

The Rise of Medieval Women

A Study of the Significance of Heroines in Two Fourteenth-Century Middle English Romances

Mariska van Dasselaar

0414794

BA Thesis

Supervisor: Sándor Chardonnens

Submitted: 26-06-07

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
OF SIR LAUNFAL.....	7
OF SIR ORFEO.....	19
CONCLUSION.....	28
WORKS-CITED LIST.....	30

Introduction

Medieval English literature boasts various types of romances. Not only do courtly and chivalric romances exist; many sub-categories can be found, and each romance has a theme or story-pattern that makes it stand apart from others (Finlayson). In spite of that, there are narrative patterns and recurring aspects these stories have in common. For instance, romances often deal with a knight who goes on a quest or adventure and a heroine who becomes the object of desire for the hero (Burlin). There are kings (sometimes queens), loathly ladies, courteous knights, malicious knights, wooing women, rash promises, fountains, giants, and woods full of adventure. There are battles and magic objects to thrill the audience, as well as good or bad endings. However, these story-elements are not likely to be found in a story all at once, whereas some are; medieval romances almost always have a hero and a heroine, who each have typical character traits. The hero is often beautiful, strong, and courteous, and he does great deeds in order to win a lady's heart or hand. The heroine is even more beautiful than the hero, yet she usually lives in her father's (the king's) castle, where she waits for the hero's return from battle. Overall, the heroine appears to be rather insignificant, except for moments when she tries to seduce the hero (King Horn) or has more obviously active moments, as in Chaucer's The Wife of Bath's Tale, where a loathly lady manages to get dominion over a knight by forcing him to choose between two possibilities: to have her ugly, kind, and faithful, or to have her beautiful and unfaithful. By allowing the lady to choose, the knight gives her dominion over him, and the lady's sovereignty is shown.

However, to state that the typical medieval heroine is insignificant or there to fill the gaps of the story with insignificant love scenes in between battles (or perhaps to add some male fantasy to the story) would be utterly wrong; although women in medieval English romances might appear to be rather passive, there is more to them than meets the eye. According to Harris, heroines were already essential to the plot line in Old French romances, even when the hero was more important (6). French romances were brought to England in the late Middle Ages, for instance by Marie de France, and the French stories were transformed into English versions, based on the original. Although Middle English

romances vary from their French counterparts, the importance of the heroine has not become less, even when it might look that she is insignificant to the storyline.

First, the lady is the motivation for knights to do great deeds. According to Ferrante, “[l]ove can provide a man with a new and nobler identity and inspire him to great deeds in the service of others, or it can cause a madness that cuts him off from this world and drives him into exile or death” (65). Indeed, women can drive men to do almost anything. It is often the case that the hero leaves on a noble quest or adventure in order to gain a knightly status, so he can eventually marry a princess. For instance, in King Horn the orphan Horn has to slay Saracens in great battles to gain the status that he lost after he had been exiled from his home country. His love for Rymenhild, the daughter of the King of his new home, encourages him to do great deeds and dominates the choices he makes in life. It is she he wants to marry, even if he has to go into exile for seven years. Rymenhild only appears active when she expresses her love to Horn. In this, she is quite particular, as she is the one expressing her love to the knight, whereas the knight might be expected to take the initiative. She gives Horn a ring as a token of their love, and she almost begs him to marry her. In other scenes, she appears rather passive, as she does not go to battle like the knights or performs heroic deeds. Still, she is vital to the story, as she is the driving factor for Horn to participate in great battles and the reason for his victory. Every time Horn looks at the ring she has given him, he is reminded of his love for Rymenhild, which strengthens him to fight on. As Crane says, “[v]ictories won in combat, land taken by conquest, and marvels appropriated or overcome replay metonymically the lover’s ultimate conquest of his lady” (15). Heroes are ready to do anything to win the heroine’s heart or to gain respect from the king, so they can receive their daughter’s hand.

Second, women contribute to the male’s masculinity. A knight may be beautiful and strong, but his life is only perfect when he is married to a beautiful woman. The knight’s quest does not just contain the search for adventure; it always involves the search for a future wife, even if this is not immediately clear in the beginning. Only with a wife, the knight can be truly happy. The woman might conceive and bear a child, but this is not a requisite. If the woman does conceive, the hero’s fertility is proven, which

adds to him being perfect (knights in Middle English romances were often described as being perfect). In this case, a son was seen as most valuable, a view that derived from classic times, in which a male heir had to be produced to take over the king's reign. Women did not often rule a kingdom. Again, this is an explanation for woman as motivation for the knight to do great deeds. Crane investigates love in romances by stating that the man sees the woman's beauty as object of desire "and sees masculinity reflected back to itself in the difference between the ideal feminine and masculine identity" (74). The moment a knight looks at a lady, his feeling of masculinity is increased; he sees the feminine ideal and is made aware of his masculine ideal, which perfection will be proven when he manages to win the lady's heart. By looking at her, his motivation to do great deeds is stirred. Her perfection is his perfection; the hero needs her to be a perfect knight; if he is incapable of winning the lady's heart, he is not perfect, whereas perfection is a requisite characteristic of a true knight. An example is the grave situation in Sir Orfeo. King Orfeo and his wife Heurodis live happily together in a kingdom. However, one day Heurodis is abducted into the fairy world by a fairy king (ll. 190-93). Orfeo's life collapses as soon as Heurodis is taken away. Through this event, his masculinity is threatened, as he suddenly finds himself without a wife. He has lost his happiness and all that he can do is to go into exile. A second example is Sir Launfal, where the hero's masculinity is threatened by Guinevere, King Arthur's wife, who accuses Launfal of being a homosexual when he refuses her (ll. 685-90). This has great consequences to Launfal's life, as it makes him boast of Tryamour, his secret fairy lover (ll. 694-95). Tryamour once laid a magic taboo on Launfal that forbid him to boast of her (ll. 361-65). By breaking the taboo, Launfal loses her and it fuels the dislike Guenevere has towards him.

Finally, heroines have a far more important function in medieval romances than might be thought at first sight, as shall be discussed in the next chapters. Every single action has a reaction, but idleness can have reactions too. By being silent, the heroine might have specific meaning, like in Sir Orfeo, where Heurodis ceases speaking due to her abduction to the fairy kingdom. Small actions may have consequences to the hero's life. Gifts can have influence, like the ring in King Horn, which reminds Horn of his love

for Rymenhild every time he looks at it and thus gives him strength to fight on. He might have been slain if it had not been for Rymenhild's gift. He might even have forgotten her. The heroine's words may have serious consequences by invoking reactions from the hero or by pursuing him to do something. Her words, actions, silence, or idleness may give meaning to the story and emphasise the theme of the romance. In Sir Orfeo and Sir Launfal, the heroines have a significant role and add vital meaning to the storyline, despite their seemingly passive role.

Of Sir Launfal

In the late fourteenth century, Thomas Chestre wrote Sir Launfal, a lai that derived from Marie de France's Lai de Lanval (Billings 148). Chestre used the original storyline and made few adaptations, but his story was meant for a peasant audience instead of an aristocratic audience (Bliss 41-42). Sir Launfal describes the life of the knight Launfal, who has the habit to spend a lot of money. The people dislike him for his debts and poverty, but the fairy lady Tryamour, who Launfal meets on entering the fairy kingdom, gives him gifts and love, but she also places a taboo on him that forbids him to speak of her (ll. 361-65). Launfal's popularity increases and the King's wife, Guenevere, tries to seduce him (ll. 673-81). Launfal refuses her, and she accuses him of being a homosexual. Launfal breaks his taboo by boasting of Tryamour (ll. 694-96) and he is tried by the King's court because of Guenevere's accusation (ll. 835-40). At the end of the story, Tryamour rides into the King's hall and proves her existence (ll. 973-1005), and Launfal is saved. Contrary to Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal contains two heroines instead of one. The first woman encountered in the narrative is Guenevere; the second woman is Tryamour, the fairy princess Launfal meets on entering the fairy kingdom. When analysing these two women, it can be noted that neither of them actually appears very passive, as they both make advances towards Launfal and fulfil a prominent role in the poem. For instance, through these heroines the main theme of the story becomes clear, namely that of generosity. From the beginning of the story, the acts of Guenevere influence the storyline and the way Launfal's generosity is seen by its characters. The heroine's actions and words have great consequences on Launfal's life, yet also on the way story elements can be interpreted. Particular conversations can have specific meaning to the interpretation of the story and its characters, and it becomes obvious that there is more to the heroines of medieval English literature than meets the eye. In Sir Launfal, Guenevere and Tryamour are significant to the storyline, despite their seemingly passive role.

Guenevere is the first of the heroines to be introduced. She is married to King Arthur at the beginning of the story, and there is a great feast (ll. 49-72). Guenevere gives gifts to all knights, except for Launfal:

The Quene yaf yftes for the nones,
Gold and selver and precyous stonys
Her curtasye to kythe.
Everych knight sche gaf broche other ryng,
But Syr Launfal sche yaf nothing –
That grevede hym many a sythe (Lines 67-72)¹.

By not giving Launfal a gift, Guenevere already plays a significant role; she emphasises one of the main themes of the story, the theme of *largesse*, which means being generous. At the beginning of the story, Launfal's generosity is described: "Launfal, forsoth he hyght / He gaf gyftys largelyche, / Gold and sylver and clothes ryche, / To squyer and to knight" (ll. 27-30)². At this stage of the story, this eagerness to give gifts and spend money is not yet seen as a bad thing. Indeed, it is described as something good, as for his generosity Launfal was made steward of the King (ll. 31-32). However, Guenevere shows her dislike for Launfal by giving him nothing, as if he does not deserve a gift because he is not one of her many lovers, and therefore is not generous with giving love. Whereas the King and his knights appreciate Launfal, Guenevere already sheds an evil light on his generosity and thus anticipates the next stage of the story. Ramsey states that, as soon as Guenevere and Arthur are married, Guenevere stops Launfal's income, without the King knowing it (137). This act is like an act of revenge because Launfal does not give Guenevere love, which is an insult to her. Therefore, she punishes him in a very mean way; she takes away his income, so Launfal cannot spend the King's money anymore and soon starts making debts. This sole act is of major

¹ The Queen gave gifts believe me,
Gold and silver and precious stones
To make known her courtesy to the King
Every knight she gave a brooch or ring,
But Sir Launfal she gave nothing –
That saddened him many a time.

² Launfal, as he was called, / gave gifts generously, / Gold and silver and valuable clothes, / To squire and to knight.

consequence to the rest of the story, as it causes Launfal's poverty and unpopularity, and at the same time introduces the theme of generosity.

Soon after the wedding, Launfal leaves to Karlyoun because of his father's burial (ll. 85-88). There, the disrespect Guenevere showed Launfal is also shown by the citizens. They do not appreciate the debts Launfal creates because of his generosity; they see it as a fault. According to Ramsey, generosity "becomes a problem for Lanval only because his own rightful source of income, the generosity of Arthur, has been cut off" (137). From the moment the income stops, Launfal starts creating debts because he cannot spend the king's money anymore. Consequently, Launfal becomes poor. His poverty makes the citizens believe that Launfal's relationship with the King has become bad, or else he would still get the King's money and be rich. If the King dislikes Launfal, it must be for a good reason, because he is the King, and the citizens follow him. Therefore, they stop respecting Launfal the moment they learn of his poverty, as it shows his lack of income and indicates the King's disrespect for Launfal. The mayor, however, learns about Launfal's problems sooner. When Launfal asks for lodging, he says, "I am departyd fram the Kyng, / And that rewyth me sore" (ll. 101-02)³. Thus, he tells the mayor that his relationship with the King has become bad. Ramsey notes that "Launfal seeks lodging with the mayor of Carleon who had formerly been his "servant" but who now, seeing the hero's poverty, sends him out to sleep in the orchard" (137). The mayor now sees Launfal as a poor man, and – now that he learns about the bad relationship between Launfal and the King – it is hard to treat him like a noble knight, as knights are supposed to be noble, handsome, and wealthy. He cannot offer him the best lodging he has. The mayor does not know what happened to estrange Launfal from the King; in the worst case, Launfal might have been sent away, and to lodge a knight disliked by the King would not give the mayor a good reputation, as it might be a sign that he is siding with the knight.

When he is poor and miserable, Launfal decides to ride into the west (ll. 217-19). Soon, the second heroine is introduced: Tryamour. When Launfal rests under a tree, two fairy maidens come to him and ask him to come with them to Dame Tryamour (ll. 229-

³ I am estranged from the King, / And it aggrieves me sorely.

58). This is the moment Launfal enters the fairy kingdom, and there he becomes Tryamour's lover. Just like Guenevere, Tryamour plays a role in the theme of largesse, but she treats Launfal with respect and does not condemn him for being too generous. She also gives him a never-empty purse, a coat of arms, a steed, a servant (Gyvre), and good luck in battle (ll. 319-36). Still, it can be wondered at why Launfal is chosen to enter the fairy kingdom and be Tryamour's lover. He has done nothing but spent money and given gifts, and thus creating debts. Bliss remarks that "[t]he most important possession of a knight is his wealth, and his most important virtue his generosity; once he loses his wealth he is no longer respected by anyone" (42). Launfal's largesse has indeed caused him to have a bad reputation, because he has made debts and is a poor knight. By having debts at all, his reputation has turned bad, as it shows the lack of income from the King and suggests a bad relationship between Launfal and him. Launfal's new life in the fairy kingdom seems therefore rather a reward instead of a punishment.

Launfal's generosity can be accounted for by a Christian interpretation. The story was introduced to an English audience in the Middle Ages, in which Christianity was prominent. Almost everyone was a Christian, and a Christian message might therefore be included in the story. According to Ramsey, Launfal "has spent himself into punery, but such expense, to a medieval audience, is a virtue rather than a fault, an example of Christian charity and of the generosity expected of a medieval nobleman" (137). Possessions were not really seen as possessions by Man, but by God. Objects were seen as borrowed from God, and nobody owned anything, a theme that returns in medieval stories, for instance in the Dutch Elckerlijc, where the man who clings too much to earthly materials is punished. In Sir Launfal, largesse may therefore be viewed as something good, like a "virtue". Although Launfal spends everything he has as well as the King's money, he gives away that what is in nobody's possession but God's, which in turn emphasises the fact that people should be generous and not cling to material things, as dealt with in Elckerlijc. The purse Launfal receives from Tryamour is connected to this Christian view. It encourages Launfal to be even more generous instead of saving money, and by doing so he is later rewarded by being popular with the people. Lane sees "[g]enerosity as a Christian ideal" and notes that "[i]n the Anglo-Saxon "comitatus" the

benevolence and nobility of a lord is invariably displayed in the gifts and favors he distributes among his thanes” (285). Gifts are good; they show the goodness of the one who gives them. Already in stories like *Beowulf* the importance of gifts is made clear, where the noble knights receive gifts from the King.

The great number of oppositions in *Sir Launfal* creates a clear contrast between Guenevere and Tryamour (Anderson 118). Through generosity, the opposition between Tryamour and Guenevere is shown. Tryamour gives Launfal the respect he deserves through a Christian view. Anderson notes that, in contrast to Guenevere, Tryamour *does* give Launfal gifts (118): she gives him a never-empty purse, a steed, a knave, a coat-of-arms, and success in battle (ll. 319-36). She also gives him love and respect. In turn, Guenevere is disrespected for her behaviour. She too, is generous, but not with the gifts of God, like Launfal. Instead, she is too generous with what *is* her own possession and the only thing she is able to give: her body. The moment Guenevere enters the story, it becomes clear that she is promiscuous with the King’s knights, and that she is disrespected because of it:

But Syr Launfal lykede her [Guenevere] noght,
Ne other knyghtes that were hende;
For the lady bar los of swych word
That sche hadde lemmannys under her lord,
So fele ther nas noon ende (ll. 44-48)⁴.

Guenevere has so many affairs that the King’s knights dislike her for it. Launfal, too, dislikes her for that reason. The difference between Guenevere’s and Launfal’s way of generosity is made clear by their dislike for each other, and this dislike only intensifies the moment Launfal cannot give her the gift she wants: to have him for herself:

⁴ But Sir Launfal did not like her,
Nor did other well-bred knights;
For the lady bore a reputation of renown
That she had lovers besides her lord,
So many that there was not ever an end.

Sche seyde, “Fy on the, thou coward!
Anhongeth worth thou hye and hard!
That thou ever were ybore!
That thou lyvest, hyt ys pyté!
Thou lovyst no woman, ne no woman the –
Thou were worthy forlorne!” (ll. 685-90)⁵.

These are foul words for a queen, and they immediately emphasise the negative view the audience is to have of Guenevere. Lane claims that Sir Launfal contains a strong opposition of good and evil, in which Launfal and Tryamour personify good and Guenevere personifies evil (285). From the beginning of the story, Guenevere is depicted as unfaithful, dishonest, and unkind. Arthur’s knights dislike her; she refuses to give Launfal gifts; she is only interested in Launfal because of his sudden wealth and popularity; and she accuses him of propositioning her when he refuses her, thus causing him to be tried. Tryamour, on the other hand, is depicted as a respectable, kind woman. Lane calls her “the power of goodness” (285). There is no slightest hint of evil in her gestures; she woes Launfal, but does not seduce him; she loves him for who he is, for she pledges her love to him when he is at the lowest point he could be in his life. The moment Tryamour allows him to enter the fairy kingdom (ll. 253-58), Launfal is miserable, muddy, in great debts, and disliked by the people, yet Tryamour immediately adores him. She furthermore gives him many gifts and a great feast, and her love for him does not appear to be short-lived, but eternal, as long as Launfal does not break her taboo, which is the only possible thing that might break their love.

⁵ She said, “Fie on you, you coward!
A hanging you deserve high and hard!
Alas that you were born!
It is a pity that you live!
You love no woman and no woman loves you –
You are fit to be destroyed!”

The taboo Tryamour has laid upon Launfal can be seen as a test. Launfal has Tryamour's respect and everything he desires, but he is not allowed to tell anyone about her existence or to boast of her:

But of o thing, Syr Knyght, I warne the,
That thou make no bost of me
for no kennes mede!
And yf thou doost, I warny the before,
All my love thou hast forlore! (ll. 361-65)⁶.

Launfal can call Tryamour whenever he wants when he is alone in his chamber, and she will come, as long as he does not boast about it. To boast is a great sin, as it makes people jealous, and it would undo the goodness of his generosity. At the same time, the taboo might be derived from aspects of courtly literature. According to Stevens, a "recurrent motif in tales of romantic love is that of secrecy, [privacy]. The lovers' obligation, the man's especially, to keep their love a secret is frequently referred to in courtly literature" (35). Also, Andreas states that "[t]he man who cannot keep a secret cannot be a lover" (qtd. in Stevens 35). This is part of the test Launfal undergoes. As long as he keeps silent about Tryamour, she will stay with him and keep visiting him. Through this taboo, Tryamour is in great control of future events in the story, as can be seen later, in the scene in which it is broken.

Tryamour's world, the fairy kingdom, shows a contrast too, as the real world and the fairy world are closely related to the opposition of good and evil. Ramsey remarks that "[w]hat separates the fairyland stories from all the others is their presentation of dual worlds, one the imperfect world of reality, the other a fantasy world of great pleasures and accomplishments" (132). Indeed, a clear separation can be seen. In the real world we

⁶ "But of one thing, Sir Knight, I warn you,
That you do not boast of me
For no kind of reward!
And if you do, as I warned you before,
All my love you will have utterly lost!"

have King Arthur, his knights, Guenevere, the mayor, and townspeople, and most of these characters take a dislike to Launfal for his poverty and debts. The real world is mostly concerned with the role of Guenevere, who from the beginning shows her dislike for Launfal (ll. 70-72) and later causes him to be tried by accusing him of seducing her (ll. 835-40). In contrast, Tryamour personifies the fairy kingdom and its “great pleasures and accomplishments”. There, all is well and perfect. Even when a bit of fairy kingdom enters the real world, a bit of that perfect world and happiness comes with it. Launfal is happy when he is in his chamber and calls Tryamour to him. He is happy when Tryamour enters the King’s court to prove her existence (ll. 973-81), thus saving Launfal. Tryamour is associated with perfect happiness, Guenevere with real-life troubles.

The next important scene is when Valentine, a knight from Lombardy, challenges him to fight a duel (ll. 505-15). After Launfal leaves the fairy kingdom, the citizens suddenly respect him because of his riches, and great tournaments are organised for him (ll. 433-35). Because Launfal is very successful in those tournaments, Valentine decides to challenge him. It is here that yet another theme enters the story, that of masculinity. As Ramsey says, “[t]he rigid hierarchical society of the late Middle Ages created a situation in which wealth, rank, birth, power, fame, physical and sexual maturity seemed all fused into a single entity, lack of which meant continual frustration” (140). One of the greatest concerns of a knight is to prove that he is virile, a theme that returns in many romances. Most medieval romances deal with a knight going on a quest and falling in love with a beautiful woman. The eventual goal always returns, which is to marry and – sometimes – to produce a child. Anderson describes Valentine’s challenge as a threat to Launfal’s manhood and places it as the central focus of the story, as it is in the exact middle of it and is surrounded by Tryamour’s and Guenevere’s advancements towards Launfal (122). Before this challenge, Tryamour expresses her love to Launfal (ll. 301-06), and their love affair shows the audience that he is capable of loving women. Valentine’s challenge shows the first indication of doubt towards Launfal’s masculinity, for he claims to challenge Launfal “[t]o kepe his harneys from the ruste, / And elles hys manhood schende” (ll. 527-28)⁷. This means that Launfal needs to prove himself and his

⁷ To keep his harness from rusting, / Or else his manhood will fall to shame.

masculinity by winning the duel. I agree with Anderson about the structure of the story putting emphasis on the importance of the Valentine scene, as the theme of masculinity and the proving of the knight's perfection returns, but it cannot be the main focus of the story. It *is* in the middle of Tryamour's and Guenevere's advancements, but the challenge does not have the same consequences as when Guenevere tries to seduce Launfal, which is an even greater challenge. Launfal just fights the duel with Valentine and wins, but Guenevere's challenge turns out rather differently.

It is at the King's great feast that Guenevere attempts to seduce Launfal, as he has become popular and wealthy (ll. 673-81). Guenevere's attempt to seduce Launfal is of great consequence to Launfal's fate. Since Launfal already has a lover, remains loyal to her, and dislikes Guenevere, he refuses her advances (ll. 384-85). The first consequence is that Guenevere makes him break Tryamour's taboo. In her anger of being refused, Guenevere cries: "Thou lovyst no woman, ne no woman the" (l. 389)⁸. This line can be interpreted as implying that Launfal is a homosexual (Anderson 118), but it also shows that Guenevere's advances towards Launfal are not out of love. She becomes angry because she cannot get what she wants. She accuses him of not loving women because he does not want her, and it is yet another attack on his masculinity. According to Anderson, this accusation is as bad as Valentine's challenge (122), but I believe this is worse, because Guenevere's words have greater consequences than Valentine's. It is because of Guenevere's accusation that Launfal boasts of Tryamour, whereas he did not do so when Valentine challenged him. Guenevere is also more important to Launfal's life, as she is the King's wife, and her words have great influence on the King. Anderson describes the issue of manhood as a main concern of the story, as it is threatened by Guenevere, whereas it is treated the opposite way by Tryamour (119). I agree that this opposition is prominent in the story, as it again shows the difference between Tryamour and Guenevere; Tryamour signifies good and treats Launfal with respect, whereas Guenevere questions his masculinity and another aspect of her being evil arises, especially when it becomes clear that this accusation makes Launfal break his taboo. In defence to her accusation, he calls, "I have loved a fayryr woman / Than thou ever leydest thyn ey upon

⁸ You love no woman and no woman loves you –

/ Thys seven yer and more!” (ll. 694-96)⁹. The result of revealing Tryamour’s existence is that he loses her and everything she has given him, but at least as important is that it leads to Guenevere’s rash promise and her accusing Launfal of trying to seduce her (ll. 712-20). For the last element in turn results in him losing the respect of the King and being exiled.

As a result of Guenevere’s accusation, Launfal has to try to prove Tryamour’s existence. Lucas states that “without [Guenevere’s] initial hostility Launfal would not have left court and met Tryamour, and without her proposal of love Launfal would not have required to be rescued by Tryamour” (292). Guenevere’s words have enormous consequences to Launfal’s life. Not only does he have to deal with the King’s charges; he also needs to prove his masculinity. The last thing can only be achieved by proving that he has had a woman for seven years, and that she is indeed more beautiful than the Queen. Tryamour can therefore be seen as an image of Launfal’s masculinity, and, when she enters the King’s hall in the end of the story, Guenevere’s words are proven false, and Launfal’s masculinity is no longer doubted (ll. 973-1008).

When Tryamour appears in the King’s hall, the contrast of good and evil Lane describes (283) is again shown, this time by a comparison between the beauty of Tryamour and Guenevere (ll. 985-1002). This is more than just a beauty contest; the fact that the beauty of the Queen is questioned is already a sign of some deeper meaning. Lane mentions that “the goodness of Triamoure is brought out in sharp relief against Gwenevere’s evil” (285). Although Launfal is doubted the moment he claims to have a more beautiful woman than Guenevere, he does get the chance to prove his honesty. Guenevere is absolutely not perfect, especially not in her behaviour, and everyone is aware of it. The chance of the existence of a more beautiful, more perfect woman is therefore not impossible. And indeed the King agrees with Launfal that his woman is more beautiful (ll. 1004-05) when Tryamour appears in the King’s court. At that moment, Guenevere loses face, and her symbolism of evil comes to a climax. Her losing face is symbolised by the rash promise she has made: “Yyf he bryngeth a fayrer thyng, / Put out

⁹ I have loved a fairer woman / Than you have ever laid eyes upon / For more than seven years!

my eeyn gray!” (ll. 809-10)¹⁰. Indeed, she is blinded by Tryamour once it is proven that she is more beautiful than Guenevere (ll. 1006-08), and the disclosure of her evil is complete.

Besides the themes discussed, Sir Launfal can be interpreted as a (male) fantasy story. It fits perfectly with the theme of being disrespected for that what deserves respect. In real life, it is not always natural that those who deserve praise for their deeds receive it. Attention often goes to those people who attract most attention, even if their deeds are less worthy. In Sir Launfal, we see a knight whose generosity is not given the respect it deserves. If such a thing occurred in real life, one would most likely start imagining that it was different, and dream about being popular with the people. Or one might fantasise punishing those people in a way, for instance by imagining having something they have not: for instance, having a secret love in a perfect fairy kingdom, who gives everything the person desires, like love, pleasure, money, and many gifts. In Sir Launfal, the secret love is Tryamour, and she gives Launfal everything he desires, in a way compensating that what he lacks in real life.

Since Sir Launfal did not have an aristocratic but a lower-class audience, it makes sense that the fantasy story appealed to them. Bliss notes that “the humble circumstances in which [Launfal] finds himself make it possible for the peasant listener to identify himself with the hero, and to share in imagination in his success” (43). A peasant audience was most likely poor, and a story about a poor knight getting everything one can wish for might fit in perfectly with what poor peasants dreamt of. Bliss rightly calls such stories “wish-fulfilment stories” (43), as Launfal’s wishes eventually all come true. The audience will have enjoyed the imaginative story, as everyone can enjoy fantasising about what they dream of. A poor peasant might place himself in Launfal’s situation and be happy when Launfal is finally respected for his generosity and manages to prove that his lover is more beautiful than Guenevere. In turn, women might place themselves in Tryamour’s situation and picture her spectacular entrance in the King’s court.

In this same fantasy situation, it is not surprising that people in the story soon find out about the knight’s sudden wealth and success. It is to prove that what they used to

¹⁰ “If he brings a fairer lady, / make my blue eyes blind!”

think of him is wrong; Launfal is not poor, but rich, and he *is* a noble knight. And Guenevere, who disrespects Launfal most, is to be punished. Now that Launfal is rich and victorious in battle, she desires him most, and one of the worst punishments for her is to be refused. Another punishment is at the end of the story, when Launfal claims to have a lover who is even more beautiful than the queen (ll. 694-95). It is the worst punishment Guenevere can get as a queen; to not be most beautiful, and it must satisfy the ‘fantasizer’ to have victory in the end: Launfal is rich, popular, has the most beautiful woman in the world, and he has conquered over those who disrespected him.

As is made obvious, Guenevere and Tryamour are very different heroines in Sir Launfal, as they can be seen as opposites in many ways. However, there is one thing they have in common: both have influence on Launfal’s actions, whether it be by words, silence, actions, or idleness. Guenevere causes Launfal evil, whereas Tryamour gives him everything his heart desires. Guenevere is a threat to Launfal’s generosity, as she stops the income he receives from the King, and thus allows Launfal to create debts and have a bad reputation. Tryamour, on the other hand, returns to Launfal a respectable reputation and she allows him to be generous; the purse she gives Launfal returns to him wealth, the armour and his servant Gyvre help him to win battles victoriously, whereas the taboo serves as a test. Guenevere causes mischief to Launfal’s life by disliking him from the beginning. Her influence is greatest when she attempts to seduce Launfal and accuses him to be a homosexual (invoking Launfal to break his taboo). This influence continues with her accusing him of seducing her, which in turn causes Launfal to lose the King’s respect and to be tried. Tryamour’s rescue of Launfal is almost like a victorious ending; she is a heroine, and goodness returns to the story. Both women give meaning to the story, by personification of good and evil, by drawing a contrast between the real and fairy world, and by playing a prominent role in a fantasy story.

Of Sir Orfeo

The early fourteenth century Sir Orfeo is found in three different manuscripts, of which the Auchinleck manuscript contains the version closest to the original. The original poet is unknown, but the story derives from the Breton *lai* of Orpheus, of which the classic Orpheus myth is the primary source. The Breton *lai* does not exist anymore, but the story was translated into English and adapted to an English audience, just like many other *lais* in the twelfth century (Bliss x-xxxiv). Sir Orfeo tells the story of Orfeo and his wife, Heurodis, who is visited in her dream by a fairy king and is abducted by him the next morning (ll. 181-93). Orfeo's life collapses and he decides to go into exile (ll. 226-28). In the wilderness, he lives a miserable life, until the sight of his lost wife allows him to enter the fairy kingdom (ll. 320-48). There, he manages to retrieve his wife, after which he brings her back to the real world (ll. 463-80). The heroine analysed is Heurodis, who, by her abduction, causes much grief to Orfeo and eventually causes his decision to go into exile. She is the factor that makes the story set off, whereas she is not even aware of the consequences of her actions. That what appears to be the most innocent thing to do turns out to be vital to her surroundings, such as lying down under a tree on a beautiful May afternoon (ll. 69-70). Heurodis' decisions in life prove to be of great consequence to Orfeo's life. Sir Orfeo is not just Orfeo's adventure; it shows the significance of its heroine, who influences her surroundings in many ways.

The first scene in which Heurodis' significance can be shown is when she is sleeping under a tree: "Thai sett hem doun al thre / Under a fair ympe-tre, / And wel sone this fair queen / Fel on slepe upon the grene" (ll. 69-72)¹¹. So far, the atmosphere is peaceful and rustic, but the moment Heurodis awakes, she scratches her face until it bleeds and she tears her clothes to pieces (ll. 79-81). In a short moment, the calm atmosphere of a May morning is turned into that of panic. Through Heurodis' sudden

¹¹ The three of them sat down
Under a grafted tree,
And very quickly this fair queen
Fell asleep upon the green.

hysteric behaviour and the contrast between her initial beautiful face and her now ugly, bleeding visage, we learn that something must have happened during her sleep. When Heurodis is in her chamber, her sudden hysteria is explained. To Orfeo she says, “Ac now we mot delen ato; / Do thi best, for y mot go” (ll. 125-26)¹². Her words sound as if her separation with Orfeo is her destiny and nothing can be done to prevent it from happening. Heurodis is to be taken to the fairy world the next day. The words of the fairy king make clear that there is no chance to escape:

“Loke, dame, tomorwe thatow be
Right here under this ympe-tre,
And than thou schalt with ous go
And live with ous evermo.
And yif thou makest ous y-let,
Whar thou be, thou worst y-fet,
And totore thine limes al
That nothing help the no schal;
And thei thou best so totorn,
Yete thou worst with ous y-born” (ll. 165-74)¹³.

The fairy king says that Heurodis shall go with him the next morning when she is resting under the tree, and she shall live with the fairies forever. Wherever she is, she will be taken, and any resistance shall be punished. This threat shows that there is no escape, and that is proven correct the next day. In spite of the army Orfeo brings to the tree the next

¹² Now we must separate apart;
Be good, for I must go.

¹³ Look, dame, tomorrow when you are
Right here under the grafted tree,
Then you shall go with us
And live with us forever.
And if you are a hindrance for us,
Wherever you are, you will be fetched,
And all your limbs be torn apart,
Yet you will be carried with us.

morning, Heurodis is “oway y-twight, / With fairy forth y-nome” (ll. 192-93)¹⁴. The army is unable to do anything when the queen is taken away in an instant. The fairy king’s words are proven correct.

Indeed, there is no chance for Heurodis to escape, for her lying under the tree has caused her abduction into the fairy world. It is a situation often encountered in Celtic folktales. Lasater illustrates that “both the ympe-tre and sleeping under it seem to have given the otherworld figure a right to claim the mortal. [T]he queen’s sleeping under an impe-tre [...] was what led to her being abducted” (qtd. in Olsen 200). It is the place where the fairy king first seeks contact with Heurodis through her dream and the place from which she is taken. Heurodis’ act to lie down under the tree is decisive to the rest of the story. Through her decision to lie down, it is made clear that she is important to the storyline, as the entire course of events is triggered by it: the dream and the fairy king’s presence in it; Heurodis’ panic; and her abduction by the fairy king. None of those things would have happened if she had not lain down under the tree, an action that seemed too innocent beforehand to have major consequences.

The abduction scene is of importance to the rest of the story, as it is what makes Orfeo decide to leave his kingdom and to go into exile. Bliss remarks that “this apparently simple act is the true beginning of the story, for all the rest of the action springs from it” (xxxv). First, Orfeo is in grief because of his lost wife, yet then he appoints a steward to rule the kingdom while he is in exile. It is because of Heurodis’ abduction that Orfeo decides to leave his kingdom behind and to choose instead a life in the wilderness. When Heurodis tells Orfeo that she has to leave him, Orfeo replies: “Allas! [...] [F]orlorn icham! / Whider wiltow go, and to wham? / Whider thou gost, ichil with the, / And whider y go, thou schalt with me” (ll. 127-30)¹⁵. No matter where Heurodis goes, Orfeo promises to go there too. The problem, however, is that he does not know the place Heurodis has been abducted to. She is lost, and thus Orfeo leaves everything he has behind, just like Heurodis, and enters the wilderness (ll. 226-38). It is the closest he can get to the unknown where she has been taken. Louis indicates the

¹⁴ snatched away, taken by an enchantment.

¹⁵ “Alas! [...] Utterly lost I am! / Where will you go, and to whom? / Wherever you go, I will go, / And where you go you shall be with me.”

importance of the fact that Orfeo does not show the *intention* to find Heurodis, and that he does not *expect* to find her (246). Although Orfeo recovers his wife at the end of the story (ll. 463-71), it is not his initial quest. There is no active search when he is in the wilderness. Louis mentions that the sight of the sixty ladies with Heurodis among them is not because Orfeo was searching for Heurodis, but because he happened to cross her path (246). Before this scene, Orfeo just laments his loss and plays his harp, but there is no sign that he intends to search for his lost wife. His adventure takes place in the wilderness, and there is no inclination for him to leave it before he sees Heurodis.

Another aspect of Heurodis' significance to the story can be shown through Christianity. Although the ancient Orpheus myth originates from classic Greece, it is not surprising that the writer of Sir Orfeo adjusted it to medieval standards. Christianity was a prominent part of medieval life, so the story would appeal more to the contemporary audience if it contained a Christian message. Friedman gives the story a bit of an over-enthusiastic Christian reading by claiming that the fairy king originates from Satan, who lustfully preys on Heurodis, the object of desire and the personification of Eve (24). He also claims that, in Sir Orfeo, Satan has become a fairy king: “[i]n time, all evil supernatural beings of the Middle Ages came to be thought of as descendents of the fallen angels; some were evil fairies who attacked women, especially those who were so unfortunate as to be caught near trees and bushes” (27). However, the fairy king is not evil and can therefore not be a personification of Satan. According to Hynes-Berry, the fairy king “is not really presented as evil; he seems to operate as much outside our judgement as he does outside of the human realm, in which he seems to have very little real interest” (655). Heurodis is abducted by the fairy king, but not for evil purposes. As Hynes-Berry implies, the real world is of no concern to the fairy king, so there is no actual reason for him to steal a queen with malicious intent. However, he is not completely good either; he does threaten Heurodis to come with him to the fairy kingdom (ll. 165-74). Still, the worst Heurodis undergoes in the fairy kingdom is to lie among the undead (ll. 387-408), but it is unclear whether it is her own decision to do so. The fairy king's actual intention with Heurodis remains unclear too, but he does not maltreat her.

The significance of Heurodis' abduction can be explained in another Christian way, namely by penance. It has already been stated that Orfeo never searches for Heurodis. According to Louis, a reason for Orfeo to go into exile is as "an act of love" (246), but that is not all. Louis subsequently believes that Orfeo's life in the wilderness is meant to purify Orfeo from his sins. He there "learns the greater value of another kind of power, another kind of wealth. By humbly abandoning his material pleasures and donning the mantle of a pilgrim, Orfeo indicates his acceptance of the loss of Heurodis and his recognition of the proper role of man on earth" (248). I find this interpretation very credible, since it fits in with the Christian norms in the Middle Ages. In that time, it was believed that earthly materials were all possessions of God, a theme that returns in medieval stories, for instance in the Dutch *Elckerlijc*, where the man who clings too much to earthly materials is punished. To cling too much to earthly materials was seen as a sin, also because earthly things are useless in heaven. At the beginning of *Sir Orfeo*, Orfeo is a powerful king of a great kingdom and his life is full of valuable possessions. Heurodis' abduction is the beginning of his penance. It is the beginning of Orfeo's self-development. In the wilderness, he learns that one does not need the material world and that all that counts is his love for Heurodis, which is not borrowed from God and therefore invaluable. He does not need his kingdom to be rich.

An important moment is the scene in which Orfeo sees sixty ladies and Heurodis among them (ll. 320-22). It is the moment Orfeo leaves the wilderness and follows the fairies into the fairy world. Hynes-Berry emphasises the moment's importance by stating: "At the exact center of the work, the pattern of loss begins to reverse into a pattern of restoration. At line 303, Orfeo sees, for the first time, the sixty ladies hawking, with Heurodis among them. There is a rhetorical indication that this is, in fact, a break in the pattern of the past" (663). Indeed, from this moment on, the story moves towards the moment when Orfeo recovers Heurodis. An atmosphere of hope is created and continues when Orfeo decides to follow the ladies into the fairy kingdom (ll.340-48). Here again Louis' interpretation is credible: "[t]he ten years [Orfeo] spends in the wilderness constitute a kind of penance, and because of it, [he] receives a gift of grace – Heurodis is returned to him" (247). Orfeo has learned to abandon his desire for earthly things and has

done his penance. All that has to be done now is to recover his wife from the fairy world. To have seen Heurodis has given Orfeo new strength; strength to abandon his life of exile and to rebuild his kingdom. The sight of Heurodis is of such an importance that, had he not encountered her in the woods, Orfeo might never have been able to enter the fairy world to retrieve her and his kingdom would never have been restored.

To enter the fairy world and to retrieve Heurodis is a test for Orfeo and simultaneously a thing he has to do to win her back. It is here that his adventure is turned into a quest. Although he has gone through a state of mind that resembles Heurodis' current situation by living a poor, miserable life in the woods, Orfeo has yet to visit the exact place where she has been taken to. According to Duncan, “[t]he archetypal structure and theme of Sir Orfeo is death and rebirth” (177). This pattern is introduced here; by going into exile, Orfeo has lost part of his life in a way. He has left all that he has behind (except for his harp) and has lost the desire to live. In a way, life has left him. Duncan states that “if a man would gain his life, he must lose it” (212). To lose his life completely is to search for death. Orfeo has to enter the fairy world to find death in order to find life again.

Though opinions differ about whether the fairy kingdom really resembles death, the narrative draws a picture of it that resembles both death and paradise. On the one hand the fairy world is described as containing “castles and tours, / Rivers, forests, frith with flours” (ll. 159-60)¹⁶. On the other hand it contains macabre descriptions, especially when Orfeo enters the kingdom (ll. 349-404). That what had appeared like paradise in Heurodis' dream turns out to contain scenes of what resembles death; Heurodis does not lie on a beautiful adorned sofa in a castle, but among the undead in a foul place: “Than he gan bihild about al, / And seighe ligeand witin the wal / Of folk that were thider y-brought / And thought dede, and nare nought” (ll. 387-90)¹⁷. Duncan claims that “[t]hough fairyland appears to be a paradise, in reality it is a kind of hell” (195). The macabre environment emphasises the bad state Heurodis is in, especially when her clothes are the only sign to Orfeo that it is really her (l. 408). In the meanwhile, he has

¹⁶ Castles and towers, / Rivers, forests, woods with flowers.

¹⁷ Then he beheld everything about him, / And saw lying within the wall / Folk that had been brought thither, / And seemed dead, but were not.

kept his promise: to go where his wife goes is what he once said. Thus Orfeo has visited the fairy kingdom. Although it is not really a place of death, the macabre environment does make it appear like “a kind of hell”. Therefore, Orfeo has sought death after Heurodis.

This is the first time in the story when Orfeo actually seems to have a quest. Now that the pattern of restoration has arrived, Orfeo finally *intends* to retrieve his wife. The adventure he encountered at the beginning of the story has been turned into a quest. Now that he has followed Heurodis into the fairy kingdom, he will undergo the test and *try* to win her back. It is as if beholding the dead world and Heurodis in it has returned to Orfeo the desire to live. To achieve that goal he has to persuade the fairy king to let Heurodis go. Orfeo plays a tune on the harp that seems to enchant the whole palace (ll. 435-42). When the fairy king asks what he wants, Orfeo replies that he wants Heurodis and the fairy king eventually agrees to this (ll. 449-71).

This is one of the moments in which the importance of the harp becomes clear. Throughout the story, the instrument keeps playing a prominent role. No matter in what state of mind Orfeo is, the harp is always there to return to the story a sense of liveliness. It is what makes him able to retrieve Heurodis. It is what brings a light on the horizon when Orfeo lives his miserable life in the wilderness:

He toke his harp to him wel right
And harped at his owen wille.
Into alle the wode the soun gan schille,
That alle the wilde bestes that their 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 a-fine –
So miche melody was therin;
And when he his harping lete wold,

No best bi him abide nold (ll. 270-80)¹⁸.

The moment Orfeo plays the harp all animals of the forest surround him and are enchanted by the music. Suddenly, Orfeo is significant to his surroundings, yet when he ceases playing all animals leave him, as if misery envelops him immediately. Hill states that the harp “tempers the madness just as in Orfeo the music of the harp balances and then overpowers the threat of madness” (147). It is what prevents Orfeo from going mad completely, and the scene seems to be right in time in the story, as it is just before he sees Heurodis among the ladies in the woods (ll. 320-22). The hope the harp invokes almost introduces the scene in which Heurodis appears in the woods, and it resembles the hope of recovering her.

By having retrieved Heurodis, Orfeo is ready to restore his kingdom. He has undergone his trial in the wilderness and he has learned that life does not necessarily have to involve earthly materials, but that there are different – far more important – things in life. However, there is one more thing to do at his homecoming. Because of Heurodis’ abduction his kingdom is now ruled by a steward, whose loyalty shall have to be tested after Orfeo has been away for so many years. Louis says that Orfeo now “wants to know the quality of his power” and not the quantity (251). It is what the entire loss and recovery of Heurodis has changed in Orfeo: he does not solely care for the size of his kingdom, but whether or not it is good and whether his servants have been faithful. The moment Orfeo makes the steward believe that he is dead, he passes the test by lamenting it (ll. 542-50).

¹⁸ He took his harp
And played at his own desire.
In the whole woods the sound began to resound,
So all wild beasts that were there
Gathered around him for joy,
And all the birds that were there
Came and sat down on a briar
To hear his fine harping –
So much melody it contained;
And when the harping would leave off,
No beast would remain.

Although Orfeo and Heurodis have their kingdom back, the end of the story might not be seen as perfect. Many medieval romances end with the married couple having children, but there is no indication of an heir in Sir Orfeo. According to Falk, “Orfeo’s lack of an heir of his flesh effectively undermines all his other achievements” (248). I do not agree entirely with this statement, for to go into exile and eventually retrieve his wife and return to his kingdom is quite an achievement. Heurodis’ barrenness could be an unlucky sign, as it would mean that Orfeo is the last king and that the end of his house is near. However, I think that Heurodis’ stay in the fairy land has affected her too much to have any children, and that there is no other reason for her being childless. She also never speaks again, which is a sign that part of the madness that came over her after the fairy king visited her in her dream has never left. The narrator does not speak of her and Orfeo leading an unhappy life because they do not have children, which would have been worth mentioning otherwise. There are many romances in which the married couple does not have children, and they still have happy endings.

In conclusion, it can be said that what once seemed a harmless act, turned out to have major consequences; if only Heurodis had been aware of the influence she would have by lying down under the “ympe-tree”. By her typical queenly behaviour; by dwelling around the castle leisurely, she and Orfeo are pulled into an adventure they could not have anticipated. Heurodis’ significance cannot be doubted. Through her abduction, Orfeo goes into exile and is purified from his sins. After that, her appearance in the wilderness (ll. 320-22) again influences Orfeo’s life, as it is the beginning of his adventure being turned into a quest. From the moment he sees her in the woods, hope is returned to the story, and Orfeo is on his way to rescue her from the fairy king. By going where she has been taken (ll. 349-408), he visits a place that resembles death, and is ready for his “rebirth”. Back at the palace, Orfeo’s steward is tested and proven loyal (ll. 530-74), which would not have happened without Heurodis’ abduction. At the end of the story, her abduction cannot be judged as being bad, as it allowed Orfeo to be purified and his steward being tested. Through these events, Heurodis has proven her significance.

Conclusion

Sir Launfal and Sir Orfeo were both written in the fourteenth century and both have their origin in a Breton *lai*. Although their plot lines differ considerably, it cannot go by unnoticed that they contain similarities. For instance, both stories deal with the fairy kingdom, which power intervenes with the real world. In Sir Launfal, the fairy kingdom changes Launfal's life, as the fairy lady Tryamour becomes his lover and gives him many useful gifts (ll. 301-36). In Sir Orfeo, the fairy kingdom is the place Heurodis has been abducted to, and the one place Orfeo has to visit to turn the downwards spiral of his life into a positive direction.

The heroines of the discussed stories each have distinctive characters, yet there is one thing they have in common: their presence in the story is of major influence to their surroundings. In Sir Orfeo, Heurodis, who at first sight appears like a common, passive queen, turns out to control all major turns in the plot line. She triggers a string of events by lying down under a tree (ll. 69-70); through that act, Orfeo decides to go into exile in token of his love for Heurodis. It is she who pulls Orfeo out of his exile after he has been purified from his sins and has learned to care more for his love for Heurodis. She allows him to enter the fairy kingdom by appearing in the wilderness (ll. 320-22); she becomes the object of a quest that had first been Orfeo's adventure; she returns to him hope that had once been lost; she makes him visit the place she has been taken to, and thus allows him to return to his kingdom with her, where the steward's loyalty is tested (ll. 530-74) and they live a happy life. In Sir Launfal, Guenevere personifies an evil force that haunts Launfal throughout the story. She introduces the main theme of the story, generosity, by stopping Launfal's income and by not giving him gifts at her wedding (ll. 70-73). It is because of that that Launfal starts creating debts and becomes unpopular with the citizens of Karlyoun. By seducing Launfal and accusing him of being a homosexual after her refusal, Guenevere challenges his masculinity and causes him to boast of Tryamour (ll. 673-96). By her lies, Launfal is tried in the King's court and has to find a way to prove Tryamour's existence (ll. 829-40). All her actions come down to one thing: to bring evil into Launfal's life and to destroy his happiness. Tryamour, on the other hand, represents

goodness; by giving Launfal love and gifts, she brings him success and happiness; even when Launfal breaks her taboo, she does not completely leave him to his fate; by appearing in the King's hall at the end of the story, she proves her existence and saves Launfal (ll. 973-1005). Once again, her goodness is demonstrated, which is in stark contrast to Guenevere's evil nature, as Tryamour does encourage Launfal's generosity.

Medieval romances have many different themes, but one thing always returns: the presence of a heroine, whether she appears passive or impassive, strong or weak, loathly or beautiful. At the end of the day, she is there for a reason. Even the slightest action – or doing nothing at all – has a reaction. Whether she speaks, is silent, rests, or walks; she is an essential presence in the storyline. Without her, no quest or adventure would enter the story, and there would be no reason for a knight to leave the King's court. There simply would be no medieval romance.

Works-cited List

- Anderson, Earl R. "The Structure of Sir Launfal." Papers on Language & Literature: a Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature 13.2 (1977): 115-124.
- Billings, Anna Hunt. A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances. New York: Russell & Russell, 1967.
- Burlin, Robert B. "Middle English Romance: the Structure of Genre." The Chaucer Review 30 (1995): 1-14.
- Crane, Susan. Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Duncan, Patricia Jean. From Folktale to Archetype: Analyses of four Middle English Romances. Diss. U of New York at Albany, 1976. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1976. ATT 48106.
- Falk, Oren. "The Son of Orfeo: Kingship and Compromise in a Middle English Romance." The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 30.2 (2000): 247-274.
- Finlayson, John. "Definitions of Middle English Romance" Part II. The Chaucer Review 15 (1980): 44-61
- Friedman, John Block. "Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-day Demon." Speculum: a Journal of Mediaeval Studies 41.1 (1966): 22-29.
- Ferrante, Joan M. Woman As Image In Medieval Literature: from the 12th century to Dante. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975.
- Harris, Adelaide Evans. The Heroine of the Middle English Romances. Philadelphia: R. West, 1977.
- Hill, D.M. "The Structure of Sir Orfeo." Mediaeval Studies 23 (1961): 136-153.
- Hynes-Berry, Mary. "Cohesion in "King Horn" and "Sir Orfeo"". Speculum: a Journal of Mediaeval Studies 4 (1975): 652-670.
- Lane, Daryl. "Conflict in Sir Launfal." Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 74.2 (1973): 283-287.
- Louis, Kenneth R. R. Gros. "The Significance of Sir Orfeo's Self-Exile." Review of English Studies 18.17 (1967): 245-252.
- Lucas, Peter J. "Towards an Interpretation of "Sir Launfal" with Particular Reference to Line 683." Medium Aevum 39 (1970): 291-300.
- Olsen, Hennessey Alexandra. "Loss and Recovery: A Morphological Reconsideration of Sir Orfeo." Fabula 23.3-4 (1982): 198-206.
- Ramsey, Lee C. Chivalric Romances: popular Literature in Medieval England. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.
- "Sir Launfal." Teams: The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages. 2005. January 2007 < <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/launffrm.htm>>.
- Sir Orfeo. Ed. A.J. Bliss. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- "Sir Orfeo." Teams: The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages. 2005. January 2007 < <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/orfint.htm>>.
- Thomas Chestre. Sir Launfal. Ed. A.J. Bliss. London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960.