swete.

The king herkneth and sitt ful stille

To here his gleº he hath gode wille.

Gode bourdeº he hadde of his gle;

The riche quen also hadde he.º

When he hadde stintº his harping,

Than seyd to him the king,

‘Menstrel, me liketh wele thi gle.

Now aske of me whatº it be;

Largelich ichilº the pay.

Now speke, and tow might assay.’º

‘Sir,’ he seyd, ‘ich biseche the

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10 In Sands, these are vv. 411–50.
Thatow woldest yive me
That ichº levedi bright on bleº
That slepeth under the ympetre.º
‘Nay,’ quath the king, ‘that nought nere.º
A sori couple of you it were,
For thou art lene, roweº and blac,
And sche is lovesum,º withouten lac;º
A lothlichº thing it were forthiº
To sen hir in thi compayni.’
‘O sir,’ he seyd, ‘gentil king,
Yete it were a wele fouler thing
To here a lesingº of thi mouthe.
So, sir, as ye seyd nouthe,º
What ich wold aski have y schold,
And nedes thou most thi word hold.’
The king seyd, ‘Sethen it is so,
Take hir bi the hond and go,
Of hir ichil thatow be blithe.”º
He kneled adoun and thonked him swathe.º
His wiif he tok bi the hond,
And dede him swathe outº of that lond.

Disguised as a minstrel ‘of poor life’ he takes Heurodis with him back to his own city. He plays before the steward, who recognises his harp. He reveals his identity, is restored to his kingdom, and after his death the faithful steward becomes king.

iii) Emaré

A simple romance, with direct style, repetitions, and formulae, perhaps suggesting it is not too far removed from oral storytelling; but one which it is easy to underestimate. With its symmetrical plot it tells a ‘pitous’ story of a suffering woman, a calumniated queen. It is a ‘test’ story; it has similarities with the Constance story (Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale, Gower’s tale of Constance) or Chaucer’s story of Griselda. Behind
it lies the folk tale of the ‘Maiden without Hands’.\footnote{Emaré is in \textit{Six Middle English Romances}, ed. Mills. For the Handless Maiden, see Bliss \textit{Naming and Namelessness}, the section entitled Unknown Women esp. \textit{La Manekine} (and index).} Emaré’s wonderful garment, a present from the ‘riche kynge of Cesile’ may have originally been a fairy present.

(a) Emaré, the beautiful daughter of the emperor Artyrus, excites the passion of her father. When she refuses his incestuous desire, he has her cast out in a rudderless boat, clad in a robe of rich, gold, ornamented cloth. Her boat is blown far away by the wind; the emperor repents, but it is too late … [vv. 313–60]

The lady fleted\textsuperscript{\textdegree} forth alone. 
To God of heven she made her mone\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 
And to hys modyr also, 
She was driven wyth wynde and rayn 
Wyth stronge stormes her agayn,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 
Of the watur so blo,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 
As y have herd menstrelles syng yn sawe,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 
Hows ny\textsuperscript{\textdegree} lond myghth she non knowe,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 
Aferd\textsuperscript{\textdegree} she was to go. 
She was so driven fro wawe to wawe 
She hyd her hede and lay full lowe, 
For\textsuperscript{\textdegree} watyr she was full woo,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 

Now this lady dwelled thore 
A goodsevennyghth and more, 
As hyt was Goddys wylle. 
Wyth carefull\textsuperscript{\textdegree} herte and sykyng\textsuperscript{\textdegree} sore, 
Such sorrow was here yarked\textsuperscript{\textdegree} yore,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 
And ever lay she styl. 
She was driven ynto a lond, 
Thorow the grace of Goddes sond,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 
That all thing may fulfylle. 
She was on the see so harde bestadde,\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 

\textsuperscript{\textdegree} floated 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} lament 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} against 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} dark 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} tales 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} make out 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} afraid 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} in great misery 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} sorrowful 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} sighing 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} destined for 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} long ago 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} dispensation 
\textsuperscript{\textdegree} beset
For hungur and thurste almost madde:

Woo worth wederus yll!º

a curse on bad storms

She was dryven into a lond

That hyghtº Galys, y unthurstond:

That was a fayr countre.

The kyngeus steward dwelled ther bysyde,º

nearby

In a kastell of mykyll pryde:º

much splendour

Syr Kadore hyght he.

Every day he wolde go,

And take wth hym a sqwyer or two,

And play hym by the see.

On a tyme he toke the eyr

Wyth two knyghtus gode and fayr;

The wedur was lythe of le.º

calm and peaceful

A bootº he fond by the brymº

boat edge

And a glysteryng thing theryn:

Therof they hadde ferly.º

wonder

They went forth on the sond

sand

To the boot, y unthurstond,

And fond theryn that lady.

She hadde so longe metelesº be

without food

That hym thowht gret deleº to se;

distress

She was yn poyn[t] to dye.º

at the point of death

They askede her what was her name;

She changed hyt ther anone,º

at once

And seyde she hetteº Egaré.¹²

was called

(b) Sir Kadore cares for her, and his king falls in love with her and
marries her. They live happily for a time, and while the king is away
fighting she bears a son, Segramour. A letter to him from Sir Kadore,
telling him of this, is intercepted by the king’s wicked mother who hates

¹² Egaré means lost or strayed.
Egaré/Emaré. Another letter is substituted, saying that her offspring
was a devil. The king laments, but sends a letter saying that she should
be well cared for. This too is intercepted by his mother and replaced
with another saying that she should be cast out on the sea with her child
and her splendid robe. The steward is unable to prevent this, and the
two are cast adrift. [vv. 637–708]

Then was ther sorrow and myche woo,
When the lady to shype shulde go;
They wepte and wronge her hondus.
The lady that was meke and mylde
In her arme she bar her chylde,
And toke leve of the londe.
When she wente ynto the see
In that robe of riche ble,
Men sowened on the sonde.
Sore they wepte and sayde, 'Alas,
Certys thys ys a wykked kase.
Wo worth dedes wronge!'

The lady and the lytyll chylde
Fleted forth on the watur wylde,
Wyth full harde happes.
Her surkote that was large and wyde,
Therwith her visage she gan hyde,
Wyth the hynthur lappes;
She was aferde of the see
And layde her gruf uponn a tre,
The chylde to her pappes.
The wawes that were grete and strong
On the bote faste they thronge,
Wyth mony unseemly rappes.

And when the chyld gan to wepe
Wyth sory herte she songe hyt aslepe
And putte the pappe yn hys mowth.
And syde, 'Myghth y onus gete⁰ lond, 
Of the waturn that ys so stronge.⁰
    By northe or by sowthe,
Wele owth y to warye⁰ the, see, 
I have myche shame yn the'
    And evur she lay and growth.⁰
Then she made her prayer
To Jesu and hys modur dere,
    In all that she kowthe.

Now thys lady dwelled thore
A full sevenenyght and more, 
    As hyt was Goddys wylle;
Wyth karefull herte and sykyng sore, 
Such sorrow was her yarked yore, 
    And she lay full stylle.
She was driven toward Rome, 
Thorow the grace of God yn trone,⁰ 
    That all thing may fulfylle. 
On the see she was so harde bestadde, 
For hungur and thurste allmost madde, 
    Wo worth chawnses ylle⁰ 
A marchaunte dw[el]led yn that cyte. 
A ryche mon of gold and fee,⁰ 
    Jurdan was hys name. 
Every day wolde he 
Go to playe hym by the see, 
    The eyer forto tane,⁰ 
He wente forth yn that tyde,⁰ 
Walkynge by the see sy[d]e, 
    All hymselfe alone. 
A bote he fonde by the brymme 
And a fayr lady therynne, 
    That was right wobygone.
The cloth on her shon so bryth
He was aferde of that sight,
   For glysteryng of that wede;\(^9\)  garment
And yn hys herte he thowghth right\(^9\)  thought indeed
That she was non erdyly wyght;
   He sawe nevur non such yn leede.\(^9\)  the world
He sayde, ‘What hette ye,\(^9\) fayr ladye?’  is your name
‘Lord,’ she sayde, ‘y hette Egarye,
   That lye her yn drede.’\(^9\)  fear
Up he toke that fayre ladye
And the yonge chylde her by,
   And hom he gan hem lede.

[Jurdan and his wife care for her, and Segramour grows up. In a final scene, Emaré is at last reunited with her husband and her father, who have come to Rome to do penance.]

iv) Octavian\(^{13}\)

Written perhaps in the first half of the fourteenth century, Octavian tells the story (widespread in Europe) of another calumniated woman and her sons, stolen by wild creatures.

Florence, wife of the emperor Octavian, bears twin sons (Florentyn and Octavian). Thanks to the hostility of a cruel mother-in-law she and her babies are driven out into the forest, and both children are carried off by animals. [vv. 325–84]

Be that sche had hur children dyght,\(^9\)  made ready
Hyt was woxe\(^9\) derke nyght,
   As sche sate be the welle;
In the erber\(^9\) downe sché lay  grassy spot among trees
Tyll hyt was dawning of the day
   That fowlys\(^9\) herde sche yelle.\(^9\)  birds  cry
There came an ape to seke hur pray;

\(^{13}\) In Six Middle English Romances (ed. Mills).
iv) Octavian

Hur oon chylde sche bare away
   On an hye hylle.
What won'dur was, thogh sche were woo?
The ape bar the chylde hur fro!
   In swownynge downe sche felle.

In all the sorowe that sche in was,
There come rennyng a lyenas,º
   Os wode as sche wolde wede;º
In swownynge as the lady lay,
Hur wodurº chylde sche bare away,
   Hur whelpysº wyth to fede.
What won’dur was thogh sche wooº ware?
The wylde beestys hur chyldyr away bare;
   For sorowe hur herte can blede,
The lady sett hur on a stone
Besyde the welle and made hur mone,
   And syghyng forthe sche yede.

There came a fowle that was fayre of flightº
   (A gryffyn he was callyd be right)
The fowle was so moche of mightº
That he wolde bare a knight
   Well armyd thogh he ware.º
The lyenas wyth the chylde up toke he
And into an yle of the see
   Bothe he tham bare.
The chylde slept in the lyenas mowthe;
Of wele nor woº nothing hyt knowyth,
   But God kepe hyt from care!

Whan the lyenas had a fote on londe,º
Hastyly sche can upstonde,º
   As a beste that was stronge and wylde.
Thorow Goddys grace the gryffyn she slowe
And sythen ete of the flesche ynowe\textsuperscript{o} plenty
And leyde hur downe be\textsuperscript{o} the chylde. by
The chylde soke\textsuperscript{o} the lyenas, suckled from
As hyt Goddys wylle was,
   Whan hyt the pappys\textsuperscript{o} feled;\textsuperscript{o} teats felt
And when the lyenas began to wake,
Sche lovyd the chylde for hur whelpys sake peacefull
   And therwyth sche was full mylde.\textsuperscript{o}
Wyth hur fete sche made a denne
And leyde the lytull chylde theryn
   And kepe\textsuperscript{o} hyt day and nyght; guarded
And when the lyenas hungurd sore,
Sche ete of the gryffyn more,
   That afore was stronge and wyght. that
As hyt was Goddes owne wylle,
The lyenas belafte\textsuperscript{o} the chylde style:\textsuperscript{o} left at peace
   The chylde was feyre and bright.
The lady sett hur on a stone,
Besyde the welle and made hur mone creature
   As a wofull wyght.\textsuperscript{o}
[After many adventures, the brothers, now proven warriors, are reunited and
the mother-in-law is burnt.]

v) Sir Gowther

This romance, dated around 1375 in Mills,\textsuperscript{14} is a version of the widespread
legend of Robert the Devil, in which a young child, begotten by a devil,
finds salvation after a disorderly and sinful youth.

A duke and his wife have been married for ten years, but have no child.
In desperation the wife prays for a child by any means ... [vv. 58–81]
Thothyskyued and made yll chere, 
That all feyled hur whyte lere,  
For shu conseyvyd noght,  
Scho preyd to God and Mare mylde  
Schuld gyffe hur grace to have a chyld,  
On what maner scho ne roghth.  
In hur orchard, apon a day,  
Ho meyt a man, tho sothe to say,  
That hur of luffe besoghth;  
As lyke hur lorde as he might be —  
He leyd hur down under a tre,  
With hur is wyll he wroghth.  

When he had is wylle all don,  
A felturd fende he start up son,  
And stode and hur beheld.  
He seyd, ‘Y have geyton a chylde on the  
That in is yothe full wylde schall bee  
And weppons wyghtly weld.’  
Scho blessyd hur and fro hym ran;  
Into hur chambur fast ho wan,  
That was so bygly byld;  
Scho seyd to hur lord, that lade myld,  
‘Tonyght we mon geyt chyld,  
That schall owre londus weld.’

The boy, Gowther, grows up to be a very strong and very ‘wild’ young man who terrorises everyone in the neighbourhood. His supposed father dies of sorrow. When he is called ‘a devil’s son’ by an earl, Gowther forces his mother to tell the story of his conception. He goes to Rome, and begins a life of penitence as ‘Hob the Fool’. He rescues the emperor’s daughter from the Saracens, is recognised by her, and marries her. He is absolved by the Pope, becomes the ruler of Almayne, and is venerated as a saint.
vi) Chevelere Assigne

A fourteenth-century century romance in alliterative long lines. It is a version of the Swan-Knight legend (cf. Lohengrin, the son of Parzival in German romance); though it is not here associated, as it often was from the late twelfth century, with the name of Godfrey of Bouillnon, one of the leaders of the First Crusade.

An episode in which the innocent young knight Enyas (Helyas, in other Middle English stories) is instructed in the art and method of single combat. The scene is treated with a touching and attractive comedy (as in some scenes in the English William of Palerne). Bewtrys (Beatrice), wife of king Orien of Lyon, is delivered of six sons and a daughter, born simultaneously, each with a silver chain around the neck. Her wicked mother-in-law, Matabryne, orders her man Markus to drown the children, but out of pity he spares them and leaves them in the forest, where they are reared by a hermit. But Malkedras, a wicked forester, sees them, and tells Matabryne who sends him to kill them and bring her the silver rings from their necks. He finds six children; the seventh, Enyas, has gone into the forest with the hermit in search of food. When the chains are cut, the six children become swans, and fly to a nearby river. Matabryne wishes that Beatrice should be burnt, but the young Enyas offers to fight on her behalf: he must do battle with Malkedras.

[vv. 287–313]

A knyghte kawghte hym by the honde, and ladde hym of the rowte.
‘What beeste is this,’ quod the child, ‘that I shall on hove?’
‘Hit is called an hors,’ quod the knyghte, ‘a good and an abull.’
‘Why eteth he yren?’ quod the chylde, ‘Wyll he ete noghth elles?’
And what is that on his bakke, of byrthe or on bounden?
‘Nay, that in his mowth men callen a brydell,
And that a sadell on his bakke, that thou shalt in sytte.’

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15 The Romance of the Chevelere Assigne, ed. Gibbs. If Gray used this edition, he silently deleted letters added by the editor (such as ‘e’ at the ends of words marked in italic type).
16 William of Palerne, ed. Skeat.
'And what hevy kyrte\textsuperscript{2} is this with holes so thykke,\hfill coat
And this holowe\textsuperscript{5} on\textsuperscript{5} on my hede? I may not here.'\hfill hollow one hear
'An helme men kallen that on and an hawberke\textsuperscript{7} that other.'\hfill coat of mail weighs
'But what broode on is this on my breste? Hit bereth\textsuperscript{5} adown my nekke.'
'A bryghte shelde and a sheene,\textsuperscript{9} to shelde the fro strokes,\hfill shining
'And what longe on is this that I shall up lyfte?'
'Take that launce up in thyn honde, and loke\textsuperscript{9} thou hym hytte;\hfill see that
And whenne that shafte is schyvered,\textsuperscript{9} take shattered quickly
'scharpelye\textsuperscript{9} another.'
'Ye, what yf grace be we to grownde wenden?'\hfill go
'Aryse up lightly on the fete, and reste the no lengur.'\hfill longer strike
And thenne plukke out thy swerde, and pele\textsuperscript{9} on hym faste, edge downwards
Allwey eggelynges down\textsuperscript{9} on all that thou fyndes. care
His rych helm nor his swerde rekke\textsuperscript{9} thou of neythur;\hfill neither
Lette the sharpe of thy swerde schreden hym small.'
'But woll not he smyte ayeyne, whenne he feleth smerte?'
'Yys, I knowe hym full wele, both keenly and faste.
Evur folowe thou on the flesh tyll thou haste hym falleth,\hfill felled him
And sythen smyte of his heede; I kan sey the no furre.'\hfill further
'Now thou haste tawghte me,' quod the childe, ‘God I the beteche;\hfill commend
For now I kan of the crafte more thenne I kowthe.'

Enyas overcomes Malkedras; Matabryne herself is burnt; Beatrice is released. Five chains are returned to the swans, who become human once more; the sixth child, who must remain a swan, laments bitterly. The others are baptised: ‘thus the botenyng of God browghte hem to honde.’\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} Thus the help of God brought them to a happy end.
vii) The Turke and Gowin

A romance (probably written around 1500) which survives, in an incomplete form, in the mid-seventeenth century *PFMS*. Arthurian tales, and especially stories about Sir Gawain, often find their way into popular romance. The Percy Folio Grene Knight tells the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; and others, like this, have similarities with that story.

A strange man — broad and shaped like a Turk — enters when Arthur is sitting at table, and asks for an exchange of buffets (compare *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). Gawain accepts the challenge. He accompanies the Turk, into a hill and to the castle of the king of Man, through a series of often fantastic adventures and tests of strength. At the end, the Turk, bearing a basin of gold, asks Gawain to cut his head off ... [vv. 268–94]

... He tooke forth a bason of gold
As an emperour washe shold,
As fell for his degree.

He tooke a sword of mettle free,\(^9\)   \(noble\) metal
Saies, 'If ever I did any thing for thee,
Doe for me in this stead,\(^8\)    \(place\)
Take here this sword of steele
That in batell will bite weele,\(^9\)    \(well\)
Therwith strike of my head.'

‘That I forefend!’\(^9\) said Sir Gawaine,
‘For I wold not have thee slaine
For all the gold soe red.’
‘Have done, Sir Gawaine, I have no dread,
But in this bason let me bleed
That standeth here in this steed,

\(^{18}\) In *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Hahn’s edition differs slightly from Gray’s here).
And thou shalt see a new play,
With helpe of Mary that mild ma[y]
That saved us from all dread.’

He drew forth the brand of steele,
That in battell bite wold weele,
And there stroke of his head.

And when the blood in the bason light,º
He stood up a stalwortht knight
That day, I undertake,º
guarantee
And song, Te deum laudam[u]s.º
Worshipp be to our lord Jesus
That saved us from all wracke!º

disaster

They return to Arthur’s court, and the Turk, now Sir Gromer, a stalwart knight, is made king of Man.

viii) Sir Lambewellº

Marie de France’s lai of Lanval survives in two Middle English versions: Sir Landevale (early fourteenth century) and Thomas Chestre’s Sir Launfal (later fourteenth). The former lives on in two popular versions. Sir Lambewell (632 lines, in PFMS) is a good example of popular romance, which has probably passed through a series of copyists and retellers.

Lambewell is a young knight at Arthur’s court who is far from home and who has spent much of his wealth. In his distress he is helped by a fairy mistress, who in typical fashion imposes a taboo: he must not reveal her to anyone. But, taunted by Guinevere, he does. He is no longer visited by his mistress, and he is accused of slandering the queen. But just before the judges speak, his beautiful mistress rides into the town, with a sparrowhawk on her hand, and three white greyhounds running beside her ... [vv. 523–38 & 600–30]

19 Te Deum Laudamus (We praise thee, O God) is not a psalm, but has been a song of praise in the Church since early Christian times.
20 In PFMS (vol i), p. 142 ff.
… Wife and child, yonge and old,
All came this lady to beholde,
And all still upon her gazing
As people that beheld the sacring,º
And all they stood still in their study,º
And yet they thought them never weary,
For there was never man nor woman that might
Be weary of this ladies sight.
As soone as Sir Lambwell did her see,
On all the people cryed hee
‘Yond comes my life and my liking!º
Shee comes that me out of baileº shall bring!
Yond comes my lemmán,º I make you sure;
Treulie shee is the fairest creature
That ever man see before indeed,
Looke where shee rydes upon her steed!’ …

… Th[e] king and theº prayd, everyone;º
But for all that ever he cold doe,
Not a word shee wold speake him too,
But obayd her to the king soe h[e]nd,º
And tooke her leave away to wend.
Then Lambewell saw that shee wold fare,º
His owne hart he tookeº to him there;
When shee turned her horse to have gone,
He leaped upon, sooneº anon,
Upon her palfray; whatsoever betide,
Behind her he wold not abide;
And he said, ‘Madam, with reason and skill
Now goe which way so ere you will,
For when you light downe, I shall stand.
And when you ryd, all at your hande,
And whether it be for waile or woeº
I will never depart you froe.’
This lady now the right way nummº

° consecration of the Host
° amazement
° delight
° torment
° beloved
° courteous
° go
° took courage
° immediately
° good or ill
° took
With her maids all and some,
And shee brought Sir Lambwell from Carlile
Farr into a jolly\(^{9}\) il[e]
That clipped was A[v]jilion,
Which knoweth well every Briton;
And shee came there, that lady faire,
Shee gave him all that he found there,
That was to say, all manner of thing
That ever might be to his likinge;
And further of him hard\(^{9}\) no man,
Nor more of him tell can,
But in that iland his life he spend,
Soe did shee alsoe tooke her end.\(^{9}\)

ix) **Thomas of Erceldoune**\(^{21}\)

This fifteenth-century romance has very clear similarities with the ballad of *Thomas the Rhymer* (see our chapter Ballads, no. x), but the nature of the relationship is not certain. Many scholars have thought that the ballad is derived from the romance, but recently it has been argued that the romance has itself been formed from earlier tales or possibly ballads (which may have lived on separately). Certainly, the romance has some unusual features: the first-person narrative at the beginning, the unusual quatrain form and the relative lack of ‘story’. It ends with a long series of prophecies, but these may well have been added later.

a) vv. 25–36 & 69–108\(^{22}\)

Als I me wente this endres daye,
Full foste in mynd makand my mone,\(^{9}\)
In a mery mornynge of Maye,
In Huntle bankkes myselfe allone.


\(^{22}\) This first part is on p. 2 of the edition (the Thornton text); the next begins on p. 5; the edited text is not set out in quatrains.
I herde the jaye, and the throstyll coke,º    male thrush
The mawysº menydeº hir of hir songe,    song-thrush sang plaintively
The wodewaleº berydeº als a belle,    oriole woodpecker cried
That alle the wode abowte me ronge.

Allone in longynge thus als I laye,
Undyrenethe a seemly tree,
[Saw] I whare a lady gaye
[Come rydyng] over a longe leeº …    meadow23
… [She led three grehoundes in a leshe],
And sevne rachesº by hir thay rone,º    hounds ran
Scho bare an horne abowte hir hales,º    neck
And undir hir belte full many a flone.º    arrow

Thomas laye and sawe that syghte,
Undirnethe ane semly tree;
He sayd, 'Yone es Marye moste of myghte,
That bare that childe that dyede for mee.

Bot iº I speke with yone lady bryghte,
I hopeº myne herte will brysteº in three!    unless think break
Now sall I go with all my myghte,
Hir for to mete at Eldoune tree.’

Thomas rathelyº upe he rase,
And he rane over that mountayne hye;
Gyffº it be als the storye sayes,    if
He hir met at Eldone tree.

He knelyde downe upon his knee,
Undirnethe that grenwode spray;º    branch
And sayd, ‘Lufly ladye! Reweº one mee,
Qwene of hevene, als thou wele maye!’

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23 An extensive meadow, or this may be a place-name (the edition has no explanatory notes; cf. the ‘lilly lee’ in Thomas the Rhymer.
Then spake that lady milde of thoghte,
‘Thomas, late swylke\(^9\) words bee;
Qwene of hevene ne am I noghte,
For I tuke\(^9\) never so heghe degree.\(^9\)
Bote I ame of ane other countree,
If I be payrelde\(^9\) moste of prysse;\(^9\)
I ryde aftyre this wylde fee,\(^9\)
My raches rynnys at my devyse.’\(^9\)

‘If thou be parelde moste of prys[e],
And here rydis thus in thy folye\(^24\)
Of lufe, lady, als thou erte wysse,
Thou gyffe me leve to lye the bye.’

Scho sayde, ‘Thou mane, that ware folye,
I praye the, Thomas, thou late me bee;
For I saye the full sekirlye,\(^9\)
That synne will fordoo\(^9\) all my beaute.’

‘Now, lufly ladye, rewe one mee,
And I will evermore with the duelle;
Here my trouthe I will the plyghte,
Whethir thou will in hevene or helle’ …

[Thomas makes love to her and she is transfomed into an ugly and fearsome sight. Then she leads him into Eildon Hill … b): vv. 157–222]\(^25\)

… ‘Thomas, take leve at sonne and mone,
And als at lefe that grewes\(^9\) on tree;
This twelmoneth sall thou with me gone,
And medillerthe\(^9\) sall thou none\(^9\) see.’

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\(^{24}\) cf. ‘follee’ in *Thomas the Rhymer*. The word usually means ‘folly’, but other meanings include ‘park’, a place for hunting and other activities.

\(^{25}\) This section begins on p. 9 of the edition.
He knelyd downe appone his knee,
Undirnethe that grenewod spraye,
And sayd, ‘Luflu lady, rewe on mee,
Mylde qwene of hevene, als thou beste maye,

Allas!’ he sayd, ‘and wa es mee,
I trowe my dedis wyll wirke me care.
My saulle, Jesu, byteche I the,
Whedir someº that ever my banesº sall fare.’

Scho ledde hym in at Eldone hill,
Undirnethe a derneº lee,
[Whare it was] dirkeº als mydnyght myrke,
And ever the water tillº his knee.

The montenansº of dayes three,
He herde bot swoghyngeº of the flode;
At the laste, he sayde, ‘full wa is mee!
Almaste I dye for fawte of fode.’

Scho lede hym intill a faire herbere,º
Whare frwte was g[ro]wan[d gret plentee],
Pere and appill, bothe ryppe thay were,
The date and als the damasee,º

The fygge and als so the wyneberye.º
The nyghtgales byggandeº on their neste,
The papejoyesº faste abowte gan flye,
And throstylls sange wolde hafe no reste.

He pressedeº to pulle frowyte with his hande,
Als maneº for fude that was nere faynt,
Scho sayd, ‘Thomas, thou late thame stande,
Or ells the fende the will atteynt;º
If thou it plokk, sothely to saye, pluck
Thi saule gose to the fyre of helle; before
It comes never owte or domesdaye,
Bot ther in payne ay for to duelle.

Thomas, sothely I the hyghte, command
Come lygge thyne hede downe on my knee,
And [thou] sall se the fayreste syghte,
That ever sawe mane of thi contree.’

He did in hye als scho hym bade; haste
Appone hir knee his hede he layde,
For hir to paye he was full glade, please
And thane that lady to hym sayde,

‘Seese thou nowe yone faire waye,
That lygges over yone heghe mountayne?
Yone es the waye to hevene for aye,
Whene synfull sawles are passed ther payne.

Seese thou nowe yone other waye,
That lygges lawe bynethe yone rysse?
Yone es the waye, the sothe to saye,
Unto the joye of paradyse.

Seese thou yitt yone thirde waye,
That ligges undir yone grene playne?
Yone es the waye, with tene and traye,
Whare synfull saulis suffiris thaire payne.

Bot seese thou nowe yone ferthe waye,
That lygges over yone depe delle?
Yone es the waye — so waylawaye! —
Unto the birnande fyre of helle.
Seese thou yitt yone faire castelle,
[That standis over] yone heghe hill?
Of towne and towre it beris the belle —
In erthe es none lyke it until.

For sothe, Thomas, yone es myne awenne,Ò own
And the kynges of this countree …’

He is commanded to speak only to her when he is in her lord’s castle. Thomas stands still and looks at her. She is once more ‘fayre and gude’, riding on her palfrey with her hounds; she leads him to the castle, where he sees ladies making music, knights dancing, and feasting: there was ‘revelle, gamene and playe’. He stays there until (relapsing momentarily into first-person narrative, ‘till one a daye, so hafe I grace, My lufly lady sayde to mee’) he is told to make ready for the jouney back to ‘Eldone tree’. He says that he has only been in the castle for three days; she tells him that he has been there for three years and more (seven years and more according to the Cambridge MS).Ò She says that on the following day the foul fiend of hell will come and ‘amange this folke will feche his fee’ and ‘thou arte mekill mane and hende — I trowe full wele he wolde chese the’ (v. 292), and she takes him back to ‘Eldonne tree’. The first Fytte ends here. In the following two fyttes, in response to his request to be told of ‘some ferly’ she tells him a long series of prophecies, until at last he allows her to go … to Helsdale in the north, reputed to be the home of fairies and witches.

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26 In Murray’s edition, p. 17 (v. 286).