'I BE NOT NOW HE ? AT ÁE OF SPEKEN': MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES AND THE CONVENTIONS OF *FIN' AMORS*

In his English translation of A. Capellanus' *Arte Honeste Amandi*[1] (the medieval treatise on the rules of the so called *fin'amors*),[2] J. J. Parry states that this text was never rendered into English during the Middle Ages (1941: 24). This fact might well support a point of view held by some scholars according to which *fin'amors* (as it was conceived in France from the XIth to the XIIIth century) never existed in England.[3] This new concept of love was born

[1] The *Liber de arte honeste amandi et reprobatione inhonesti amoris* (or, simply, *De Arte amandi)* was a three volume treatise written by André le Chapelain (c. 1184-86). It has been preserved in a XIVth century manuscript now kept in the National Library of Paris. The first Latin edition of this text dates from the begining of the XVIth, *Tractatus amoris*. A later one (1610) was entitled *de Erotica seu amatoria*. The best Latin modern edition was published in 1892; see: E. TROJEL. *Andreae Capellani regii Francorum De amore Libri Tres*. Havniae: Libraria Gadiana. This treatise was translated into French twice during the 13th century; Guillaume de Lorris drew upon it for the *Roman de la rose*. The *Liber* codifies the whole doctrine of *fin'amors*, containing practically all the elements of the cult. We know little about this Andreas Capellanus. He is thought to have been a chaplain at the court of Marie, Countess of Champagne, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, at whose request André wrote the *Liber*.

[2] I will use *fin'amors*, rather than *courtly love* –from G. Paris' "amor courtois" ("Etudes sur les romans de la Table Ronde" 1883: 519)– for Provençal poets never used the second term, but rather the first: "The adjetive *fin*, *fis*, from Latin *fides*, had the sense of faithful, honest, sincere, true" (Valency 1958: 142).

[3] Such was the opinion of M. Valency, who claimed that "true love was really never at home in England" (1958:188). Much in the same vein we find Gist's words: "It is true that the complete outline of the convention does not often appear in the English romances" (1947:106). Recently, D. Burnley has stated that "a literature illustrating full compliance with the code described by Paris and Lewis turns out, upon cool reflection, to be absent from England before the end of the fourteenth century" (1998:150). Burnley also makes reference to the opinion held by Reuters (REUTERS, A.H. 1991. *Friendship and Love in Middle English Metrical Romances*. Frankfurt, p. 195), who "comments on the difficulty of finding anything resembling courtly love in Middle English romance before the time of Chaucer"

among Provençal aristocracy at the beginning of the XIth century,[1] but seldom did it permeate into lower levels of society, the middle classes or the peasantry. The love of a woman became the only pursuit in the life of the knight and a quasi-religious ethic was built around this quest.

In 1883 G. Paris published a most influential article on Arthurian literature in which he provided the first explanation of how this new ethic manifested in French Arthurian literature, focusing on Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*. Love was always illicit and furtive, a man-woman relationship in which the first was permanently in a position of inferiority, subject to the whims of the lady. The lover was always ready to fulfill every deed she asked in order to become worthy of the lady's love. Love was, to sum up, a virtuous art, a religion (Paris 1883: 459-534). Forty years later, C.S. Lewis held true to Paris' definition when he offered what seems to be the best known systematization of the basic principles of this philosophy of life: "Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love" (1936: 12). *Fin'amors* was erected as a kind of parallel religion, framing and giving sense to all aspects in the knight's life. In a more or less implicit way, the love for a lady (usually and preferably married) is presented as superior to the love of God, in such a way that all the virtues of the lover, especially his humility and his courtesy, are subject to this devotion. The lady, often mute, is placed on a pedestal, beautiful to behold and refined, unattainable, and, therefore, always desired.[2] Whether this ideal was simply a literary convention or it was really practised in the so called *courts of love*, I will not say. The truth is that it found an inmediate echo both in Provençal love lyrics and in the *roman courtois*, the classic type of which are Chrétien de Troyes' five romances, written between 1170 and 1190. Plainly speaking, medieval romance began in the XIIth century when clerks, working for aristocratic patrons, often ladies of royal birth such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughters (Marie de Champagne and Matilda, wife of Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony), began to write for a leisured and refined

(1998:174, n. 5). However, I do not think Chaucer himself fully represented the conventions of *fin'amors*, either (Olivares Merino 1998: 208-14).

[1] Peter Dronke opposed this assumption of novelty and claimed that "'the new feeling' of *amour courtois* is at least as old as Egypt of the second millennium B. C., and might indeed occur at any time or place (…) [It] is not confined to courtly or chivalric society, but is reflected even in the earliest recorded popular verse of Europe" (1968: xvii).

[2] *Fin'amors* is for me, above all, the most accomplished manifestation of the masculine erotic ideal (Olivares Merino 1998: 74-77).

society. Like the courtly lyric, romance was a vehicle for the new aristocratic feelings: in most of them, at considerable length, the authors narrated the necessary interaction between chivalry and love.

Due to the many contacts between the main countries of western Europe, soon Germany, Italy or Spain adopted this new fashion, each country gradually producing a good number of troubadours and romance writers to satisfy the taste of the new European courts. English poets also imitated the new conventions. Their case, however, presents a distinctive and particular typology. Leaving aside for now the issue of English love lyrics, the purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate how in England the rules of French *fin'amors* were never fully reflected in Middle English romances.

I. THE QUEEN OF TROUBADOURS GOES TO ENGLAND: AN AUSPICIOUS START

Several circumstances might have favoured the proliferation of the conventions of *fin'amors* among XIIth century English aristocracy. All of them merge into one of the most influential characters of the Eurpoean late Middle Ages, Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204), the granddaughter of William IX of Aquitaine, the first known troubadour. This woman exercised an unquestionable influence in the development and popularisation of the new courtly sensibility in France. She was the great patron of the two dominant poetic movements of the time: the courtly love tradition, conveyed in the songs of the troubadours, and the historical matter of Britain, best represented in Chrétien de Troyes' *roman courtois*. One might well expect that the marriage of this queen with Henry of Plantagenet (1152), the heir to the English throne (proclaimed king in 1154 as Henry II), could probably contribute to the spreading of the new literary fashion in the British isles as she would later on do in France, while holding her court at Poitiers (1170-74), ruling the duchy in the name of Richard Coeur de Lion, her younger son. Eleanor was probably the one who propitiated the combination of those elements that best define the *roman courtois*: *fin'amors*, chivalry and Celtic myths (Pernoud 1995: 116). When she was about 13 years old, her child imagination was probably amazed by the stories told by the Welsh or Breton *jongleur* Breri (or

Bleheris), known to have been at Poitiers (c. 1135)[1]. These narrations, mainly from Celtic traditions, were about heroes who suffered from spells and tests of their fairy mistresses (Barron 1987: 31). Once in England, she again heard about Celtic heroes, mainly Arthur and his warriors, this time in an epic setting: Geoffrey of Monmouth had long ago written his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136). To these raw materials the queen would add courtliness and *fin'amors*.

The presence of the Queen of Troubadours in England did not pass unnoticed in the literary circles of Henry II's court. Exactly as it would happen in Poitiers later on, she was a patroness, a source of inspiration and an influence in poetic creation. All the authors writing for her would certainly include in their texts those elements of the new love fashion she found so enjoyable.

> Thomas of Britain wrote his *Tristam and Ysolt* under her inspiration,[2] perhaps definitely for her.Wace dedicated to her his *Brut*,[3] and it is generally believed that she is the noble lady to whom

[1] R. S. Loomis summed up in 1956 much of the information concerning this *conteur*, together with the sources (see: Loomis, R. S. 1956. *Wales and the Arthurian Legend*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 193-95). For a more recent account on Breri, see: Gallais, P. 1967. "Bleheri, la cour de Poitiers et la difusion de récits arthuriens sur le continent". *Actes du VIIe congrés national de littérature comparée*. Paris: Didier.

[2] The Anglo-Norman poet known only as Thomas of Britain wrote a courtly version of the Tristan story (1150-70). According to R. S. Loomis, Thomas' *Tristam and Ysolt* was not written for Eleanor but for her husband Henry II (1963: 84). However Thomas' attempt to resolve the tragic conflict in favour of the sovereignty of passion, turning the magic potion into a mere symbol, seems to suggest Eleanor's complicity rather than her husband's.

[3] Wace (c. 1100-after 1174) was born in Jersey but he was sent to France for his upbringing. In 1155 he finished his *Roman de Brut*, a poem probably dedicated to Eleanor. This we conclude from the information contained in the *Brut* (1190), a version of the latter written by Layamon (fl. XIIth century), a priest from Worcestershire. When refering to the sources of his text, he makes the following statement: "Boc he nom pe pridde, eide per amidden,/ pa makede a Frenchis clerk Wace wes ihoten, pe wel coupe writen,/ and he hoe ¥ef pare æ?elen Ælienor/ pe wes Henries quene pes he¥es kinges" (Layamon 1989: ll. 14-23). Wace certainly knew the tastes of the Queen and his text is adorned with the elements of the new courtly fashion (Loomis 1963: 40); as Barron puts it, Wace coloured his text "faintly as *roman courtois*" (1987: 134).

> Benoît de Sainte-More dedicated his romance of Troy.[1] (Parry 1941: 13)

Leaving aside the three poets in Parry's quotation,[2] it is also worth noting that the most relevant French writers of the time went to England. The troubadour Bernard de Ventadour (+1195?), whose poetry is considered the finest in Provençal language, is known to have traveled throughout England around 1152 or 1155. The rumours about his love affair with Eleanor will never be fully proven, but it seems they made her second husband uneasy. In one of her frequent visits to Poitiers, Eleanor welcomed Bernard (recently expelled from Ventadour) in her court, where he would stay for some time. Henry II himself "invited" him to leave Poitiers and go to England.[3] The earliest

[1] Benoît de Sainte-Maure (also spelled Sainte-More) was a XIIth century poet, probably from Sainte-Maure, near Poitiers. He is the author of an Old French poem in about 30,000 octosyllabic couplets, the *Roman de Troie* (c. 1165), the subject of which was given by Henry II to the poet who, then, dedicated his text to Eleanor (Barron 1987: 49). Benoît's poem, a travesty of the story told in Homer's *Iliad*, is an immense Baroque tapestry of Greek lore and fable. His is the first version of the Troilus and Cressida story. Benoît's poem was widely popular in its day and it analyzed various forms of love: the rape of Helen by Paris; Medea's desertion by Jason; Briseida parted from Troilus and seduced by Diomedes; and, finally, Polyxena wooed by Achilles (Barron 1987: 111-12).

[2] The names of two minor authors should also be added to the list of those writing in Henry II's and Eleanor's court, Béroul and Philip of Thaon (Pernoud 1995: 116-17), though a direct link between them and the queen can not be established. Béroul, a Norman poet, also wrote a Tristan poem (c. 1190), very possibly in England (Barron 1987: 49). The cleric Philippe de Taon (early XIIth century) had enjoyed the patronage of the English king Henry I (1069-1135). He provides one of the first examples of "scientific" writing in Anglo-Norman literature: the *Cumpoz* or *Comput*, a kind of ecclesiastical calendar. He also wrote a lapidary and a bestiary, both allegorical. His *Bestiary*, a typical Romanesque genre, is full of knights and ladies (Pernoud 1995: 117). It seems, however, that the author dedicated it, not to Eleanor, but to Henry I's second wife, Adeliza or Adelaide of Louvain (Barron 1987: 48; Burnley 1998: 126). The name of another author can still be included here, one *mestre* Thomas, a clerk associated with the court of Henry II. He is the author of the *Romance of Horn* (Burnley 1998: 11), from which *King Horn* derived. As in the cases of Béroul and Philip of Thaon, an explicit connection with Eleanor can not be made. For an edition of Thomas' romance, see: POPE, M. K. (ed.). 1955-64. *The Romance of Horn by Thomas*. 2 vols. Anglo-Norman Texts 9-10, 12-13. Oxford.

[3] Eleonor had just returned to Poitiers and there was a rumour concerning the love between Bernard and the queen. R.Pernoud wonders: "¿Se molestaría Enrique, como antes Eble de Ventadour, por los homenajes que el trovador rendía a la reina? ¿Llevaría por esto a Bernard a Inglaterra, prefiriendo poner el mar entre la reina y el poeta? Es lo que habría de insinuar, el siglo siguiente, su biógrafo, Uc de saint-Circ" (1995: 113). Walter Map (1140?-1209?), a clerkman at the service of Henry II, did not have a very favourable opinion on Eleanor. It is remarkable that he should refer

known French woman poet, Marie de France (+1216?),[1] must have spent some time in England –for she knew English (Larrington 1995: 20)– where she probably wrote her literary works, all of them in French: the *Lais* (before 1189), the *Fables* (*Ysopets*) and a version of *St. Patrick's Purgatory* (*Espurgatoire of Saint Patrice*, after 1189). From her three surviving texts, the twelve brief *Lais* are especially relevant for the present purpose. As Barron has claimed, some (if not all) of these short stories, combining the central topics of courtly love poetry and chivalric spirit –everything adorned with the magic halo of Celtic influence–, were written in England. Besides, this same critic concludes, "Henry II was most probably the King to whom Marie of France dedicated her *lais"* (Barron 1987: 49).[2] In light of this assumption, one might reasonably suppose that Marie de France also met Queen Eleanor. Finally, Chrétien de Troyes (fl. 1165-80) himself, the creator of the *roman courtois*, is likely to have spent some time in England, for it seems it was there where he wrote his first romance, *Erec et Enide* (1170), at the behest of Henry II, to support his son Geoffrey's claim to the throne of Brittany by stressing the "link" between the latter and King Arthur.[3] The poet from

to her, when she was the queen-mother, in the following terms: "Cui successit Henricus Matildis filius, in quem iniecit oculos incestos Alienor Francorum regina, Lodouici piisimi coniux, et iniustum machinata diuorcium nupsit ei, cum tamen haberet[ur] in fama priuata quod Gaufrido patri suo lectum Lodouici participasset" ("To him Henry, son of Matilda, succeeded, and upon him Eleanor, queen of the French, the wife of the most pious Louis, cast her unchaste eyes, and contrived an unrighteous annulment, and married him, though she was secretly reputed to have shared the couch of Louis with his father Geoffrey") (Map 1994: 474-77). For further allegations made against Eleanor and her misconduct, see: John of Salisbury. 1956. *Hist. Pontificalis*. Ed. M. Chibnall. Nelson's medieval texts, pp. 52-53, 61; Richard of Devizes. 1963. *Chronicle*. Ed. J. T. Appleby. Nelson's medieval texts, pp. 125-26.

[1] What little is known about her is taken or inferred from her writings and from a possible allusion or two in the works of contemporary authors. The most plausible identification of her historical identity is that she was the illegitimate daughter of Godefroy d'Anjou and that she became abbes of Shaftesbury around 1181. Her surname, *de France* (first used by Claude Fauchet in a line in the epilogue to her fables [1581]), suggests that she was probably of French birth, rather than of French descent, i.e. a member of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy (Larrington 1995: 20).

[2] However, it is sometimes thought that this was Henry II's son, the Young King (died in 1183).

[3] Kibler states that the coronation of Erec at Nantes on Christmas Day presents similarities with a historical event that took place in England. In 1169 Henry II held a court with the purpose of marrying his third son, Geoffrey, to the daughter of Conan IV of Brittany, Constance. It also took place in Nantes and in Christmas Day. Apart from this, "The guest list at the coronation of Erec includes barons from

Troyes certainly met Eleanor, either in England or in one of the Queen's stays in Poitiers, being so impressed by Henry II's wife that he might well have found in her the inspiration for *Erec et Enide* (Pernoud 1995: 152). Both Marie de France and the poet from Troyes were very popular in England and, as Sanders writes, "The works of both poets seem to have circulated both widely and over a long period" in that country (1994: 40).

Eleanor's second husband, ten years younger than her, could not help feeling himself seduced by the figure of King Arthur, a kind of British messiah, as Geoffrey of Monmouth had depicted him in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*: this Breton chief became a model for all Christian knights, his fabled court the materialization of the feudal ideal of social harmony. Henry II was particularly moved by the Arthurian legend: at his command some excavations were carried out in Glastonbury. A rumour spread that Excalibur, the sword of the king, had been found there. Indirectly, Henry II contributed to kindle the interest of his people for those stories that narrated the deeds of the Knights of the Round Table, deeds that would soon be adorned with love adventures and refined manners in the pages of Chrétien de Troyes' romances, the very core of the Arthurian canon. This fascination for the figure of King Arthur did remain through the XIIIth century and found a most accomplished manifestation in the person of Edward III: "His new order of Chivalry [the Order of the Garter, founded in c. 1344] was a belated realization of long cherished military ideals and long fostered literary images" (Sanders 1994: 39).

Certainly, it goes without saying that Henry II and his wife Eleanor exercised such a wide and generous patronage,[1] that the courtly romance

all corners of Henry II's domains" (Kibler 1991: 6). Besides, the thrones on which Arthur and Erec were seated, both gifts from Bruianz des Illes, had leopards sculptured in their arms. Leopards were the heraldic animals in Henry II's royal arms and Bruianz des Illes has been identified as Brian of Wallingford, the King's best friend (Kibler 1991: 6). But the presence of Henry II's England seems not to be confined solely to *Erece et Enide*: "References to English cities and topography, especially in *Cligés* but indeed in all his works, show that the Britain of King Arthur was the England of King Henry II Plantagenet" (Kibler 1991: 5). For other scholars who have pointed out Chrétien de Troyes' links with the court of Henry II, see: Cohen, G. 1931: *Chrétien de Troyes et son oeuvre*. Boivin, Paris, pp. 82, 89; Holmes, U. T. Jr. 1937: *A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300*. Linker, Chapel Hill, p. 164.

[1] Eleanor's daughters, Marie of Champagne and Alix, were equally (if not more) influential (Parry 1941: 13). Under Marie's command, Chrétien de Troyes wrote his

tradition rapidly spread in the late XIIth century; the great courts of Europe were so cosmopolitan surely thanks to the periods of peace Europe was enjoying.[1] But this was not the case in England: "Of all the genres of *romanz* only the full-blown *roman courtois* is missing [in England], though it seems unlikely that it would have been less welcome in Eleanor's English court than at Poitiers" (Barron 1987: 49). Eleanor's England might well have been a suitable audience for those romances in which the love of ladies (often married) was the only goal in the life of the knight; romances which the Lady of the Castle well described to Sir Gawain in the following terms:

> For to telle of pis teuelyng of pis trwe knyftez,
> Hit is pe tytelet token and tyxt of her werkkez,
> How ledes for her lele luf hor lyuez han auntered,
> Endured for her drury dulful stoundez,
> And after wenged with her walour and voyded her care,
> And broft blysse into boure with bountes awen–
> *(Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Tolkien 1967: ll. 1514-519)

However, leaving aside the romance-chronicle *Brut* by Layamon (c. 1220), the first Middle English romance *(King Horn)* was not written until c. 1225, when this genre was already beginning to show signs of a decline from its original form. It was not until the lower classes, who knew no French, "became more literate and prosperous that they created a considerable demand for written records of the romances which pleased them", texts that were obviously written in Middle English (Loomis1963: 133). Relying on the preserved manuscripts, it must be concluded that the "matter of Britain" was not taken into England (exception again made of Layamon's *Brut*) until the XIVth century, with great appeal to English readers then.[2] Nevertheless,

Lancelot, one in which he was told to reflect the most accomplished type of a fin'amors relationship, the adulterous love between Artur's wife, Guinevere, and Lancelot, the best and most loyal of his knights.

[1] Focusing only in the "matter of Britain", apart from Chrétien de Troyes five French romances (1170-90), many romances were written in Germany: the *Parzival* (c. 1200) by Wolfram von Eschenbach and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan und Isolde* (c. 1210) (Barron 1987: 237-38). In another German text, we find the archetypal Tristan romance: Eilhart von Oberge's *Tristant* (c. 1170-80).

[2] Generally speaking, let us point the following romances or groups of them: a) *Ywain and Gawain* (1300-50), which is a version of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*; and *Sir Perceval of Galles* (1300-40). b) Four Breton lays in English: *Sir Orfeo* (c. 1300); *Sir Degare* (1300-25); *Emare* (c. 1400); and, finally, Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*

neither at that moment nor before did the ethos of *fin'amors* –ultimately defined by its quasi-religious intensity, its adulterous connotations and its joyful unfulfillment– widely satisfy the taste of the English romance readers. What follows is an attempt to explain the referred dearth.

II. THE LOVE TOPIC IN ENGLISH ROMANCES

Romance, the most accomplished literary reflection of French courtly culture, soon spread to other parts of Western Europe. England, as stated before, saw a later flourishing of the genre, though the fashion would last until the end of the Middle Ages: many French romances were adapted into verse and prose from the late XIIIth to the XVth and even XVIth centuries. In general terms, the subjects dealt with were those found in French romance.[1] In any case, it is necessary to talk about adaptations (or very liberal versions), imitations, naturalizations or reflections of the French models, but never mere translations. Besides, from a formal point of view, English romances present a richer variety of verse forms: from the almost exclusive mode of the rhyming couplets, there is a shift into a remarkable diversity of metrical styles.[2] In this sense, Barron concluded that English romances show a modified conception

(late XIVth century). c) The Gawain romances (XIVth and XVth centuries), including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (l375-1400). d) Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (1350-1400); the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (c. 1400); and Malory's *Morte Darthur*(c. 1470). A full account of the development of the "matter of Britain" in England is given by Barron (1987: 132-76).

[1] I mean the three types of historical materials broadly defined as the "matter" of Rome (legends from classic antiquity); the "matter" of France (the deeds of Charlemagne and his knights or the fight against the invading Muslims); and, finally, the "matter" of Britain (the adventures of King Arthur and his knights). Barron also talks about the "Matter of England", made up of a body of national legend of the Germanic stock (1987: 63-88). Among the most outstanding romances from this last (and less known) group, we find *King Horn* (c. 1225), *Havelok the Dane* (c. 1290), *The Tale of Gamelyn* (c. 1350-70) and *Athelston* (c. 1355-80).

[2] R. S. Loomis makes a two-fold division of Middle English romances: "the rimed English romances" (1963: 131-46) and "the alliterative English romances" (1963: 147-165). More recently, Inés Praga has preserved the same distinction, giving a detailed account of possible variations (1985: 244-46). M. Mills does not make explicit reference to this two-fold division and he rather points out the range of metrical forms. He mentions various kinds of couplets, various types of alliterative lines and, finally, various stanza patterns. Among these, he singles out the short rhyming-couplet and the twelve-line tail-rhyme stanza, as the most popular (1973: viii).

of the genre, different, but by no means inferior to the French models: "The result is an even greater variety of form and content" (1987: 57). This statement is further tinged by Sanders, when he defines English romances as "simpler in form and more direct in address than their originals" (1994: 41). Therefore, it is fairly justified to conclude that there are "some distinctively English modes of romance-writing" (Mills 1973: vii). Among these original features of English romance corpus, I would like to focus on the way in which the love topic is presented.

Love vs. action: Being not a marginal topic, it is by no means the central aspect of the stories. In *roman courtois* (best exemplified in *Lancelot* by Chrétien de Troyes) the whole narration depends on the relationship between the knight and the lady (it being developed along the patterns of *fin'amors*, as first systematized by A. Capellanus); this is hardly the case in the English texts. Love in them, though important, is not exclusively the primary concern of the plot: courage, heroism and military prowess are relevant in and of themselves, not merely as the necessary attributes of the perfect *fin'amans.* As A.B. Taylor concluded: "They [English romance readers] liked to have a love theme running through a romance, but not as the supreme topic," (1930: 250). M.A. Gist (1947: 8) restates K. Lippmann's opinion when she claims that the ethics of English romances are not French, but Anglo-Saxon.[1] The stress falls, rather than on love, on "courage, steadfastness, truthfulness, honor, prowess, nobility (*edelmut*), generosity, and manhood (*menske*)". The same opinion is held by J. Fellows:

> The modern connotations of the term "romantic" might lead us to expect that love between the sexes is the primary focus of these narratives, but this is not normally the case. Such love provides the motive force for *Florys and Blauncheflour* alone among the romances in this volume. This is not to say that love and marriage do not play an important part in most romances, but usually they subserve other themes such as the hero's growth to maturity *(King Horn, Syr Tryamowre),* or are seen in relation to knightly prowess,

[1] See: Lippmann, K. *Das ritterliche Persönlichkeitsideal in der mittelenglischen Literatur des 13 und 14 Jahrhunderts*. Leipzig: Meerane in Sachen, 1933, pp. 56-72. See also: Schücking, L. L. *Die englische Literatur in Mittelalter. Handbuch der literaturwissenchaft* 4. Ed. O. Walzel. Wildpark-Postdam, 1927, pp. 66.

> honour *(The Erle of Tolous)* and loyalty *(Amis and Amiloun)*. (1993: vii)[1]

English readers preferred rather strength, courage, marvellous incidents,… that to which we refer to nowadays as *action*. In 1924, Laura H. Loomis conducted a survey of those Middle English romances that did not wholly fit within the traditional story-cycles or "matters"(those of Rome, France and Britain).[2] The result of her research was a new thematic subdivision: "'Romances of Love and Adventure'"; "'Romances of legendary English heroes'"; and "'Romances of Trial and Faith'" (Mills 1973: vi). Loomis' division was by no means a clear-cut one, since she pointed out that the three ethos often appeared in different sections of the same romance. Be it as it may, the heroic or edifying modes seem to prevail over the chivalrous (the essence of which is love), without wholly supressing it (Mills 1973: ix).

In order to exemplify what is being said, let me briefly focus on two romances in which love is one of the central concerns of the narration, particularly in the second text: *King Horn* (c. 1225) and *Floris et Blancheflur* (c. 1250). In the first case, the story is not primarily a love-story, but one in which the overall structure is determined by the hero's three basic motifs: "Horn's need to prove himself as a man and a knight, to avenge his father's death and to regain his patrimony" (Fellows 1993: ix). Horn is in love with Rymenhild but their final union subserves the last of the aforementioned motifs: it is a kind of culmination to Horn's success in regaining his royal status (Fellows 1993: ll. 1279-90). Besides, anticipating the argumentation that follows in the next heading, the relationship between the lovers frustrates two of the fundamental features of *fin'amors*: the lovers eventually marry and, besides, the reader often has the impression that it was Rhymenhild who was courting Horn and not the other way around! In *Floris et Blancheflur* the reader certainly finds a more French-like treatment of love: it is pasionate and

[1] It is necessary to account for the exceptions to this statement. The theme of a knight who undertakes adventures to prove to his lady that he is worthy of her love, a typical task of the *fin'amans*, is mainly represented in two romances: *Ipomedon* (1174-90) of Hue de Rotelande and the referred *Florys and Blauncheflour* (c. 1250). The first one, as M. Mills remarks, is "unusual in its full-scale treatment of the refinements of chivalrous love" (1973: viii). The second one, even more so, focuses on passionate love to the exclusion of other values and considerations (Fellows 1993: xi).

[2] See: LOOMIS, L. H. 1924. *Medieval Romance in England*. New York.

seems to exclude other values and considerations, even the religious and the chivalric. Nevertheless, the author omits or condenses passages of descriptions, reflections and dialogues and he concentrates rather on practical action.[1] In light of this, G. Barnes stated that love is here subordinated to the engine by which Floris achieves his goal (1984: 10-25).

Love vs. 'fin'amors': Once it is remarked that love is not the main concern in English romances, a further clarification should also be made. When English romance writers describe the love of the hero, it is not presented according to the strict precepts of *fin'amors* as usually happens in the *roman courtois*. English romance readers would rebel against many of the conventions of this fashion: the lengthy descriptions of wooing scenes, the refinement and delicacies of knights and ladies or, at times, the sugary submission of the knight-lover were not much to the taste of the English audience. For English romance writers, as for their readers, love might be a most ennobling human feeling, but the pursuit of it was by no means an obsession or a kind of pathology. In a sense, the conception of love in English romances is more naturalistic, less endowed with quasi-mystic connotations, as in the French case. Common sense and rationality are, in general terms, preserved in the minds of the lovers, who never let themselves be fully carried away by uncontrolled passion. King Horn's love for Rymenhild is less sublime than that of Lancelot for Guinevere, but at the same time more realistic and closer to the everyday life of readers.[2] In 1938, a study conducted by Donnell Van de Voort was published.[3] It dealt with the treatment given to love in Medieval

[1] *Ywain and Gawain* (entre 1300 y 1350) exemplifies the present statement, since it is an adaptation (never a translation) of Chrétien de Troyes' *Ywain*. The almost 7000 lines in the French text are transformed into little more than 4000 in the English version. This drastic reduction is achieved by the simplification, if not supression, of the wooing episodes and delicacies of the courtly system: "The poem is clearly the work of a minstrel catering for the sober, realistic audience of a provincial baron's hall, an audience whose sensibilities and sympathies were not adjusted to Chrétien's elaborate and subtle representations of courtly love or to high- flown chivalric sentiment. The elegant and dilatory court romance of Chrétien has become in the hands of the English minstrel a rapid-paced story of love and gallant adventure" (Friedman and Harington 1964: xvii).

[2] This is also one of the main differences between Provençal and English love lyrics (Olivares Merino 1998: 204-07).

[3] See: *Love and Marriage in the English Medieval Romance*. Nashville: Privately Printed.

English romances and it has remained for decades an influential work. M. A. Gist summarized Voort's opinion on the present issue in the following terms: "in the ethics of sex and marriage the English romances do not follow the French pattern of courtly love" (1947: vii). Already in the 70's, H. A. Kelly also made reference to Voort's text, sharing with this author the view that "those parts of the code of courtly love relating to a system of idealized immorality have no place in the English prose or metrical romances" (1975: 21). Five years before, R. Woolf had stated that "Love can be said to be the chief subject of the romances. This love, however, is not courtly love" (1970: 274).[1]

Love vs. adultery: In *King Horn* and *Floris et Blancheflur*, marriage is presented as the perfect (and desireable) culmination of a true love relationship. When A. Capellanus stated that the first rule of love was "Marriage is no real excuse for loving" (1941: 184), he was establishing a pattern that many other romances were to follow, Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot* and the Prose (or Vulgate) *Lancelot* (XIIIth century) being the most emblematic ones. English romances rarely presented their heroes enrolled in adulterous love relationships. As early as 1947, G. Mathew stated that "In fiction romantic love was very rarely associated with adultery"(71). French romances in which illicit love was somehow legitimated (*Flamenca*, *Joufrois*, *Châtelain de Coucy*,...),[2] did not appeal to English readers, who rather preferred a less problematic treatment of the love theme.[3] In *Sir Degrevaunt* (late XIVthe

[1] M. A. Gist reports J. E. Wells' opinion (*A Manual of the Writings in Middle English*. New Haven, 1916, pp. 1-2) when he described English romances as less sophisticated, more sincere and democratic (1947: 2) A. McI. Trounce defined English romances as "popular and religious in subject-matter, and lively in tone" (1932: 102). Equally conclusive is B. Ford, when he writes about "the lack of an audience interested in the refinements of *amour courtois*" (1976: 161).

[2] The provençal *Flamenca* (c. 1234) is, probably, the most outstanding. It is a poem of more than 8,000 lines in which a lady by ingenious devices eludes the vigilance of her jealous husband: no book in medieval literature had more quickness of intellect or was more instructive about the manners of polite society in the XIIIth century. The theme of "outwitting of the jealous husband", common in the *fabliaux* (short verse tales containing realistic, even coarse detail, and written to amuse), is frequently found in XIIIth-century romance and in lighter lyric verse. It occurs also in the *Châtelain de Coucy*, where it is combined with a more tragic, sophisticated, and far-fetched theme, that of the dead lover's heart served by the jealous husband to the lady.

[3] "for many the amusements of secular life, especially stories of amorous intrigue (according to the strictest doctrine incompatible with true piety), were equally en-

century), the hero's love for Melydor is described following many of the conventions of *fin'amors*, but both marry at the end; the same happens in *William of Palerme* (c. 1350). Finally, the heroes in *Sir Torrent of Portyngale* (c. 1400), *Sir Eglamour of Artois* (c. 1350) and *Sir Triamour* (late XIVth century) respectively marry Desonel, Cristabelle and the King of Hungary's daughter (Mathew 1947: 132-3).[1]

The dearth of English romances starred by Lancelot or Tristan, the two adulterous lovers *par excellence*, is also symptomatic of this uneasiness with illicit love affairs. Queen Guinevere's lover appears in only four English texts, all of them written in the XVth and XVIth centuries. The first one is the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (c.1400). The anonymous north-Midlands poet did not want to modify the love between Lancelot and Arthur's wife, a literary documented *historical* fact, but he made a lot out of it. Whereas Chrétien de Troyes described its beneficial effects and the writer of the Prose *Lancelot* created "a frank glorification of idealized adultery" (Loomis 1963: 92), the English poet dramatized the consequences of the affair: "is such a love compatible with the dynastic ideal which Arthur embodied for an age which condemned sexual relations with the wife of the ruler as treason?" (Barron 1987: 144). In *Le Morte Darthur* by Sir Thomas Malory (c. 1470), Lancelot's role is again essentially defined by the conflict between his love for Guinevere and his loyalty to his lord (Barron 1987: 151), a dilemma that leads to Arthur's dolorous death. Although based on French romances (mainly the Vulgate Cycle [first third of the XIIIth century]), Malory's account differs from his models in its emphasis on the brotherhood of the knights rather than on *fin'amors* and on the conflicts of loyalty (brought about by the adultery of

grossing. But, as said earlier, few specimens of this literature contraverted, and most maintained conventional medieval morality more or less strongly" (Ford 1976: 96).

[1] *The Awntyrs of Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* was included by Madden in his 1839 compilation of Gawain-romances. In this text, composed in half or late XIVth century (Wells 1926: 61), the anonymous poet describes Gawain and Guinevere riding together, when suddenly a storm breaks. The Queen's mother's ghost appears to them, dreadful to see, just to warn Guinevere about the dangers of *fin'amors*, which have led her to her present state: "This es it to luffe pamoures, and luftis, and litys,/ That gerfe me lyghte and lenge so lawe in pis lake" (Madden 1839: ll. 200-1). *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* is a short narration which, being supposedly based in real events, enjoyed great popularity in XIVth century England. A boy insistently claims the grace of knowing whether or not his dead father has saved his soul. He is taken to Heaven and then to Hell, where he sees his father suffering terribly for he was an adulterer (Stone 1971: 82-8).

Lancelot and Guinevere) that finally destroy the fellowship. Only two late poems bear the name of the Queen's lover: the Scottish verse romance *Lancelot of the Laik* (1482-1500), clearly derived from the Vulgate-*Lancelot* and, well into the XVIth century, the ballad *Sir Lancelot du Lake*.[1] Finally, it is worth remarking that in the most accomplished English Arthurian romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Lancelot only appears once, referred to in a long list of Arthurian knights (l. 553).[2]

Tristan's case is even more telling, since (apart from Malory's references to him) he is the subject of only one romance, *Sir Tristrem* (late XIIIth century), that derives from Thomas of Britain's version of the legend.[3] In the Middle English text, the anonymous author avoids the courtly embellishments of his source, while delaying the meeting of the lovers for one third of the narration. Tristan is not a passionate lover, but "a good knight whose career is blighted by a fatal error", his affair with Isolde (Barron 1987: 154).

III. THE REASONS

[1] There might also be other reasons, more irrational, to understand the unpopularity of Lancelot in England. We can not forget that Arthur and his knight are all English characters, whereas Lancelot du Lac was French, according to Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, born in Bayonne, in the Aquitaine region. As narrated in the the Prose or Vulgate *Lancelot*, after the death of his father, King Ban of Benoic, Lancelot was carried off by the enchantress Vivien, the Lady of the Lake, who in time sent him to Arthur's court. Plainly speaking, the English audience would not find much pleasure in reading the amorous adventures of a French knight who went to the Arthurian court and seduced the King's wife!

[2] I have already analysed the implicit contrast established by the *Pearl*-poet between Gawain and Lancelot (Olivares Merino 1998: 239).

[3] The legend was given the form in which it has become known to succeeding generations in about 1150-60 by an otherwise unknown Old French poet whose work, although lost, can be reconstructed in its essentials from surviving versions based upon it. The main French versions (both fragmentary) are by the Anglo-Norman poet Thomas (c. 1170) and the Norman Béroul (rather later and possibly composite. From these versions it can be inferred that the archetypal poem told the story of an all-absorbing passion caused by a magic potion, a passion stronger than death, yet unable to triumph over the feudal order to which the heroes belong. The story ended with Iseult's death in the embrace of her dying lover and with the symbol of two trees growing from the graves of the lovers and intertwining their branches so closely that they could never be separated. Thomas of Britain's poem was used by Gottfried von Strassburg in *Tristan und Isolde* (c. 1170-80), as well as being the source of the Old Norse, Italian, and Middle English versions of the story.

So far I have stated that, as far as the presentation of the love topic is concerned, Middle English romances depart from their French models in the following aspects: the non exclusivity of love in the plots, the lack of interest in the refinements of *fin'amors* and, finally, the rejection of adulterous affairs. I would like to propose some reasons to account for these differences. Many more might surely be added, but I consider these to be the most relevant ones.

The Anglo-Norman background: One important difference between continental and Anglo-Norman literature is that the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 led to an outpouring of doctrinal and devotional works for the laity in England not paralleled in France.[1] Religious houses caused lives of native saints to be written, and the nobility had a taste for romances about imaginary English ancestors, the matter of England. Thus social and political differences prevented Anglo-Norman literature from being a mere imitation of its French counterpart. Focusing on the present purpose, it is necessary to take into account the attitude of Anglo-Norman romance writers in order to better understand the special treatment given to the issue of love in Middle English romances, for in many cases the first ones provided direct sources for the latter.[2] Anglo-Norman literature had its fair shair of romances. Apart from the XIIth century versions of the Tristan story by Thomas and Béroul, in this same century some romances were composed in the form of the *chanson de geste*; for example, *Romance of Horn*, by Master Thomas, a text from which

[1] The fourth Lateran Council, the 12th ecumenical council (1215), generally considered the greatest council before Trent, was years in preparation. Pope Innocent III desired the widest possible representation, and more than 400 bishops, 800 abbots and priors, envoys of many European kings, and personal representatives of Frederick II (confirmed by the council as emperor of the West) took part. The purpose of the council was twofold: reform of the Church and the recovery of the Holy Land. Many of the conciliar decrees touching on Church reform and organization remained in effect for centuries. The council ruled on such vexing problems as the use of church property, tithes, judicial procedures, and patriarchal precedence. It ordered Jews and Saracens to wear distinctive dress and obliged Catholics to make a yearly confession and to receive Communion during the Easter season. The council sanctioned the word transubstantiation as a correct expression of eucharistic doctrine. The teachings of the Cathari and Waldenses were condemned. Innocent also ordered a four-year truce among Christian rulers so that a new crusade could be launched.

[2] See: Crane, S. 1986. *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature.* Berkeley, California; and Weiss, J. 1992. *The Birth of Romance: An Anthology*. London.

both the Middle English *King Horn* (c. 1225) and *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild* (c. 1320) were independently derived (Fellows 1993: viii). Yet another Thomas wrote the *Roman de toute chevalerie*, an independent version of the Alexander romance and the source of the Middle English romance *King Alisaunder* (c. 1300). In the XIIIth century the more courtly type of romance reappeared in *Amadas et Idoine* and in *Amis et Amiloun*, perhaps derived from the same source as the Middle English poem *Amis and Amiloun* (late XIIIth).

C. B. West made a clarification which is very useful for my present concern: "the idea of marriage separated from love remains foreign to them [Anglo-Norman poets]" (1938: 168). Leaving aside the referred Tristan stories (both written under the patronage of Eleanor), continental *fin'amors* was seen by Anglo-Norman poets, elsewhere prosaic, practical, insensitive, showing no enthusiasm nor sense of beauty, with a certain degree of suspicion. Love, that irrational, blind and joyful force that subdues every other consideration, is defined in an Anglo-Norman text in the following terms (in Latin, Anglo-Norman and Middle English):

> Amor est quedam mentis insania
> Que vagum hominem ducit per devia;
> Sitit delicias et bibit tristia,
> Crebris doloribus commiscens gaudia.
>
> Amur est une penseé enragiée
> Ke le udif humme meyne par veie deveye,
> Ke a seyf de delices et ne beyt ke tristece.
>
> Love is a selkud wodenesse
> That the ideal men ledeth by wildernesse,
> That thurstes of wilfulscipe,
> And drinket sorwenesse,
> And with lomful sorewes menget his blithnesse
> (Meyer 1876: 383).

The moral background: When analysing the genesis of Provençal love poetry, it has elsewhere been pointed out that it was the moral relaxation in the Provence that conditioned the development of *fin'amors* precisely there

and not, initially, in Northern France.[1] The situation in England was very different, for there the influence of a very active Church was felt everywhere. Even running the risk of oversimplification, R.W. Ackerman draws the following conclussion:

> But more importantly, all education above the elementary level, the grammar school in particular, was and continued to remain under the aegis of the Church and was oriented toward the preparation of priests. Again, from the parish church itself flowed and endless stream of dogma and moral exhortation. These Christian influences were of primary significance to all aspects of medieval culture, and an understanding of them is crucial to a student of Middle English literature. (1966: 38)

Something similar might be said concerning the end of the period that is being dealt with, for, as W.A. Pantin remarked, "With all the faults and scandals of the times, and they were many, it was at the same time a profoundly religious period" (1955: 1-2).[2] The moralising purpose of many English romances is now better understood, as is the fact that many of them present affinities with hagiographic narrations: *Sir Launfal* [end XIVth c.], *Erl of Toulous* [c. 1400], *Emare* [c. 1400], *Sir Gowther* [c. 1400] or *Sir Orfeo* [c. 1300], etc).[3] M. A. Gist, after highlighting that English romances were characterized by "didactic intention and conscious piety" (1947: 2), goes on to claim that some of the episodes in French romance were embarrassing for the

[1] "The contrast between the two moralities (…) perhaps provides us with the key to the problem of social geography presented by these new preoccupations with romantic love. (…) It is beyond dispute, on the other hand, that in the South the Church, especially during the first feudal age, was less rich, less cultivated, less active than in the northern provinces. No great works of clerical literature, no great movements of monastic reform emanated from that region. (…) it was also no doubt the reason why the higher ranks of the laity, being less subject to clerical influence, were relatively free to develop their own secular morality" (Bloch 1961: 310).

[2] In a less enthusiastic manner, H. S. Bennet states that "Chaucer's England was Catholic England, … The world in which Chaucer grew up accepted the Church and its teaching" (1990: 12).

[3] "[The romances] were usually pious in their sentiments and often religious in their purport, even though the actions and emotions they displayed did not always accord with the orthodox Christian ethical code. In fact, there was frequently no great difference between many medieval romances (in the sense of amorous adventures) and the equally numerous tales of saints and sinners" (Ford 1976: 87).

English audiences (1947: 7-8).[1] The moral conflicts arising from a too serious concern for the precepts of *fin'amors* should not be underestimated as a factor conditioning the peculiarities of Middle English romance. As Robertson reminds us, "that lechery or amorous passion is a destructive of chivalry is a commonplace of medieval thought from the twelfth century onward among both religious and secular writers on the subject" (1968: 7). Therefore, the lack of interest in the refinements of courtly love might betray a certain degree of uneasiness with some of the implications (especially adultery) and intricacies of this code, since they brought about serious moral objections. A historical document from XIVth century England might well illustrate this point. In 1346, after the English victory at Crécy, Thomas Bradwardine[2] gave a sermon in St. Paul's Cathedral in which he explained the reasons for the French defeat:

> Embracing a seventh error, they [the French] seem to emulate antique pagans worshiping Hymen or Cupid, the god of carnal love. Soldiering in Venus, associating themselves with the retinue of Aphrodite, they think the vigour of their audacity to be probity, victory, or triumph. But they say that no one can be vigorous unless he is amorous, or loves amorously, that no one can fight strenuously to excess unless he loves to excess. But how profane is this foolishness, how false, insane, and wild!…They labor strenuously in arma to make for themselves a name like the name of the greatest upon earth…And why do they wish such a name? That they may be loved by foolish women. …And who gives them the payment and reward for their labors? Who, except for the god for whom they fight, to whom they devote themselves, and whom they worship? And what payment or reward do they get for their

[1] Gist also mentions A. H. Billings (see: *A Guide to English Metrical Romances*. New York, 1901, p. xx), who defined English romances as more passionate and less lascivious (1947: 2).

[2] Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1290-1349) was archbishop of Canterbury, theologian, and mathematician. Bradwardine studied at Merton College, Oxford, and became a proctor there. In about 1335 he moved to London, and in 1337 he was made chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral. He became a royal chaplain and confessor to King Edward III. In 1349 he was made archbishop of Canterbury but died of the plague soon afterward during the Black Death. Bradwardine's most famous work in his day was a treatise on grace and free will entitled *De causa Dei* (1344), in which he so stressed the divine concurrence with all human volition that his followers concluded from it a universal determinism. Bradwardine also wrote works on mathematics.

> pride? Public and inmense disgrace. And for their lechery? A stinking and intense burning. (Robertson 1968: 6)[1]

Popular audiences: Aware of the differences between French and English romances, A.B. Taylor claimed that, in general terms, English romances were basically aimed at the common working folk (1930: 81), who were less learned (or interested) in the refinements of *fin'amors* and certainly preferred to read about heroic deeds and fiery battles:

> Stories of courtly love make no appeal to the lower classes of any country, and to all classes of Englishmen, inheriting a strong vein of Puritanism from the Anglo-Saxon stock, chastity would be a highly reverenced virtue: Since most English romances were fashioned to suit the lower classes, it is not surprising that where Tristam is the subject of one, and Lancelot only of two, Gawain is the hero of ten. (1930: 81)

Since the Norman ruling classes were (well into the XIIIth century) French speaking, the obvious consequence would be to claim that Middle English romances were written only for those who were literate in English, the lower classes. It has also been argued that, as romances tend to appear in moral and didactic compilations, "they too would appeal to an audience of limited sophistication anxious for instruction and moral edification" (Barron 1987: 74).[2] The level of material production of the great majority of romance collections also seems to suggest humble audiences. The modest manuscript compilations in which most English romances are preserved stands in open contrast with the richly illuminated French texts.[3] Though it would be an error to immediately identify the quality of the manuscripts containing romances with the social status of their patron or owner, it is remarkable that only two of these manuscripts might be associated with readership drawn from the

[1] See: *Sermo Epinicius*. Ed. H. A. Oberman and J. A. Weisheipl, *Arch. d'hist. doct. e. litt. d.m.a.*, XXV (1958), pp. 323-4.

[2] For example, the British Library MS Harley 2253, the Auchinleck MS (National Library of Scotland), the Thornton MS 91 (Lincoln Cathedral Library) or the British Library Cotton Nero A.x. (Barron 1987: 54-55). C. M. Meale provides a complete index of manuscripts containing Middle English romances (1994: 227-28).

[3] Few manuscripts fall into the cathegory of *de luxe*. From them, only four contain illustrations: British Library Cotton Nero A.x.; Oxford, Bodleian Library Bodley MS 264; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M 876; and British Library Harley MS 326. (Meale 1994: 213).

nobility: the Bodley 264 (1994: 214-15) and the Harley 326.[1] Therefore, medievalists have almost unanimously referred to "a popular English audience to whom the style and conventions of *roman courtois* would have been alien but whose pious and sentimental tastes approved the moral rectitude of the hard-working hero, a model apprentice-boy, and the idealized picture of monarchic rule" (Barron 1987: 73).[2] What all these scholars mean when talking about *lower classes*, *audiences of limited sophistication* or *popular English audiences* should be finally clarified. Generallly speaking, they make reference to a wide spectrum of English society: from the ranks of rural gentry to the merchant élite of London -including wealthy merchants' wives, whose literacy in English is occasionally assumed (Meale 1994: 212). The bourgeoisie, "anxious for edification but also for the type of entertainment favoured by their social superiors" (Barron 1987: 54), seems to conform the main body of English romance readers. The opening lines of *Havelok the Dane* appeal to an audience of "gode men/ Wiues maydnes and alle men", a clear reference to the gender of the potential readers, but one that places them "firmly in the middle classes" (Meale 1994: 209). Most of the compilations including romances seem to have been written for them. This fact will provide Middle English romances with one of their most outstanding peculiarities: marriage as the culmination of love relationships. The remainder of the section will deal with this issue.

Bourgeois marriage and the rejection of adultery: Through out this analysis, I have gradually arrived at the XIVth and XVth centuries, the two periods when the majority of the Middle English romances were written. This is now the England of Chaucer, the Gawain poet and Malory. The bourgeoisie has become the most powerful social group; if England is still a rural country,

[1] Apart from these two, only the Longleat MS 257 might be associated with the nobility (Meale 1994: 215).

[2] Recently, C. M. Meale has challenged the assumption that, since romances were written in Middle English, they were only aimed at readers of low birth. She claims it is not possible to state that those for whom works in English were written were of a different class or were any less sophisticated in their tastes than those reading in Anglo-Norman. Equally, we should not assume that everyone of gentle status would necessarily know French and not English (Meale 1994: 210-11). For this scholar, all different social groups read romance in Middle English, the gentry too (Meale 1994: 220).

the cities have become centres both of population and economic power. The inhabitants of these cities constitute a heterogeneous mass, of whose diversity the *Canterbury Tales* provide ample evidence. Nevertheless, these townpeople had two things in common: they made their living by practicing medieval arts and crafts and they occupied an intermediate position in the economic and social scale between the aristocratic landlords and the peasantry in the open country. As a response to this, the English aristocracy failed to define themselves as a separate élite, gradually opening its ranks to those of lower social standing.

One of the consequences of the increasing weight of the middle-classes is particularly telling for the present purpose: marriage achieves a social importance that had not been so apparent in the previous decades. The union between man and woman had too often been viewed as a suitable way to unify kingdoms, to end feuds or to increase a family's fortune. It would be naive not to take into account all these factors in the conformation of bourgeois marriage, but a change did nonetheless take place. The XIIth century is a turning point in the doctrinal systematization of Christian marriage. It was then that the sacramental character of the marital union was definitively confirmed.[1] Besides, the personal consent and the free choice of the individuals was a *sine qua non* requisite for the validity of the union. This had always been a given in the canonical regulation of Christian marriage, but new emphasis was now being made on this condition, especially from the XIIth century onwards.[2] All these innovations contributed to conform a revitalised conception of marriage in XIVth century England:

[1] See: Howard, G. E. *A History of Matrimonial Institution*. 3 vols. Chicago, 1904. I, , vol. I, pp. 291-99. It was in the two Ecumenic Councils of Lyon (1245 and 1274) that the Church ratified that Marriage was one of the Seven Sacraments; this had already been anticipated in the Synod of Verona (1184). A text by Saint Paul might well underline the sacramental nature of Marriage, *Ephesians* V, 22-32. Especially relevant to assert the early certainty of the sacramentality of Marriage are the testimonies by St. Agustin (*De bono coniugali*, c. 24: *PL* 40, 394; and *De nupt. et concup*. 1, c. 7: *PL* 44, 424) and by the Pope St. Leon I Magnus *(Epistola 92 ad Rusticum*, 4: *PL* 54, 1204). The Eastern Church had long ago assumed the sacramental status of Marriage.

[2] For long, the practise imposed by the ruling aristocracy had given little or no importance to personal free consent, particularly that of the wife. There are early records that testify how the Church Fathers condemned this practise; this is the case of St. John Chrysostom or St. Agustin. In his Homily LXXIII, *In Matthaeum* (*PG* 58, 678), the first one complains about those husbands who are only moved by eco-

> By the time that is of interest to this study the western Church had arrived at a general theory and description of the ends and practice of marriage… These included an understanding of the purposes and agreement on the main qualities of marriage, a set of regulations establishing a capacity of the individual and the couple, extremely important notions of consent as that which constituted the marital bond, and formalities for the public exchange of this consent. (Sheehan 1971: 229)

The truth is the courtly conception of love had left a deep imprint in the middle-class mentality. This love, a sublime feeling giving sense to human existence, was viewed as the basis of married life rather than its opposition. Now that personal consent had been repositioned at the centre of the marital bond, marriage for love was the ideal culmination of man-woman relationships: "At least within this milieu a conventional theory of marriage assumed that it was not only compatible with romantic love but ideally an expression of it" (Mathew 1947: 131).[1] And so, these middle-class readers, who appar-

nomic interests when looking for a wife, as if it was all a matter of buying or selling, rejecting thus God's gift. When choosing a wife, the saint goes on, the future husband must only take into account the virtues of the woman, her kindness, piety and abnegation; these will be the real treasures for him. St. Agustine writes something similar in his *Enarratio in Psalmum LV (PL* 36, 658). The truth is, as Gist points out, that other Church Fathers were not so insistent on personal consent (1947: 17). During the XIIIth century personal consent was given its necessary importance. St. Thomas Aquinas stated that the absence of personal consent or its forcefulness annulled the union (*Summa Theologiae*, Part III (supplement), Q. 45, Art. 4; Q. 47, Art. 1). In the moral treatise *Handlyng Synne* by Robert of Brunne, much blame is put on those who force others to marry against their will: "Yn pys, do fo men ful ylle/ pat wedden any afens here wylle;/ Here wyl behouep to-gedre consente./ Are pe prest do pe sacrament./ Ne pou ne shalt (not) do py myft/ pat two be weddyd wyth vnryft" (R. of Brunne 1901 & 1903: ll. 11165-170).

[1] Similarly, though in a more didactic and doctrinal context, the treatise "How the gode man taught hys sone" (its present form dated at the end of the XIVth century) shows how a father advises his son to marry for love and to take care of his wife, since she will be his companion. This idea is also found in some moral treatises by Wyclif, particularly in "of weddid men and wifes" and "good Wyfe wold a Pylgremage" (Mathew 1947: 129; for an edition of Wyclif's texts, see: Arnold, Thomas. *Select English Works of John Wyclif*. Oxford: 1871). From all these texts we may well conclude that the widely held assumption was that, in marriage, the husband was his wife's lover and friend, but also her master. Mutual service and respect were assumed to be the guides for the success of the relationship, though the wife's submission was never questioned; the best formulation of this can be read in Chaucer's "The Franklin's Tale" (Benson 1987): "Thus hath she take hir servant and hir lord-/ Servant in love and lord in mariage;/ Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and servage;/ Servage? Nay, but in lordship above,/ Sith he hath bothe his lady and

ently would not have otherwise had interest in matters of chivalry, were also reading romances in which heroes fell in love with heroines (with little attention paid to the refinements of "courtliness") and eventually married them. Adultery seldom appeared, for it added no glamour to the affair.[1] A clarification is required now in order to avoid a too naive presentation of middle class readers. It is true that the *fabliaux*, one of the most popular middle-class literary forms, were built around the comical possibilities of adulterous affairs, cuckholds and sexually active women. The average bourgeois reader might well have spent a good time reading these narrations in which adultery was central element. Nevertheless, it was always assumed that they were nothing more than a comical, saucy tale: this is one thing, but to sanctify, to idealise, a love relationship which is illicit was quite another.

his love;/ His lady, certes, and his wyf also/ The which that lawe of love acordeth to" (ll. 792-8). Another illustrating example is provided in Caxton's *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, translated from the French XIVth century *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour*. After advising his daughters that they should never oppose their husbands in public, he goes on to say that the wise wife, if her husband has made a mistake, "when she shall fynd hym alone and tyme/ but that she may wel reprehende hym and aduyse hym in shewyng curtoysly that he had wrong and vnright with hym/ And yf he be a man resonable/ he shal conne her thanke/ And yf he be other/ yet hath not she done but her parte/ For right so shold a wyse woman do" (Capitulo[sic]/ xvij. Caxton 1971: 35). All these notions are very much influenced by Pauline doctrine on Marriage, as expounded in his *Letter to the Ephesians*: "Mulieres viris suis sicut Domino, quoniam vir caput est mulieres, sicut et Christus caput est ecclesiae, ipse salvator corporis. Sed ut ecclesia subiecta est Christo, ita et mulieres viris in omnibus. Viri, diligite uxores, sicut et Christus dilexit ecclesiam et seipsum traddit pro ea, ut illa santificaret mundans lavacro aquae in verbo, ut exhiberet ipse sibo gloriosam ecclesiam non habentem maculam aut rugam aut aliquid eiusmodi, sed ut sit sancta et immaculata. Ita et viri debent diligere uxores suas ut corpora sua. Qui suam uxorem diligit, seipsum diligit; nemo enim umquam carnem suam odio habuit, sed nutrit et fovet ean sicut et Christus ecclesiam, quia membra sumus corporis eius. Propter hoc relinquet homo patrem et matrem et adhaerebit uxori suae, et erunt duo in carne una. Sacramentum hoc magnum est; ego autem dico de Christo et ecclesia! Veruntamen et vos singuli unusquisque suam uxorem sicut seipsum diligat; uxor autem timeat virum" (V, 22-33).

[1] D. W. Robertson reports which the penalties for adultery were in late medieval England: "In late fourteenth-century London, for example, a man and a woman taken in adultery were required to be shaved, except for two inches of hair around the head, taken to Newgate Prison, and thence paraded publicly through the streets accompanied by minstrels more than half way across the city to be incarcerated in a small prison in the middle of Cornhill called the Tun" (1968: 1-2). M. A. Gist goes on to mention even capital punishment: "The impression is given that death, administered either by due process of the law or by private revenge, was the usual penalty. Nevertheless such severity is not typical of the Medieval Law" (1947: 111).

IV. CONCLUSION

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was written in the background described in the present paper. In this romance, the anonymous author faces a problem that caused some degree of uneasiness to English writers: they enjoyed the conventions of *fin'amors* but at the same time they disliked some of its implications; W. O. Evans well explained this dichotomy when, referring to the use that English authors made of the French love code, he claimed that "the essentials are lacking, but the incidentals are present"(1966: 149). The Gawain-poet guides his readers through an epoch of splendour and magnificence. Along the corridors, halls and chambers of Camelot and Hautdesert, the audience has plenty of time to admire the glory and beauty of courtly society. But there is also another setting, uncourtly and wild, in which Gawain is about to finish the days of his life: the Green Chapel. This gloomy place is the embodiment of all the threats and dangers latent, unseen, in the courtly system: Gawain has to go there since the court accepted the Green Knight's awkward Christmas Game; Gawain will die there if he does not escape from the subtle web that the lady has knitted with her courtesy.

The narrator's feelings about the type of society described in courtly romances are contradictory: admiration and mistrust. With the exception of Chaucer's scattered incursions in the romance-genre, the Gawain-poet goes beyond any other English romance writer in the description of the ethics of *fin'amors*; at the same time, he best shows its contradictions. One of the most relevant (and enjoyable) features of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the tension between the aforementioned focal points: on the one hand, the possible immoral implications of the courtly love code; on the other, the poet's apparent satisfaction in the use of its *glamour* and beauty. Between the two poles, ready to be literally cut in two in a Solomon's like decision, Gawain, a courtly and Christian knight. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* best illustrates one of the "problems that so much occupied the English mind: the relations of Courtesy and Love with morality and Christian morals and the Eternal Law" (Tolkien 1984: 105)

A more accurate understanding of English romance will be achieved only if the features and modes of this literary corpus are analysed with some de-

gree of independence from its French counterpart. Besides, it is also necessary to approach it keeping in mind the fact that, for all the reasons presented here, love was never viewed as either the only reason for man's life, or a kind of ethic in itself. For the English mind, much more practical, the consequences of loving too much or without any other consideration made it a not very suitable life pursuit: Gower, a *fin'amors* enthusiast but a moralist too, in his *Confessio Amantis*, always advised "such a weie/ As love and reson wolde acorde" (1978: Book VIII, ll. 2022-023). In a process that culminated in the XIVth and XVth centuries, the common sense of the bourgeoisie rejected the values of the *roman courtois*. However, quite often, putting in practice the so called "suspension of disbelief", they enjoyed travelling to those days in which heroes ignored the annoying advice of Reason and made a religion of woman's devotion. The lovers gently burn in a bright immolation, while the reader admires, pities and, perhaps, condemns,…all at the time; but before closing the book, he will always be reminded that everything has been but a tale, for the heart is not the best counsellor in life. This is the final tuition we get from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* –after a devout compliance with the rules of the courtly code.

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