

Introduction

In the world of Middle English romance, a landscape populated by great feats of prowess, spectacular violence, fantastic beasts, magical adventures, exotic journeys, and romantic love, the family would appear to be a rather mundane subject of study. Even though it is an omnipresent backdrop of practically every romance, its very ubiquity suggests that it is a familiar space that does not play an important role in shaping romance narratives. In these stories, the family as point of departure, as well as place of eventual return, can appear to structure romance in an uncomplicated and self-evident manner. Further, unlike with other works in Middle English— most notably, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—no overt instruction, philosophizing, or argument over the family and the roles of family members is carried out in romance. Compounded by action driven romance plots that feature stock characters who seem to lack psychological complexity, the representation of family in middle English romance appears to be a domestic institution that has little bearing on how these romances were read.

However, by examining texts that span the thirteenth- to fifteenth-centuries, I aim to show that far from being entities that provide a stable backdrop against which romance protagonists act out fantastic adventures, families in romance are portrayed as institutions that are at the center of competing ideas regarding what was recognized as "family life." Integral to my project is the use of various psychoanalytical models that illuminate the force of these ideas on individual and collective subjectivities. By the late Middle Ages, key ideas about marriage and the ideal family had been established. While various aspects of church teaching idealized what we would now recognize as nuclear family life,

in Middle English romance, the idealized family often acts in tension with social realities such as extended households and the imperative to procreate. Further, the idealization of family in romance often has a disciplinary function, offering a means for members of the newly emergent bourgeois–gentry to create and enforce behaviors and values that promoted their class interests.

Exploring these issues in detail, chapter one provides an overview of medieval thought about the nuclear family by tracing the theological and social developments that led to the rise of the nuclear family as a church-sanctioned institution. This chapter demonstrates how debates about the status of marriage as a sacrament of the church, the constitution of a proper marriage, and the growing emphasis on a nurturing relationship between parents and children provide an important interpretive context for three romances from the fourteenth century—*Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Isumbras*, and *Sir Cleges*. Immediate family relations also feature prominently in these works in the forms of the suffering that these protagonists endure. *Sir Tryamour* dramatizes how tragedy can strike when a husband does not place complete trust in the integrity of his marriage and questions the legitimacy of his son. The heroic deeds undertaken by Tryamour are guided by a desire to re-establish the family unit that has been broken by his father's lack of trust. *Sir Isumbras* and *Sir Cleges* show how the misfortune brought upon the head of the family is shared by the rest of the nuclear family unit, and all members of the family play a crucial role in the path to restoration. In this way, the affective bonds between the protagonists and their parents, spouses, and children actively shape the protagonists' decisions and actions. Through these depictions of family in their plots, these romances show how the cultural work of establishing certain ideals about marriage and family life

extended beyond the preacher's pulpit or the theologian's pen. In addition, the chapter argues that while the overt didactic function of these romances seems to involve normalizing moral values and spiritual attitudes, such romances also played a role in socializing members of the bourgeois–gentry class into socially acceptable forms of family life.

Even though the first chapter does not employ psychoanalysis as a framework for textual analysis, an approach that is used in subsequent chapters, it plays an important role in mediating between the historicist and psychoanalytical readings of the thesis. Grounding the thesis in a sense of the historical moment by focusing on the theological and social history of the nuclear family, the first chapter establishes a historicized reading of the family in Middle English romance that the later chapters depend on and respond to. One of the challenges of using psychoanalytical insights or structures in reading pre-modern texts involves answering the charge of anachronism. By thinking about how the nuclear family is produced and reinforced as an idealized form of the family in the late-medieval period, chapter one is a response to the warning about the narrowing effects of psychoanalysis in its ahistorical oedipalization of desire that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari issue in *Anti-Oedipus*:

The father, the mother, and the self are at grips with, and directly coupled to, the elements of the political and historical situation ... [which] constantly break all triangulations, and who prevent the entire situation from falling back on the familial complex and becoming internalized in it. In a word, the family is never a microcosm in the sense of an autonomous figure, even when inscribed in a larger circle that it is said to mediate and express. The family is by nature eccentric, de-

centered.... Families are filled with gaps and transected by breaks that are not familial: the Commune, the Dreyfus Affair, religion and atheism, the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism, Stalinism, the Vietnam war, May '68—all these things form complexes of the unconscious, more effective than everlasting Oedipus (97).

By paying attention to the historical circumstances that contribute to an understanding of medieval families, I attempt to ensure that the application of psychoanalysis in the thesis does not exist in a theoretical vacuum, where the nuclear family is assumed to be part of an unchanging transhistorical horizon of psychoanalytical fact. Instead, the subsequent chapters of the thesis explore how various depictions of family in romance stand in ambivalent relationship to the idealized family discussed in chapter one. For instance, these representations may well valorize the nuclear family, but do so through circuitous routes—with plots that involve surrogate fathers, interracial marriages, the depiction of grief and mourning, and the revelation of adultery—as they imagine alternative means by which families cohere. In order to analyze such circuitous routes, I employ an eclectic range of psychoanalytical theories which prove useful in providing insights into how family structures, relationships, and desires are represented in each text.

I do not claim that these romances reflect a "psycho-history" of the medieval mind; indeed, anachronistically applying late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century concepts to reconstruct medieval experiences of the family would be critically naïve. That being said, the thesis shows that psychoanalytical perspectives deepen historicized readings in fruitful ways. As L. O. Aranye Fradenburg points out,

[p]sychoanalytic medievalism is contributing to the development of historiographical approaches that are neither naïvely "transhistoricist" nor naïvely "discontinuist," but are instead attentive to prospectivity and repetition, to the ways cultures wish to script their cultures as part of their historicity, and to the unpredictable but nonetheless decisive ways in which those scripts mark succeeding desires and subjectivities. ("Not Alone" 255)

Coupled with readings that are sensitive to the historical structures and practices that governed family life, psychoanalytical theory enables us to consider how the representation of the family in romance does more than mirror prevailing social institutions. Instead, these romances can be read as symptomatic of how medieval people organized their sense of identity in ways that often resisted and complicated dominant ideas about family life. Indeed, a "psychoanalytic medievalism" that looks forward to "succeeding desires and subjectivities" enables a rethinking of foundational psychoanalytical assumptions as well. While much psychoanalytical thought focuses on the individual, the way that individuals are linked to each other and to larger groups also forms a significant element of psychoanalytical theory. The historicized family enables psychoanalytical readings of Middle English romance that take into account how medieval subjectivity is predicated on one's relationship to the nuclear family as well as a broader range of familial structures and practices that made up medieval family life. By focusing on medieval families as a crucial hinge that connects individuals to larger social entities, I emphasize how psychoanalytical thought can be fruitfully used to theorize about how desires, drives, and fantasies make up class and religious affiliation and contribute to a sense of national consciousness. The psychoanalytical theories that I use

have the analysis of nuclear family relations at the foundation of their explanatory frameworks, an inevitable legacy of Freud's oedipal complex. However, I aim to show that various psychoanalytical structures, such as Klein's object-relations, Butler's notion of disavowal in the psychoanalytic "turn," Lacan's symbolic order, and even Freud's totemic father figure, can be used to analyze a range of family arrangements that extend beyond the nuclear family. Also, psychoanalysis proves useful in describing and analyzing affective and psychic experiences such as anxiety, feelings of persecution, loss, and fantasy, which shape how romance protagonists grapple with issues concerning the family.

Together with viewing these romances through psychoanalytical theory and the social history of the medieval family, I also examine how these works resonate with their particular political contexts. By focusing on how various English monarchs dealt with the process of consolidating their authority or responding to threats against their power, I show that questions concerning family affiliation, lineage, and legitimacy, issues which are taken up in the romances, connect these romances to the political concerns of the day. These political contexts, which range from Edward I's ascension to the throne in the late thirteenth century to the Wars of the Roses that spanned the second half of the fifteenth century, are invoked in order to clarify the way that the nuclear family and various other family structures and practices featured in the political thinking of late-medieval England.

This combination of psychoanalytical theory and social-political history informs my readings in chapter two. The chapter begins to complicate the picture of the idealized family unit by examining romances where the protagonist loses his family, which he never fully regains, through an early trauma. These romances, which all have Anglo-

Norman antecedents and date from an earlier period than the works studied in the chapter one,¹ seem to emphasize how the solitary hero is able to establish his authority without the help of the nuclear family, perhaps borrowing from the heroic ethos of an earlier tradition. However, while the breakdown of the nuclear family in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton* initiates the action of these romances, these stories are not entirely bereft of family structures, even if these are non-nuclear. In place of close-knit nuclear family relations, surrogate father figures as well as the haunting presence of the memory of the dead father structure the protagonists' journeys. In this process, Havelok and Horn gain authority by learning how to control and manipulate their physicality. Havelok gradually learns about how his body is an important symbol that legitimizes his right to rule, and Horn has to adopt several disguises to hide his immediately recognizable good looks, en route to regaining the right to rule. Bevis is not tied to his body in the same way, but is governed by his impulsiveness. In the maturation process, Bevis learns to control his penchant for acting on the spur of the moment. Because my analysis of these romances emphasizes these protagonists' movement away from the purely physical and the deferral of the immediate as the adoption of a more symbolic mode of being, this chapter uses the Freudian myth of the primal horde and the return of the repressed as a means of exploring how the desires of the group and individual interact in formulating symbolic authority figures. Reading these texts against the social institution of wardship and the political context of Edward

¹ *King Horn* is regarded as the earliest Middle English romance and is traditionally dated to 1225, though scholars have argued for a date later in the thirteenth century (Herzman 11). *Havelok the Dane* is "placed at the end of the thirteenth century, between 1280 and 1290" (Herzman 73), and *Bevis of Hampton* is thought to have been written in the first quarter of the fourteenth century (Herzman 187).

His own ascent to power, I argue that heroic identity is assumed through a process that does not derive from individual merit alone, but is also dependant on actual and symbolic father-figures.

Chapter three examines the stress placed upon the sacramental status of marriage by showing how representations of inter-racial and inter-religious marriages in romance can complicate conjugal unions. *The King of Tars*, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, and *The Sultan of Babylon* each feature Christian encounters with the Saracen Other, and dramatize the potential and limits of marriage as a tool for religious and political assimilation. *The King of Tars* illustrates how marriage to the Other can go wrong, and how even the conversion of the Saracen spouse may not restore marriage to its sacramental status. *The Sultan of Babylon*, on the other hand, shows how a more carefully orchestrated alliance between Christian and Saracen characters affirms the spiritual power of the Christian marriage to convert the Other. *Richard Coer de Lyon*, offers another perspective on how narratives represent the perils of inter-racial marriages and English encounters with the foreign. While the romance begins by imagining the dangers of marriage to the non-European Other, in the marriage of Richard's parents, the romance remains silent on Richard's own marriage, refusing to weave into the narrative the fact that the historical Richard married his queen on foreign soil, Cyprus, while he was crusading in the East. In reading these romances, I explore the ambiguities of the conversion process and how this creates a tension between fidelity and betrayal within marriage and the family. The earliest versions of these romances appear around 1330, with later manuscripts preserving and altering these stories into the early-fifteenth

century.² Thus, the production and circulation of these romances coincide with England's long-running conflict with France, The Hundred Years War. Using Melanie Klein's ideas on anxiety, this chapter argues that these romances illustrate how the English national psyche in the late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth- centuries felt threatened by the French, while being unable and unwilling to disavow its continental heritage.

The next chapter focuses on loss within the family unit as I deal with the question of how the commemoration of dead family members is crucial in constituting the ideal family in John Gower's late-fourteenth-century version of "Apollonius of Tyre" from the *Confessio Amantis*. If one of the "goods" of medieval marriage is its additive function in procreation, what then is the place of loss, grief, and mourning in the conception of family? While Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre" remains true to its sources by featuring its titular hero as a good husband and successful monarch because he does not repeat the sin of incest that opens the tale, his version exhibits a pre-occupation with grief, mourning, and the commemoration of loss that is not present in other versions of the story. Reading Gower's tale against late-medieval practices of commemorating the dead and Richard II's own interest in memorializing his union to Anne of Bohemia as a spiritual marriage, this chapter explores the impact of loss on how medieval families fashioned group identities through the experience of death. Because this chapter considers how the political aspects of memorialization, as private grief comes to be expressed in acts of public mourning, it

² The *King of Tars* and a fragment of *Richard Coer de Lyon* appear in the Auchinleck manuscript, which has been dated to 1330. Various versions of *Richard Coer de Lyon* continue to circulate in manuscripts well into the fifteenth century. The Sultan of Babylon has been dated to the "late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century since it contains echoes of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*" (Lupack 1).

also takes up Judith Butler's ideas on the constitutive power of loss in the formulation of socialized subjects.

Having examined various aspects of marriage and family life that question the integrity of the idealized nuclear family laid out in chapter one, the final chapter reconsiders the ideal family whose status as social fantasy is complicated by adultery. Reading Malory's *Morte Darthur*, I focus on acts of revelation within the work. Discovering the truth about his origins and kinship relations is a source of tremendous stability for Arthur, who experiences an abrupt shift in his identity on being crowned King of the Britons. Yet his slow decline—as he grows increasingly out of touch with the intrigues that swirl around him—is also marked by his clinging to the fantasy that his marriage and family continue to be sources of strength, even though suppressed rumors of the queen's adultery and the divisions these cause critique the efficacy of Arthur's fantasies about family. In this chapter, I use Lacanian theory to demonstrate how desire, knowledge, and social fantasy produce individuals that are subject to the family, examining how Malory's work resonates with questions concerning the legitimacy and lineage of the ruling elite that became prominent in the Wars of the Roses.

This thesis shows how Middle English romance was actively engaged in representing how individuals were connected to larger social groups through familial institutions. The dual nature of family life in its various forms, being both private and public, emphasizes how intimacy amongst its members never entirely insulates them from society. Hence, reading these romances against the nuclear family and various other familial structures and practices demonstrates how the family is a crucial transitional space that connects the individual to broader societal concerns involving

religion, class, and politics. The way that these romances represent the family also suggests that romance was a site where the clash between emerging ideals about the family and older and widely practiced arrangements could be imagined, and the thesis aims to show that the role of romance in shaping the various discourses about family is significant, and that examining the representation of family in Middle English romance is an important way of accessing how medieval cultures thought about individual and societal identities.