

WORK, TEXT, AND CONTEXT: STEPS TOWARDS DISCOVERING THE GENRE OF
MIDDLE ENGLISH PROSE ROMANCES

by

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(Under the Direction of William A. Kretzschmar, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

Generic classification has historically been based on a biological taxonomic metaphor in which genre equals genus. A result of using this metaphor has been an assumption that any given literary work cannot belong to more than one clearly defined genre. A better metaphor for generic classification is suggested by stellar cartography, where genre is a multidimensional star chart and a work may belong to more than one such generic star chart. The fifteenth-century Middle English prose romances have received little scholarly attention, partly because they do not fit the reigning generic assumptions for Middle English romance, which have been based on the canonical verse romances. However, deriving our generic understanding of Middle English romance from early French verse romances has limited our ability to understand and appreciate the prose romances fully. The generic characteristics of the Middle English romance should be rediscovered, beginning with the generic characteristics of the often-ignored prose romances. The method for discovering these generic characteristics involves focusing in turn on the works (literary culture), the texts (material culture), and later contexts (culture of collection) of the romances being studied. The romances considered here as examples for the application of this method are *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 185, once in the library of Sir Kenelm Digby, and *The Three Kings' Sons* from London, British

Library MS Harley 326, once in the library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes. The study of these two works and their associated texts and collections has yielded a list of eleven provisional generic characteristics for the Middle English prose romance.

INDEX WORDS: medieval romance, prose romance, Middle English literature, genre, Digby, D'Ewes, manuscripts

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Rolland and Leverne Barlow Pfile, who fostered my love of reading and taught me the value of research.

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CHAPTER 1

THE GENERIC “FAILURE” OF MIDDLE ENGLISH PROSE ROMANCES

With the exception of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* (which is nearly always the exception), the Middle English prose romances of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have been largely ignored, even by scholars of Middle English romances. The Middle English prose romances do not fit a received notion of what medieval romance should be like; more precisely, they do not fit a received notion of what a good medieval romance should be like, a set of expectations based on verse romances such as those by Chrétien de Troyes, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. In fact, we owe the existence of many of the Middle English prose romances in modern editions (meaning nineteenth-century or later) not to literary appreciation but to their linguistic utility. Many editions were prepared as part of the Early English Text Society’s support of the development of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. These narratives have not been valued for themselves in recent centuries, partly because they are seen as failed examples of their genre, but also partly because the generic definition based on verse romances fails to describe the prose romances adequately. To appreciate the prose romances, we must begin by seeing them as their own genre, not simply as members of a genre defined by earlier verse romances.

The first step in this re-evaluation of Middle English prose romances is to change the metaphor by which we understand genre (see Chapter 2). The metaphor behind literary genre has been adopted from biological taxonomy and requires that a work belong to one and only one genre, just as a tree, for example, can belong to one and only one species. The difficulty of this metaphor for literary genre can be seen when one attempts to apply the idea of a dichotomous

key, a basic tool for determining taxonomy, to literature. In a dichotomous key, a hierarchical series of questions leads inexorably from the most basic distinctions (“Is this specimen a plant or an animal?”) to the single category to which the specimen belongs. The answer to each question in the hierarchy limits not only the possible answers to the next question but also what those subsequent questions may be. In determining literary genre, however, we do not face such hierarchical questions. We can begin by asking whether a work is in verse or prose, for example, and then ask whether it is lyric, narrative, or dramatic. However, we can also begin by asking if the work is lyric, narrative, or dramatic, and then ask if it is in verse or prose. In either case, the answer to the first question does not limit the possible answers to the subsequent question.

If we discard biological taxonomy as the metaphor underlying genre because it limits each work or text to only a single category, what metaphor should replace it? A better metaphor for understanding literary genre can be derived from stellar cartography. Thinking of genre in terms of stellar cartography not only recognizes that a given work or text may belong to more than a single genre but also admits that the genre of a work or text may be affected by the position of the reader (geographic, temporal, and experiential), just as the apparent position of a star is affected by the position of the viewer. This metaphor permits genre to be conceptualized as any number of multidimensional star charts that depend on the characteristics of the works in which the reader is primarily interested.

Acquiring data which will allow us to plot these multidimensional star charts requires a method which focuses in turn on work, text, and context. Chapter 3 considers the work, the sphere of literary culture. Eight literary elements—form, plot, narrative voice, setting, character, connection to other works (not only source criticism but also the ways in which later works may refer to the work under consideration), cultural influence on the work (various historical and cultural criticisms), and cultural influence of the work (both that which it claims to have and that

which can be historically documented)—provide a framework for comparing literary works. All eight elements will not be equally important for each work, but focusing on each element in turn for every work examined insures that we have at least considered each element for possible comparison among two or more works.

The process of production provides the framework for the focus on text in Chapter 4, which focuses on material culture. Of the twenty-seven works generally called Middle English prose romances, twenty date from the fifteenth century and seven from the sixteenth century; approximately half of the fifteenth-century and all of the sixteenth-century prose romances survive only in printed editions rather than in manuscripts, a sign of the growing importance of printed texts. However, manuscript books continued to play an important role in the material culture of the prose romances. For the purpose of testing the method for acquiring data, the only process of production to be considered here is that of manuscripts rather than that of printed books. For manuscripts, production involved choosing parchment, physical layout, the style to use in writing, and what kinds of decoration and illustration should be used. The choices made at each step of production provide clues to how the work was received by, and read by, those making those choices.

Finally, in Chapter 5, we will turn to the culture of collection, to the context provided by the collections in which the book found itself in the years following its creation. From this, we may be able to glean information about the reception of a text and its work in the years following its creation by focusing on the collector and his or her collection, and by reading the collection for what it suggests about a particular, individual book. For each of these areas, literary culture, material culture, and the culture of collection, it is possible to focus on only one work, only one text, and only one collection, but the purpose of this examination is to provide a structure which allows comparison between two or more works, texts, and collections.

While it might be possible to generate new, or renewed, generic definitions from canonical works, it is easier to do so from works and texts for which significant inherited horizons of expectation do not already exist. Therefore, the focus of this study is not on the widely-read *Le Morte Darthur*, but on two marginalized relatives, *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons*, both of which survive in unique manuscripts. Focusing on these two works, their texts, and contexts allows the method to be tested in the simplest case because there are only two works, two texts, and two collections to be examined.

Once the literary culture, the material culture, and the culture of collection have been examined for each romance, it is then possible to begin modeling multidimensional generic star charts by plotting various relative scales. Figure 1 on the next page shows one possible multidimensional generic star chart for the Middle English prose romances, to be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6. This particular star chart looks at the degree to which supernatural elements are present (ranging from magical worlds to the lack of supernatural elements), geographical range of the settings (ranging from a single place to many different places), and the number of heroes in a prose romance (ranging from a single hero to multiple heroes without a dominant one). The axes, whatever data they indicate, might best be thought of as slide controls, such as the volume control in some computer programs, with lesser amounts of volume to one end and larger amounts on the other. The data to be plotted tend not to be absolute numbers but relative values. Because the axes are relative, falling in the center does not suggest that a work or text is central to the genre, so in the chart, the position of *Helyas* (Hel) does not suggest that it is a perfect romance; *Helyas* merely occupies a middle point on the various axes. In addition, because the model graphs on three separate axes, it does not permit one to begin by placing a single work or text in the middle—axes measure relative presence of particular elements, not closeness to a standard.

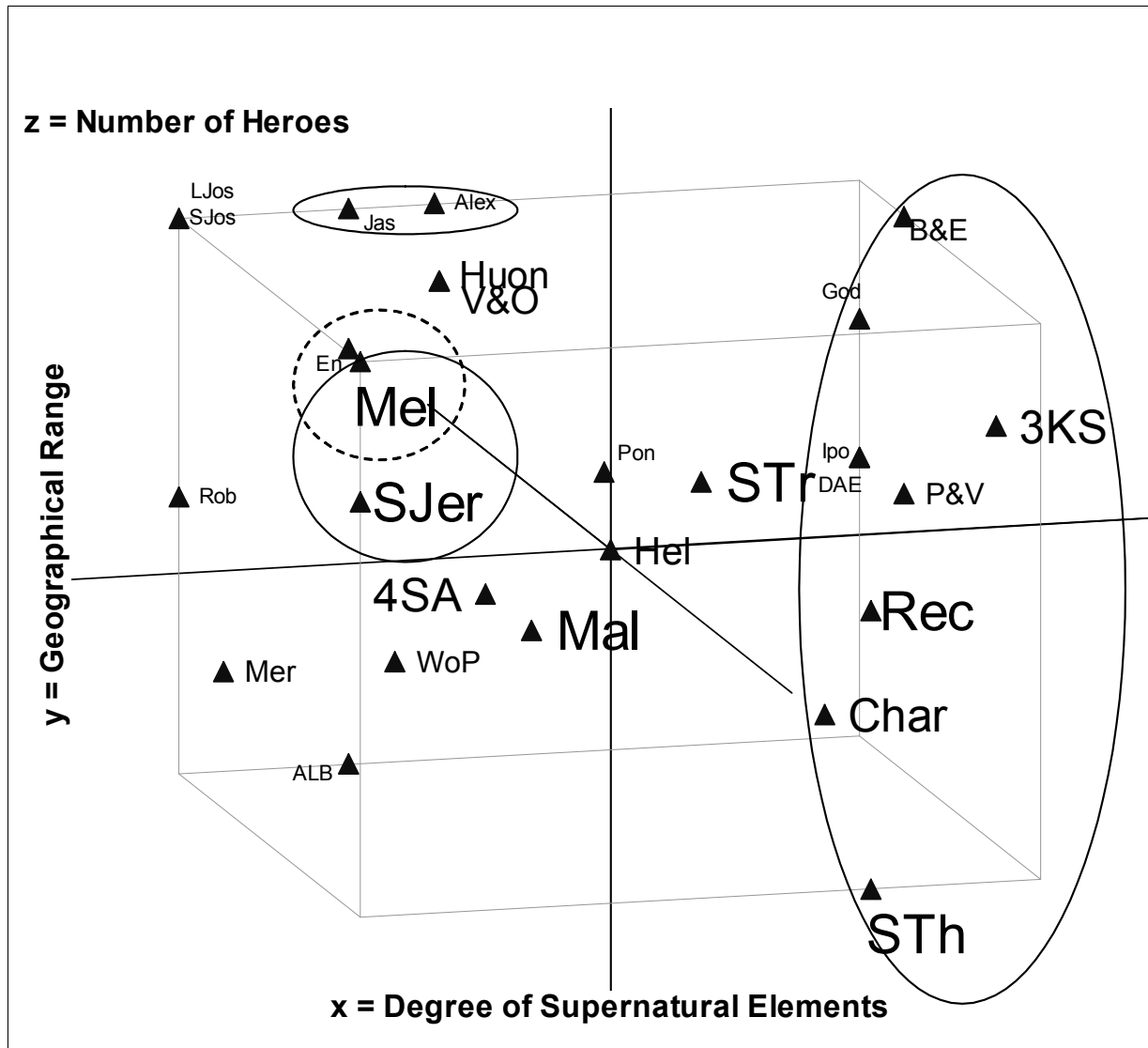


Figure 1: Example of a Multidimensional Generic Star Chart. The x-axis ranges from left to right, the y-axis ranges from the bottom to the top, and the z-axis ranges from the back (smaller letters) to the front (larger letters). The key to the title abbreviations can be found in Table 7 (page 122).

The multidimensional star charts suggest relationships among clusters of works. Looser clusters indicate general correlation (such as the cluster circled on the right-hand side of Figure 1). Closer clusters of works also appear. Some are not particularly surprising, such as Caxton's

History of Jason (Jas) and the *Prose Alexander* (Alex), both classical romances focusing on a single hero, while others are not so readily obvious, such as the closeness of Caxton's *Eneydos* (En) and *Melusine* (Mel) or of *Melusine* and the *Prose Siege of Jerusalem* (SJer). While the triangles representing *Eneydos* and *Melusine* appear closer together than those indicating *Melusine* and the *Prose Siege of Jerusalem*, the size of the labels indicates that the *Eneydos* plots to the back of the three-dimensional grid, while both *Melusine* and the *Prose Siege of Jerusalem* plot to the front. Because the number of possible generic star charts grows as one chooses additional axes, the importance of the clusters of works increases as the same clusters appear in more than one chart.

This study of *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 185, once in the library of Sir Kenelm Digby, and *The Three Kings' Sons* from London, British Library MS Harley 326, once in the library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, offers the first steps towards a renewed horizon of expectation for the Middle English prose romances and their literary cousins. The qualities common to both works provide eleven provisional generic characteristics for the Middle English prose romance, while the possible axes suggested by these two works can already be provisionally applied to multiple works to produce generic star charts which provide a visual representation not only of their similarities but also of their differences.

CHAPTER 2

THE STELLAR CARTOGRAPHY OF GENRE

To define narrative genres is an endeavor fraught with difficulties. What, for example, is a *novel*? Perhaps it is simply a long narrative work in prose which is not dramatic; after all, the genre includes works as diverse as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. And yet simply a formal generic definition ultimately does little to help us when we are classifying long narrative works in prose since the formal definition also includes works which are called romances rather than novels. One difficulty when trying to define *novel* and *romance* as genres is common to a number of European languages: the names used to describe each genre are intimately related to one another. English *novel*, Spanish *novela*, and French and German *roman* are all used to describe both novels and romances because they tend to be used to designate long narratives. How, then, do we tell them apart? This desire to make clear distinctions between novels and romances can be seen in reflections on genre written by nineteenth-century authors: Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, discusses the difference between the genres at the beginning of *The House of the Seven Gables*, while the earlier British writer Fanny Burney insists she writes novels, not romances. These writers clearly saw a difference between what they wrote and the other long prose narrative genre. Twentieth-century critic Erich Auerbach's understanding of what makes a romance a romance and not a novel is based on both language and content—its focus on the knight and the knight's life. However, because his project is about how Western literature becomes mimetic, about the development of the realistic novel (which functions as the privileged genre in *Mimesis*), then the courtly romance

is a literary dead end because “courtly culture was decidedly unfavorable to the development of a literary art which should apprehend reality in its full breadth and depth” (427). Even if Auerbach does not mean to make value judgments, even if all he means is that the medieval romance is a stage in the development of Western literature, assessing the romance in terms of mimesis asks that kind of work to be something it never meant to be nor ever was.

For modern readers, however, this concern to separate *novel* from *romance* on the basis of content or language seems pedantic since for many modern readers, *novel* describes a form (a long, narrative prose text) while *romance* is just a subset of the larger genre. But modern romance novels are quite different from older works called romances, in form as well as content. Is it possible to define *romance* in a way that is all-inclusive and universal, to discover a definition that covers not only *King Horn* and Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide*, but also Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, William Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, Harlequin romances, and this year’s hit romantic movie?

Arguably, the most influential definition of this type is that proposed by Northrop Frye. In *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Frye argues that two opposing “structures of imagery” (the “apocalyptic” or heavenly and the “demonic”) represent “undiluted” patterns of images that can be used by authors (140). Frye also argues that there are “intermediate structures of imagery” that lie between the undiluted ones; one of these intermediate structures is romance. Frye asserts, “The mode of romance presents an idealized world: in romances heroes are brave, heroines beautiful, villains villainous, and the frustrations, ambiguities, and embarrassments of ordinary life are made little of” (151).

Frye argues for the existence of “four narrative pregeneric elements of literature” or “generic plots” (162). In addition to romance, these plots are comedy, tragedy, and irony and satire. Irony and satire oppose romance, while comedy and tragedy may blend with it. The quest,

claims Frye, “gives literary form to the romance” (187) because “[t]he essential element of plot in romance is adventure [. . .]” (186). According to Frye, the generic plot of a romance tends to a three-part division: setting out on the adventure, the climax of the adventure (often including “some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die”), and then the recognition and “exaltation of the hero” (187). The primary conflict of the romance is that between the hero and the villain, a playing out in human terms of the conflict between God/Christ and Satan.

Frye’s definition of *romance* proposes a way to discuss many related literary works regardless of when or where they were composed. However, his definition becomes problematic because such an all-encompassing definition does not allow for fine distinctions, and Frye admits that his generic plots bleed into one another. If one imagines a circle of these generic plots corresponding to a cycle of the seasons (Frye’s own way of describing them, with comedy equated to spring, romance to summer, tragedy to autumn, and irony and satire to winter), then one has to ask when something is simply summer (romance) and when it is spring becoming summer (comic romance) or summer becoming winter (tragic romance). To make this even more complicated, these blends would occur at different rates in different works—what, to push the analogy, would be the ratio of tragedy to romance in a work assigned to August 6 versus one assigned August 7?

Even if we ignore works that are more modern and simply focus on medieval ones, we still face difficulty in defining the genre *romance*. It cannot be defined by form, for some are in verse, while others are in prose. Nor can it be easily defined by content. Romances are not the only narratives which discuss the life of a hero, for example, and while some romances are full of marvelous objects and events, others are not. Depending on who categorizes it, a text may be seen as a romance or as a history or as an epic or as yet another form of narrative. Looking at

medieval definitions of *romance* does little to help us either. *Romaunce* (to use the form of the headword in the *Middle English Dictionary*) exhibits definitions that do not equate to our use of the term in describing medieval literature. These definitions include

1. (a) A written narrative of the adventures of a knight, nobleman, king, or an important ecclesiastic, a chivalric romance; [. . .] (b) the source, real or alleged, of an English chivalric romance or verse narrative; [. . .].
2. [. . .] (b) a history, chronicle (freq. in French); a historical record; [. . .] (d) a book, written work; [. . .].
3. The French language; [. . .]. (*Middle English Dictionary*)

While definition 1a (“adventures”) at first glance seems similar to modern notions of romance, the inclusion of “an important ecclesiastic” as a possible hero shows that this definition does not precisely equate to modern expectations. Definitions 1b (“source”) and 2b (“history”), while describing narratives, cover works that would never be called *romances* by modern readers. Finally, definitions 2d (“written work”) and 3 (“the French language”) cease to describe narratives at all. Nor does every work that we would identify as a romance call itself such. The two fifteenth-century works I will focus on later both refer to themselves as *stories*, a word that in Middle English implied “[a] narrative account [. . .] of events that occurred or are believed to have occurred in the past” (*Middle English Dictionary*).

Medieval romances, however they are defined, were written over the course of centuries in many different countries, complicating matters further. The earliest medieval romances are from the late twelfth century, beginning with Chrétien de Troyes’s verse *Erec et Enide* (c. 1170). They spread quickly from France to Germany and England, where Middle English verse romances, such as *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, circulated by the early thirteenth century. At the same time, the form changed in France, where prose romances became increasingly

prominent, as can be seen by the various French prose versions of the Arthurian stories, such as the *Prose Lancelot* (c. 1227) and *La Mort le Roi Artu* (c. 1237).

Modern definitions of medieval romance, and even more, definitions of good medieval romance, have used the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes much as Aristotle used *Oedipus Tyrannous* to define tragedy. Privileging these early romances, with their emphasis upon the individual hero's psychology and the changes that he undergoes, creates generic expectations which make the Charlemagne romances and other non-Arthurian romances seem odd and out of balance. A romance's "failure" to satisfy generic expectations increases the farther from Chrétien it gets in time, space, and content. The authors of later romances were not interested in the inner life of the single individual hero. This is not to say that it is impossible to read these works psychoanalytically; they simply do not invite such readings to the extent that Chrétien's romances do. Recent scholars of medieval romance have been quite vocal about the dangers of defining romance in this way, particularly as it distorts the history of the genre. William Calin, for example, argues that Chrétien's romances did not provide the later Middle Ages with the model for the genre: "Middle English romance ought not to be condemned vis-à-vis an abstract model of romance based on, for instance, Chrétien de Troyes because, among other things, French romance itself evolved in the thirteenth century in a manner parallel to the one the English romances generally took; besides, English romances often correspond to French romances and *chansons de geste*" (xiii). One result of privileging works such as the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is that works that do not focus on character psychology are seen as poor examples of the genre. Of course, the value assigned to romances that explore the inner life of the hero is reinforced for modern readers by our culture's interest in psychology and the individual. Without systematic examination of the less privileged romances, we risk defining a genre by highly

individual works that are, in fact, idiosyncratic and therefore not good examples of the genre as a whole.

Another way to look at the romance is to examine its cultural, social, and political values. The focus on the hero's quest to become a productive part of society in Old French and Middle English romances assumes the political system and values of a feudal society. But readers of medieval romances cannot make this assumption for the romances of other areas of Europe. For example, one societal result of Spain's ongoing struggle with the Moors (711–1492) is that Spain never developed a feudal system like that of other European countries (Brownlee 255). In Italy, meanwhile, feudal structures existed side-by-side with other social systems: "The Italian peninsula featured a variety of political systems quite unusual for medieval Europe. [These included] a monarchical model [. . .], semi-independent city-states called communes; the republic of Venice; the Papal State [. . .]; [and] the towns and lands governed by one noble family [. . .]" (Psaki 203). While Germany had a feudal system, it included the noble bondsman (*dienstman*), a person who was both serf and knight (Rasmussen 186), a class that did not exist in the French or English systems.

Not surprisingly, over the past thirty years, scholars of medieval literature (and of the medieval romance in particular) have become increasingly uncomfortable with generic definitions inherited from earlier scholars. The "received body of generic distinctions" represented in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500* (Howard 377) is an example of how, for many readers, genre is something we inherit at least as much as it is something we discover or create for ourselves. This inheritance can be as simple as the ways bookstores or libraries create sections for books or the ways previous scholars have defined works. For example, *Oedipus Tyrannous* is a tragedy. We cannot argue that it is not a tragedy. Why? Because Aristotle says it is. Arguments about what tragedy is begin by assuming that

Oedipus Tyrannous is one, because the first attempt to define the genre uses that work as its primary example. If a reader read everything that has ever been classified as *tragedy*, *Oedipus Tyrannous* might not seem to be the best example of the genre; because of the history of criticism, however, it is the work that holds a central and definitional position in the collection of works called *tragedies*. It has been clear from the time of the fifth-century BCE playwrights that the tragedies of Euripides are both like and unlike those of Sophocles, and attempts to define the genre of tragedy have had to take these into account, as well as the quite different works of William Shakespeare and Samuel Beckett. In addition, a medieval tragedy (for example, the *Monk's Tale* in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*) is yet another specimen of the genre. Of course, it is possible to argue that even though these medieval works are called tragedies, they are not actually part of that genre, but this would require defining not only the genre of tragedy but also the genre of whatever the other works are. In other words, it requires the same scholarly endeavor whether the point is to show similarity or difference. In the end, genre comes back to the works and the texts—definitions of genre based on specific works and arguments for either adding or subtracting works from a genre are exactly that—arguments about what kind of work a specific one is. Determining genre is, or should be, descriptive, not prescriptive.

The genre lists of *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500* act both as the starting point and as a focus of discontent for defining genre. If one wants to know the titles of Middle English romances, for example, this is the place to find them. But one quickly realizes that there are additional lists available, all of which act as addenda to this original list. These lists, as John Finlayson has pointed out, are of narratives that scholars “have agreed to call *romances*” (429). But Finlayson finds this too broad a term, as “anyone reasonably familiar with Middle English fictitious narratives will be aware that the only thing which many of them have in common is the fact that the *personae* are aristocratic” (429). The answer he proposes is to

define *romance* (or sub-genres of romance) more carefully, so that we do not confuse post-1100 *chansons de geste*, for example, with chivalric romances proper. These two genres, Finlayson argues, “are not distinguishable primarily by their subject matter and the larger elements of their composition, but by an attitude to that matter and those elements” (445). Other scholars approach the question of genre differently, such as Nancy Mason Bradbury, who is interested in the generic implications of the claims particular works make about whether they are oral or written, but scholars agree that the inherited list and the inherited genre definition no longer adequately categorize the works. “It is important,” Bradbury comments, “not to treat [romances] as monolithic” (21).

One of the signs of the generic crisis in the study of Middle English romance is that few of the scholars mentioned above deal with the prose romances of the fifteenth century. Attempts to define the genre more precisely start by looking at, and only at, the verse narratives. This is understandable because the Middle English prose romances have a long history of being marginalized—of the twenty-seven prose romances still extant (see Table 1 on the next page), only one has achieved canonical status, Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*. Although prose romances appeared centuries earlier in France, in England they were a product of the fifteenth century, particularly the latter part of the century. Only three narratives were probably from the first half of the century, and only another two possibly so. The influence of William Caxton’s press is obvious, as some 39% of the Middle English prose romances of the fifteenth century were printed by Caxton.

On reading prose romances, Helen Cooper comments “that one has to bear in mind two sets of expectations: those contemporary with a work’s composition and reception, and those of modern readers and scholars. There is an immediate problem with the prose romances, that the two sets may not be the same” (142). Actually, even more horizons of expectation can be

Table 1

Middle English Prose Romances

Romance	Date
<i>King Ponthus</i>	c. 1400–1450
<i>Prose Alexander</i>	1400–1450
<i>Prose Siege of Troy</i>	1425–1450
<i>Prose Siege of Thebes</i>	c. 1450
<i>Prose Merlin</i>	c. 1450
<i>Ipomedon</i>	c. 1460
Malory's <i>The Book of Arthur and His Knights (Le Morte Darthur)</i>	1469–1470
Caxton's <i>The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye</i>	1469–1476?
Caxton's <i>History of Jason</i>	1476–1478
Caxton's <i>Godefroy of Bologne</i>	1481
Caxton's <i>Charles the Grete</i>	1485
Caxton's <i>Paris and Vienne</i>	1485
Caxton's <i>Blanchardyn and Eglantine</i>	1489–1491
Caxton's <i>The Foure Sons of Aymon</i>	1489–1491
Caxton's <i>Eneydos</i>	1490
<i>The Dublin Alexander Epitome</i>	late fifteenth cen.
<i>Robert the Deuyll</i>	1496
<i>Melusine</i>	c. 1500
<i>The Three Kings' Sons</i>	c. 1500
<i>Prose Siege of Jerusalem</i>	fifteenth cen.
<i>Valentine and Orson</i>	c. 1502
<i>Prose Life of Joseph</i>	1511
<i>Helyas, Knight of the Swan</i>	1504
<i>De Sancta Joseph</i>	1516
Lord Berners' <i>Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux</i>	c. 1530
<i>William of Palerne</i> [fragment only]	1520–29
Lord Berners' <i>Arthur of Little Britain</i>	b. 1533

Sources: developed from J. Burke Severs, gen. ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967) and Joanne A. Rice, *Middle English Romance: An Annotated Bibliography, 1955–1985* (New York: Garland, 1987).

considered for a medieval work. Between the time of composition and the present, there have been many additional readers, all of whom have had their own expectations. Some of these

readers translated the romance from one language into another (as is quite common in the history of Middle English romance). Some knew other versions of the same narrative. Some produced a manuscript or printed text, and those readers had to choose whether to illustrate the romance or to include it in a compilation. Clearly, there are a number of issues that need to be examined when considering how a work has been received in the centuries between its creation and the present day.

If we allow that temporal and geographical distance affects genre definitions, how do we discover what a medieval romance was, both for medieval readers and authors and for ourselves? Hans Robert Jauss argues that readers build their understanding of medieval literature by reading it. The texts themselves teach modern readers how to read similar works. This mechanism of reading is true for non-medieval texts as well, and one of the ways that readers learn to read is by making connections between texts that are similar in form or content. The resulting groups of works are genres. But while Jauss assumes readers who have the time to read everything—and therefore who have completely tested genres—for most of us, genre is something we inherit as well as something we discover and create. And this inheritance no longer fits our experience of romance, leading to a generic crisis.

I propose that the generic crisis begins with an outdated metaphor. The study of romance is in the situation that Thomas Kuhn describes in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*—no one is happy with the way the world of the romance is constructed, but the community of scholars has not found anything to replace the received definition of the genre. We have allowed the history of *genre* to lead us to a biological metaphor that no longer functions. At its simplest, in literary studies, a genre is simply a group of similar works, but the task of splitting works into genres is, like its biological equivalent, a taxonomic activity. This is the metaphor of literary genre that Mark E. Amsler refers to when he says that “taxonomy is not taxidermy” (390). In this

metaphor, *genre* stands above individual narratives or poems, as *genus* does above species. The desire for very specific definitions of genres is a result of this model—biological taxonomies change in the face of new genetic discoveries, which indicate the relative closeness of the species or genus to others of the same family.

While it is possible to adapt the biological metaphor to an understanding of literary genre (establishing whether genre equates to species or to genus, for example), this does not solve the central problem, which is that a biological specimen can only belong to one species. In other words, each poem or narrative we read must belong only to a single generic category. While the category may occasionally be changed, the assumption is that this change is only because we have discovered more information. The placement is innate and timeless. This manner of classification works from the top down. When one encounters a new tree, for example, one can use a guidebook to determine what species it is by answering a series of binary questions. At the end of this series of questions, the answer is the identity of the species of the tree in question.

This top-down model of assigning genre does not actually describe how we understand the genre of a new poem or narrative, however. Among other problems, it assumes that any and all readers will use the same generic definition. How then can this metaphor deal with the drift of *novel* from something that can be distinguished from *romance* based on content (as Hawthorne and Burney defined it) to a term for a long prose narrative (as most twenty-first-century readers understand it)? The answer, of course, is that it cannot. I propose that we turn our initial focus from genre (the top) to texts and works (the bottom), and consider how we might discover and create—not define—genre from the bottom up, rather than the top down.

Some of the earliest discussion of the difference between texts and works is found in the works of Plato. Near the end of the *Phaedrus*, a Platonic dialogue explicitly concerned with rhetoric, Socrates tells Phaedrus about the Egyptian god Theuth, who is “the inventor of number,

arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, of games involving draughts and dice—and especially of writing” (68). When the god-king Thamous asks Theuth to justify writing, the inventor claims it “will increase the intelligence of the people of Egypt and improve their memories” (68).

Thamous denies this claim, stating that writing will actually “atrophy people’s memories” by making them “[rely] on marks made by others, from outside themselves, not on their own inner resources, and so writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds.”

Reading might make men “seem to be men of wide knowledge, when they will usually be ignorant,” because knowledge gained by reading is done “without any contact with a teacher” (69). All that writing can do, Socrates says, is “jog the memory of someone who already knows the topic that has been written about” (70).

Because of Plato’s concern with developing a system that will allow men to achieve what he sees as the ultimate goal of human existence, returning the soul to the state of existence it enjoyed before it became embodied, he is suspicious of anything that adds yet another layer between a human soul and its memory of the Forms glimpsed before its descent. Philosophical education—specifically, Plato’s method of philosophical education—aids the soul in this task by helping it recall the Forms and so helping the soul escape from the cycle of reincarnation. This pedagogical emphasis can be seen in his attitude towards writing, which takes the disjunction of word and idea a further step apart.

When one writes, Plato asserts, one does so “in black water” (71) (i.e., ink) with “words which can neither speak in their own defence nor come up with satisfactory explanation of the truth” (71). Orality is both assumed and preferred in Plato’s pedagogical system. Rather than writing words to be read by anyone, Plato argues that a teacher should write “in the soul of a student” by holding conversations, for this use of words “is capable of defending itself, and it

knows how to speak to those it should and keep silent in the company of those to whom it shouldn't speak" (70).

Plato's attitude towards the Truth leads to his negative attitude towards rhetoric: "[I]f something is going to be spoken well and properly," Socrates tells Phaedrus, "the mind of the speaker must know the truth of the matter to be addressed [. . .]" (46). His arguments assume that there is one Truth, and that one must know this in order to speak well. Writing is suspect because it is not as "true" as speech, because it is at an additional remove from the ideas of the mind. Plato argues that one should take up rhetoric—"the art of speaking"—"only after having grasped the truth" (47). For Plato, public speaking (and writing) are deficient because neither can fulfill "the function of speech [which is] to lead the soul" (64). The perfect oration would speak to each auditor in the way best suited to that individual—obviously an impossibility except in one-on-one conversations or in very small groups. In other words, the study of philosophy must come before the study of rhetoric.

However, we only know about Plato's distrust of writing through the survival of his written words. Modern literary critics, however attractive they may find the idea of writing "in the soul of a student," must work with the written word of which Plato was so suspicious. Perhaps the most text-bound of the critical methods available to modern scholars is textual criticism, the activity that includes editing and bibliography. In textual criticism, a distinction is made between the "work" and the "text." While the definitions may vary slightly, generally the work is "[t]he message or experience implied by the authoritative versions of a literary writing" (Shillingsburg 176) while the text is "[t]he sequence of words and pauses [. . .]" (174). Medieval literature is particularly useful for seeing this distinction because each text is clearly and necessarily different from all others—a consequence of the method of manufacture—in ways that more modern printed texts are not.

It would be easy to think of a work as being like a Platonic Form, the real thing of which the various texts are only pale imitations. However, this view of the literary work as a Platonic Form is flatly refuted by Peter L. Shillingsburg in his important contribution to recent theory about editing, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*:

It is dangerous to think of the work as a Platonic ideal that the author strove to represent in some final or best version of the work. While the text may be monolithic in some specific instances (in which only one copy survives or in which all surviving copies are identical), it cannot be assumed to be so always. Many editors pursuing the author's final intentions fall into this way of thinking, and most literary critics, more is the pity, buy the argument. (43)

Scholars working in the field of textual criticism have begun to question the ways in which the field has evolved. Jerome McGann, for example, in his overview of the history of textual criticism, comments, "It is the assumption of this paper that literary study surrendered some of its most powerful interpretive tools when it allowed textual criticism and bibliography to be regarded as 'preliminary' rather than integral to the study of literary work" ("Monks" 182). McGann and Tim William Machan (*Textual Criticism*, especially 14–38) both place the origin of modern textual criticism in the Renaissance. Both are concerned with how this history of textual criticism has affected the way modern textual criticism understands its own role in the wider field of literary criticism.

McGann argues that there is "an ignorance about the historical development of textual studies widespread among textual critics who work on national scriptures [vernacular literatures], especially in the modern periods. This lack of attention to the textual criticism of ancient literatures, both biblical and classical, has caused serious damage to the criticism and scholarship of our more recent and national literatures [. . .]" ("Monks" 183–84). McGann also challenges

the “underlying and fundamental assumption that the disciplines of textual criticism have as their aim, their *raison d’être* even, the editing of texts” (184). Therefore, for McGann, the issue is that textual critics who focus on post-medieval works approach their task using the tools of textual critics who have very different concerns: “The textual problems that a scholar of ancient works has to face rarely find close analogues in modern national scriptures. Consequently, when textual critics of modern works assume an editorial function for their discipline, they also take over a methodology and structural focus that are normally not well adapted to the most pressing scholarly problems they should be facing” (185). In this conflict between the needs of scholars of ancient and modern literatures, medieval literature is a mere aside—McGann comments that modern works “also differ in crucial ways from the circumstantial field of medieval works” (185).

While McGann, a Romanticist, focuses on the conflict between the needs of scholars of classical literatures and the needs of scholars of modern literatures, Machan, a medievalist, argues that modern textual criticism often wrongs medieval literature by treating it as if it were more modern literature. Machan sees the confusion of the work with the Platonic Form as a natural consequence of textual criticism’s emergence from the Renaissance: “Specifically humanist positions on textual criticism were safeguarded in such a way that even late in the twentieth century they remain synonymous with textual criticism itself” (*Textual Criticism* 14). He argues that the focus on the author that results from textual criticism’s Renaissance and humanist background does a particular disservice to medieval texts: “Even though, in historical terms, [. . .] a vernacular Middle English author is an impossibility, post-romantic conceptions of authorship and the authoritative text have been readily adapted in the editing of many medieval texts” (“Middle English” 17). The theoretical concerns of modern textual criticism, in other words, run counter to medieval understandings of literary creation.

Despite all the ways Shillingsburg (a Victorianist), McGann, and Machan disagree with one another about specifics, they are in agreement that textual criticism needs to be understood as a theoretical, critical, and subjective enterprise. They also agree that one method alone is not enough: “Works about which many people continue to ask questions need to be edited as archives of extant documents, annotated and introduced, *and* they need to be edited to extract the author’s voice or at least to identify the variety of authorizing voices in the extant documents” (Shillingsburg 100, his italics).

While the philosophy of Plato lies behind much textual criticism, the philosophy of Aristotle drove medieval ideas about rhetoric and writing. The importance of Aristotle can be seen in John of Salisbury’s twelfth-century defense of the trivium, the *Metalogicon*. English-born John (c. 1115/20–1180) studied and was ordained in France. In 1154, he returned to England as the secretary for Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, a position he continued to hold under Theobald’s successor, Thomas Becket. After witnessing Becket’s murder on 29 December 1170, John returned to France, where he became Bishop of Chartres in 1176, a position he held until his death on 25 October 1180. The *Metalogicon*, together with the *Policraticus*, was sent to then-Chancellor Becket in 1159. (Throughout the medieval period, it is interesting to note, the *Metalogicon* continued to circulate with the *Policraticus*, maintaining a close link between the rhetorical treatise and the political one.)

Where Plato’s primary concern is with speech, with writing seen as a lower form of communication to be treated with suspicion, John of Salisbury sees writing as a much higher form. He recognizes a distinction between that which is spoken and that which is written, but unlike Plato he sees speech and writing as forms of communication which are aimed at different audiences rather than having different values or worth: “He who speaks is judged merely by one or a few persons; whereas he who writes thereby exposes himself to criticism by all, and appears

before the tribunal of the whole world and every age” (117). This emphasis on communication can also be seen in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, where he comments that “[writing] avoids the necessity of silence if one wishes to communicate to others [who are not present], which is the condition of those who do not know how to write” (255). This focus on communication influences the standards by which language use is judged: “[. . .] let the virtue of style [*lexeos arete*] be defined as ‘to be clear’ (speech is a kind of sign, so if it does not make clear it will not perform its function) [. . .]” (Aristotle 221), writes the master, while the disciple echoes, “What is primarily desirable in language is lucid clarity and easy comprehensibility” (John 56).

The *Metalogicon* is concerned with how young men should be taught, and it specifically defends the teaching of grammar and rhetoric and logic: “Just as eloquence, unenlightened by reason, is rash and blind, so wisdom, without the power of expression, is feeble and maimed” (10). John of Salisbury’s concern with public life can be seen in his further comments about the need to teach “eloquence”: “One who would eliminate the teaching of eloquence from philosophical studies [. . .] undermines and uproots all liberal studies, assails the whole structure of philosophy, tears to shreds humanity’s social contract, and destroys the means of brotherly charity and reciprocal interchange of services” (11).

Where Plato thought that rhetoric must follow the study of philosophy, John of Salisbury insists that the order must be reversed because “[. . .] grammar prepares the mind to understand everything that can be taught in words” (60). If Plato’s concern with the Truth leads him to Forms, then John of Salisbury’s concern leads him to a different pedagogy—medieval Christianity tended to emphasize polyvalent ways of reading texts, even (or especially) the scriptures. These polyvalent ways of reading allowed unity to be seen where discord would have otherwise been evident. John of Salisbury explicitly rejects the doctrine of Forms that is so important to Platonic thought: “Wherefore, unless one wants to break with Aristotle, by granting

that universals exist, he must reject opinions which would identify universals with word sounds, word concepts, sensible things, ideas, native forms, or collections. For all the latter doubtless exist. In short, one who maintains that universals exist, contradicts Aristotle” (119). At the end of Book 2, John of Salisbury makes explicit his preference for Aristotle over Plato: “we by no means follow Plato in his analysis of the nature of universals” (140)—i.e., in the doctrine of forms.

The increased importance of written words over spoken words can be seen in the early twelfth-century *Dialogue on the Authors* by Conrad of Hirsau (c. 1070–c. 1150?), who “is supposed to have been a schoolmaster in the Benedictine abbey of SS Peter and Paul at Hirsau, in the Black Forest of Germany” (Minnis and Scott 37). During this dialogue, Conrad defines a book as either “parchment with marks on it” or “a collection of speeches, histories, or commentaries or the like brought together to form one body of work” (42). The importance of the physical document, whether it is a single sheet or a collection of them, is obvious. Even so, when the teacher is asked by the pupil to explain the various terms used for those who write, there is still a great deal about oral and aural language:

The author [. . .] amplifies the deeds or sayings or thoughts of men of former times [. . .]. [T]he writer of history is said to write of the event he has witnessed. Moreover, the poet (*poeta*) is called a maker, or one who gives shape to things, because he says what is false instead of the truth, or else sometimes intermingles truth with falsehood. The bard (*vates*) gets his name from his mental power. For it argues great mental powers to bypass the present and show future events as if they were right before one’s eyes. Commentators are those who can work out many ideas, beginning with just a few facts and illuminate the obscure sayings of others.

Expositors are those who unravel the mystical sayings of Holy Scripture [. . .].
(43–44)

My concerns, however, are not with Truth nor with editing nor with pedagogy. I am interested in genre and literary history, specifically with prose romance. For me, a work is an intellectual construct of which the text is a physical manifestation. The work is also an intellectual construct based on a physical text or texts. Neither work nor text has primacy since neither can exist without the other. While my definition of “text” is related to that offered by Shillingsburg, my “work” is very different from his, for it is both an individual and a collective construct, and the author is as much a reader of the work as anyone else.

The work and the text are intimately connected but separate ways of approaching literature. The intellectual construct that is the work is part of literary culture, thereby meshing with various methods of literary criticism and connecting with the various ways the work has been and will be read. The work is thus the timeless essence that is constantly in the present and which is constantly being renewed. The text is the individual manifestation, the artifact that has breadth and width and weight, and therefore is tied to the physical, material world. The text is not of value only as it relates to the work; it has value in itself as well. Our experience of a work is often affected by a text, that is, by the physical manifestation through which we may initially approach the work and through which we can approach the work over and over again. But we do not have to have a text in order to interact with the work, because the work is an intellectual construct.

On the one hand, it is possible to read a text of a work we have never approached, and it is through this text that we initially discover the work. On the other hand, it is also possible to approach the work before reading any text of that work. For example, we might read an article which makes us interested in a literary work and then read a text of that work. In this case, we

have already been provided with an intellectual construct—so we approach the work before the text.

No matter in which order we first approach a work or a text, these are the data points from which we discover genre. Imagine any given text as a point in four-dimensional space—a space with not only height, breadth, and width, but also time. Lines connect this point to other points which are similar to it or which refer to it (time may, after all, be part of the model). On one level, these collections of points and lines make up works—the various texts of *The Knight's Tale*, for example, would naturally closely congregate. At the next level, these groups themselves appear as a point—a work—which is connected by lines to those to which they are similar (see Figure 2 on the next page). These collections are genres. This model of the relationship of texts, works, and genres makes it clear that genres are not discretely defined units. Two points may not be directly related (connected by a line), but they may both be connected to a third point. Discussions of genre rely on deciding which point or points are the beginning and then determining how short or long the connecting line is between these points and the one representing the text or work under discussion. The permeable boundary between one genre and the next might be indicated by places where the concentration of points lessens. Of course, genre can be described on a number of levels, the larger, more general descriptions including within themselves a number of smaller, more specialized genres.

Because of these relationships between text, work, and genre, a better metaphor for understanding literary genre is stellar cartography, especially since the importance of the viewer is allowed for, as the star chart varies depending on where one stands. This model provides multiple dimensions for study, depending on where the reader stands within the chart. In addition, the temporal element in literary studies can be included since our model of spatial

phenomenon includes the understanding that what we currently see has actually already happened.

The way we regard the different levels (work, text, genre) has its own relationship to stargazing. We can focus on planets and moons, solar systems, or galaxies, depending on what interests us. One element of generic history which the metaphor of stellar cartography allows but which the metaphor of biological taxonomy cannot is that a text or work does not necessarily

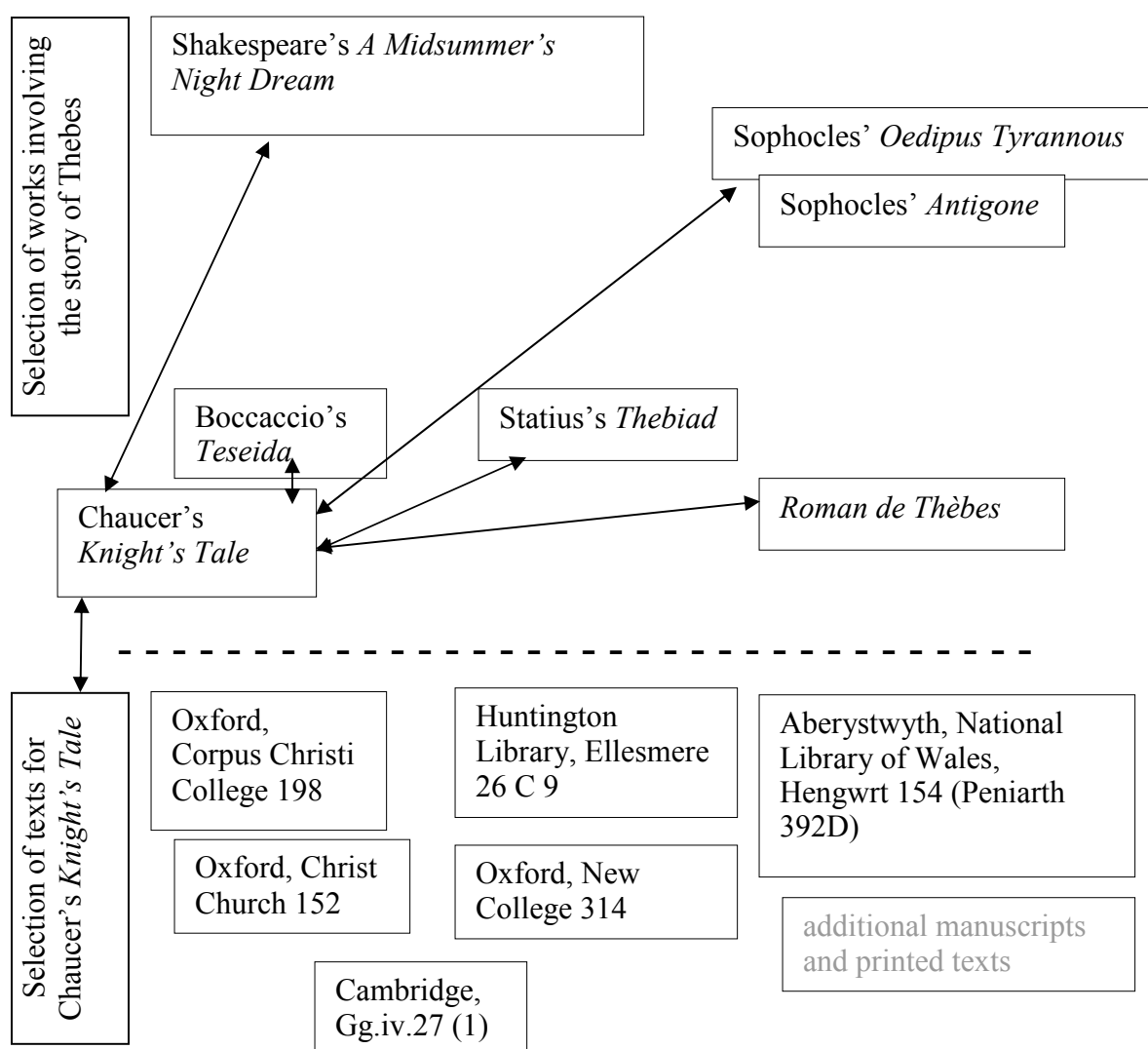


Figure 2. Relationship of Text(s) to Work(s). The bottom of the figure names some of the texts which comprise one of the works named in the top of the figure.

remain in the same genre throughout its life. Whether a narrative was seen as a romance at the time of its creation, and whether it is seen as a romance now, tells us nothing of whether it was seen as a romance in the intervening centuries. The history of an individual work and a genre may not coincide. The clustering together of works and texts which makes genres can be allowed to change in this metaphor, because we are using a base metaphor that allows for the possibility of real or perceived movement.

Discovering the genre of romance this way will not lead to a purely idiosyncratic description. Any two readers with similar backgrounds (schooling, time period, etc.) will tend to construct genres similarly. Some works lie closer to the generic heart, such as the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Most readers would recognize these works as medieval romances, and not just because we have been told they are. The difficulty comes at the edges, as we approach the margins. Here is where readers will disagree about the generic placement of a particular work—for example, is the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* a romance or a tragedy?—but these readers will agree that there are elements of both in it.

To begin this task of rediscovering medieval romance, we must begin by looking at individual texts—our knowledge of any given romance and of the genre as a whole is built up from reading many individual texts and from what we have inherited from those who have read these texts before us. To understand as fully as possible the individual romance and its reception, we must look not only at methods of reading (both ours and those of former times), but also at the physical evidence left to us: the manuscript and, sometimes, the booklists of former owners.

This dissertation will begin the process with two marginalized “prose romances”: *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Romance of the Three Kings’ Sons*. Both are Middle English translations of French prose originals, both survive in unique manuscripts from the last

half of the fifteenth century (although *Ponthus* was probably translated earlier), both manuscripts provide intriguing clues as to the identity of the patron for whom they were made, and both were eventually part of collections put together in the seventeenth century.¹ The romances I have chosen have received little attention from scholars. The modern printing of *Ponthus* dates from the 1897 volume of the *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, and *The Three Kings' Sons* was printed in 1895 by the Early English Text Society. Except for two dissertations—Henry Grinberg's 1968 examination of *The Three Kings' Sons* and the French romance of which it is a translation and Edith Smith Krappe's 1953 edition of *Ponthus*—these romances have been relegated mostly to footnotes and exempla. For my purposes, the relative obscurity of these two romances is an advantage because there does not already exist a common horizon of expectations, an accepted way of reading them, as there does with a more canonical work, such as Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

To begin, I will consider the place of the works *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Romance of the Three Kings' Sons* in literary culture. Next, I will look at the material culture of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 185 and London, British Library MS Harley 326. Finally, I will look at the culture of collection of the libraries of Sir Kenelm Digby and Sir

¹ The selection of these two works shows one of the complications of the lists of “prose romances” in Table 1—the dates given tend to be the assumed dates for the works, not the dates for the texts. For example, *King Ponthus* is listed first, based on the date of the Middle English translation. However, the surviving Middle English manuscript dates from the second half of the century, making it contemporary with the printed romances. Work by Kathleen L. Scott on the illustrations of *The Three Kings' Sons* likewise suggests a considerably different date than that assumed by the list in Table 1, although in this case Scott's work suggests an earlier date for the manuscript than previously assumed (*Later* 331-32).

Simonds D'Ewes. Once these various methods of reading have been applied, it will be possible to begin mapping these works and texts into multidimensional generic star charts.

CHAPTER 3

LITERARY CULTURE: *KING PONTIUS AND THE FAIR SIDONE AND THE THREE
KINGS' SONS*

Of the three reception contexts to be examined, the first is the one most familiar to modern students of literature. This is the sphere of literary culture, where the primary focus is on the work, not the text. The various schools of literary criticism and their attendant ways of reading—psychoanalytic, feminist, new historicist, new critical, and so forth—belong to literary culture. While literary culture is in some ways atemporal—the work as an intellectual construct is not fixed at a certain point in time—ways of reading are historically and culturally conditioned. For example, psychoanalytic criticism (whether based on Freud, Jung, or some other psychological theorist) grows in part from a cultural context in which psychology plays a major role in how humans see the world. We think psychologically (how, we wonder, have past experiences influenced current behavior in people with whom we interact, for example). Having learned to think this way in our day-to-day lives, such questions are easily, naturally, perhaps unthinkingly, raised while reading. Likewise, many modern readers are at some level aware of the politically-related ways of reading even if dismissive of them. We live in a world where race and sex are important issues, and readers easily transfer this awareness to their reading. Literary criticism absorbs theories from a number of fields that are more specifically concerned with how human beings make sense of the world, such as psychoanalysis, linguistics, philosophy, and theology. Literary criticism must do so, too, because we bring to the act of reading—of creating from the physical text the intellectual construct that is the work—our understanding of how the

world works. In return, what we read affects how we understand the world, raising new questions for our next reading.

Because the work exists within this tension between what the reader brings to the text and what the text offers the reader, specific readings have ties to specific historical and cultural eras. While a text can exist whether or not it is read, a work must be read in order to exist; it must connect with the ways in which the people of a particular time and place make sense of the world. The focus on the interior life of the hero that characterizes medieval works such as Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* or the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is part of these works' solid modern existence—they appeal to ways of reading, of understanding the world, which come easily to us. Likewise, a work such as the thirteenth-century Old French *Roman de Silence* (Roche-Mahdi xi) has come back into existence because its main character (a woman masquerading as a knight) appeals to another of the ways we understand our world—as a place where a woman must act willfully and even wilefully to compete equally with men. In any synchronic moment a work may or may not exist, even though it has an existence diachronically prior to and after that synchronic moment. The older a work is, the more readers need to find ways to adjudicate between the ways of reading important in our present moment and the ways of reading of past times. While modern criticisms affect how we receive a work, the reconstruction of former ways of reading will tend to privilege historical and source criticisms because they are attempts to understand a work's reception at a particular former synchronic moment.

In addition to being aware of how our ways of reading affect a work's place in our literary culture, we must also be aware of how fluid a category *work* might be. For example, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is a work, but it is also composed of multiple smaller works—we tend to say that we are reading *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, not that we are reading an

excerpt from the *Canterbury Tales*. Even more fluid is the existence of the *Canterbury Tales* over time. While modern readers experience the entire *Canterbury Tales* as a series of ten groups which tend to be ordered in one of three ways, with fragments one through ten in order (the *Riverside Chaucer*), or with fragment seven following fragment two (Baugh's edition), or with fragments seven and then six following fragment two (Skeat's edition) (Benson 5), medieval texts of *Canterbury Tales* suggest that many more works, or intellectual constructs, existed for medieval readers. Readers of Northumberland MS 455 (c. 1450–70), for example, experience a work in which the pilgrims arrive at Canterbury and then travel back to London, with the Merchant telling a second tale (the anonymous *Tale of Beryn*), followed by *Melibee*, *The Monk's Tale*, *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, *the Manciple's Tale*, and, at last, *The Parson's Tale* (Bowers 55). Likewise, some five manuscripts and two printed editions of *The Canterbury Tales* include John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* and its Canterbury-based prologue, including British Library MS Arundel 119, which "bears the coat-of-arms of William de la Pole [. . .] husband of Alice Chaucer, [. . .] Geoffrey's only known grandchild" (12). While modern readers tend to see Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* and the *Tale of Beryn* as interlopers into the work, the fluidity of tale order that marks medieval manuscripts as a whole suggests that the work itself was perceived quite differently. Likewise, some texts contain narratives we identify as literary works within works we identify as historical, such as chronicles. These works can be discussed without reference to particular texts, but to ignore texts that offer what seem to us to be contaminated works is to ignore stages in the reception history of those works.

The way that a text influences a work may also be seen in the reception history of Sir Thomas Malory's *La Morte Darthur*. Many modern readers experience the narrative in the version edited by Eugene Vinaver from the Winchester Manuscript. Vinaver argues that there are multiple related works in the *Morte*. (Indeed, the title of his edition is *Works*.) Before this edition

appeared in the middle of the twentieth century, Malory's narrative was experienced as a single narrative, a single work, in the version first printed by William Caxton. In some ways, the arguments over which edition represents the wishes of the long-dead author represent arguments over which version of the work should be considered primary, but, in fact, we have either one work which is also sometimes conceived of as multiple works or a number of very closely related works, which we tend to treat as one.

If simply determining what constitutes the work can be problematic, how can we look at a number of works, each with its own concerns and demands, without either forcing all of them into a predetermined mold or allowing them to remain so unrelated that we cannot really discuss them together? One answer to this dilemma is found in Hans Robert Jauss's "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," in which he adapts Andres Jolles's theory of simple forms to medieval literature, arguing that the theory of simple forms "has an aesthetic character to the extent that it makes possible the thematizing and the mastering of various claims of reality..." (214). The heuristic chart in the appendix to Jauss's article provides a starting point for developing a series of questions that can be explicitly asked of any work (see Table 2 on next page). It is important to remember that each question is not equally important for all works nor for all readers at all times. The point of any such series of questions is to make explicit the reader's rubric for making distinctions between works and, at another level, genres. These charts are influenced by the uses to which Jauss put them. The questions from "Alterity" are designed to show the differences between the nine medieval "little genres" (Jauss's equivalent to Jolles's simple forms), while related questions from "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature" focus on distinguishing the *chanson de geste* from the *roman arthurien* from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (83). While both charts contain the same number of questions, they do not simply map one on the other, and some of the questions, such as 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 (Space and Time in the "Alterity"

Table 2

Two Versions of H. R. Jauss's Heuristic Chart

“Alterity and Modernity”	“Theory of Genres”
1. Communicative Situation	1. <i>Author and Text</i> (Narration)
1.1 Who speaks? Who is addressed?	1.1 Rhapsode vs. Narrator vs. Absent Narrator
1.2 <i>Modus Dicendi</i>	1.2 Epic Objectivity vs. Fable to be Interpreted vs. Event to be Discussed
1.3 Province of Meaning	1.3 Epic Distance vs. Actuality; “How-suspense” vs. “If-at-all-suspense”
1.3.1 Space	2. <i>Modus dicendi</i> (Forms of Representation)
1.3.2 Time	2.1 Nonwritten (oral literature) vs. Written (book)
1.3.3 Agents	2.2 Verse vs. Prose
1.3.4 Plot model	2.3 Level of Style: sermo sublimis vs. medius vs. humilis
1.4.1 Message (an answer to...) ^a	2.4 Closure vs. Sequel; Length vs. Brevity
1.4.2 Province of Meaning	3. <i>Construction and Levels of Significance</i> (Unities of the Represented)
2. The Relationship to Tradition	3.1 Action (<i>argumentum</i>): Epic Occurrence [<i>Begebenheit</i>] vs. Romance Happening [<i>Geschehen</i>] vs. Unprecedented Event [<i>Ereignis</i>]
2.1 Diachronically	3.2 Characters, Social Status: High vs. Middle vs. Low
2.2 Synchronically	3.3 Represented Reality: Symbolic vs. Exemplary vs. Descriptive
3. Place in Life	4. <i>Modus recipiendi and Social Function</i>
3.1 <i>Modus Recipiendi</i>	4.1 Degrees of Reality: <i>res gesta (historia)</i> vs. <i>res ficta</i> vs. <i>argumentum qui fieri potuit</i>
3.2 Model of Behavior	4.2 Mode of Reception: Admiration and Emotion vs. Entertainment and Instruction vs. Astonishment and Reflection
3.3 Social (ideological) Function	4.3 Social Function: Interpretation of History (<i>mémoire collective</i>) vs. Initiation vs. Conversation (the formation of judgment)

Sources: Hans Robert Jauss, “The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature,” *New Literary History* 10 (1979): 181–229, and “Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature,” *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982) 76–109, 205–211.

^aThere is no 1.4 heading in Jauss's chart.

chart) are perhaps better treated as a single question. Of course, no matter how broad nor how finely detailed such a chart is, the answers cannot be considered more than guides. We cannot assume that the answers will match between any two readers or between readers of any two eras. The purpose is to insure that comparisons between any two or more works begin by consciously noting the answers to the same set of questions for all the works considered. In place of either of Jauss's series of questions, I propose that the following eight literary elements provide a framework for describing and comparing works:

1. Form,
2. Plot,
3. Narrative Voice,
4. Setting,
5. Character,
6. Connection to Other Works,
7. Culture Influence on the Work, and
8. Culture Influence of the Work.

These eight literary elements can be discussed for any work, allowing two or more works to be compared at a number of points. Form considers such questions as whether the work is written or oral, verse or prose, lyric or narrative. Examination of the plot involves looking at the overall structure as well as individual events. Narrative voice looks not only at point of view but also at the extent to which the narrator of the work intrudes upon the telling. Setting involves not only space and time, but also the degree to which the setting is realistic or magical. Character considers the social status (and, in the case of animal fables, species) of the primary and secondary characters as well as the extent to which the characters are developed and developing. Connections to other works may involve close connections, such as translations, or connections

that are more tenuous, such as the use of quotations from one work as chapter titles in another. This element includes source criticism, the work's connection to preceding works. Cultural influence on a work includes historical criticism, an examination of the place and community of creation, and may include theological or philosophical influences. Finally, there is the cultural influence of the work, which considers how the work presents itself, what kind or kinds of behavior it models, and what, if anything, it demands of the reader. These elements will be examined for each of the two works under consideration here.

Form

The most easily described of the eight elements is that of form. Both *Ponthus* and *The Three Kings' Sons* are written prose narratives. However, *Ponthus* implies orality in its opening clause, "Now I wolle you tell a noble storye" (*King Ponthus* 1), while *The Three Kings' Sons* draws attention to itself not only as a written "Boke" but also as a translation of an earlier written narrative: "vndir the Boke was written" (207).

A stylistic similarity of both narratives is repetition, but the repetition plays different roles. On the one hand, "[i]n *Ponthus*, the source of the repetition is the difference between plan and fulfillment, which is loosely that between mental actions and physical actions. We are told the details of the plan as devised by the Sultan, and the same details as they are executed by his minions" (Edwards 76). The repetition in *The Three Kings' Sons* is not the immediate repetition of *Ponthus*. The most striking narrative repetition in *The Three Kings' Sons* is at the banquet celebrating the end of the war between Sicily and the Turks, where the king asks each of the princes to tell their adventures. These are later first-person accounts of events that the reader encountered earlier; we already know what has happened, and we simply eavesdrop on the rest of the court finding out. Of course, we actually know more than is being told here because none

of the disguised princes reveal themselves. These speeches also act to remind us of what has occurred in the first part of the narrative (the reclaiming of Sicily from the Turks) before the narrative shifts to the second part of the story (the tournament for Iolante's hand).

On the basis of these two works, we can see the following similarities which may be characteristic of the genre of the prose romance. The first, painfully obvious, similarity is that both works are in prose. (A move to examine the generic relationships of romance more widely defined would, of course, require including verse works as well.) The second characteristic is the use of repetition, even though the repetition is stylistically and functionally different in these works.

Plot

The second of the eight elements to be examined is plot. Of interest here are not only the events of the narrative, but the pattern of events. Both *Ponthus* and *The Three Kings' Sons* span their heroes' entire lives, from the marriage of the heroes' parents to the heroes' deaths. These opening and closing moves, however, only require a handful of sentences. In *Ponthus* we are told at the beginning that "the kyng Tiber of [Galicia . . .] had to his wyf the kynges doghtre of Aragon [. . .]. So thei had between theym a sonne that was called Ponthus, the moste famose childe & the most gracious that euer was seyn in that tyme" (*King Ponthus* 1). The death of the hero takes only a sentence: "The kyng Ponthus and the queen leved long enughe and reigned to the pleser of God and then they discesed and finished to the grete sorowe and hevynes to theyr people" (150). *The Three Kings' Sons* follows the marriage and birth pattern for only one of the princes, Philip: "And in this tyme reigned a kyng in ffraunce [. . . who] had weddid a right faire lady, doughter to the kyng of Nauerne [. . .]" (*Three* 1) After a number of years of childlessness, they finally have a son "bettir than any man can write of, aswele towards god as to the world and

god had formed hym of suche beute, witte, trouthe and worthynes and of alle condicions that to a kynges sone perteyne to have [. . .]” (1–2). The ending does not mention the death of the hero as clearly as does that of *Ponthus*. Instead, the narrator says that “their children continued in the same affir their daies” (206), clearly implying death without actually narrating it. The only deaths actually mentioned at the end of this narrative are those of Iolante’s father, after which Philip inherits Sicily, and Orcays, after which his childless wife returns home to England (206–7). The narrator of *Ponthus* uses the death of Ponthus and Sidone to make a point, “ther be noon so fair, ne so ryche, so strong, ne so goode, bot at the last he must nedes leve this worlde” (*King Ponthus* 150), whereas the narrator of *The Three Kings’ Sons* seems to end simply by wrapping up loose ends. After mentioning that the children “continued in the same affir their daies, jauyng moo Reaumes to gouerne than their fadirs had,” the narrator notes “y suppose the Cronykells of the Reaume reherceth the noblesse of them” (*Three* 206). In other words, the passing from one generation to the next is the subject of a different book.

After discussing the birth of the hero, the narrator of *Ponthus* then turns to the event which sets in motion its two prominent narrative patterns, that of the hero’s exile and return (which is overlaid with a pattern of separation and reunion in relationship to the women in his life) and that of defeating the Sultan’s three younger sons (see Figure 3 on the next page). When Ponthus is fifteen, the Sultan of Babylon solves the problem of what his four sons will inherit by sending the three younger ones out with armies of thirty thousand men each. The Sultan pays the armies for three years, as well as providing any ships and other necessary materials. He tells them that the one who “best doos and moste conquerys and moste enhauntes the lawe of Mahoun” will inherit the bulk of his goods (*King Ponthus* 1–2), while the eldest son inherits the empire. Ponthus’s first exile begins when one of the Sultan’s sons, Brodas, arrives in Galicia with his thirty thousand men and conquers the country, killing the king. Although the queen and

Events of Exile/Return	Events of Separation/Reunion		Encounters with the Sultan's Sons
		Ponthus is born.	
		Galicia is attacked by Brodas.	SS 1a
ER 1a	SR 1a	Ponthus and companions sail to Brittany.	
		Ponthus lives in Herland's household for three years; Sidone is attracted to him.	
		Karodas attacks Brittany; Ponthus kills him.	SS 2
ER 2a	SR 2a	Guenelete convinces Sidone that Ponthus does not love her; she rejects Ponthus.	
ER 2b	SR 2b	After a year of jousting, Ponthus invites King of Brittany and Sidone to banquet and returns to court.	
ER 3a	SR 3a	Guenelete engineers break between King of Brittany and Ponthus; Ponthus goes to England.	
		Corbatan attacks England; Ponthus kills him.	SS 3
ER 3b	SR 3b	Ponthus returns to prevent Sidone's marriage to Duke of Burgundy.	
		Ponthus and Sidone are betrothed.	
ER 1b	SR 4a	Ponthus gathers army and reclaims Galicia.	SS 1b
	SR 1b	Ponthus's mother attends celebratory feast.	
	SR 4b	Ponthus returns to prevent Sidone's marriage to Guenelete.	
		Ponthus and Sidone die after long life.	

Figure 3. Patterns in the Plot Structure of *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*.

the prince escape separately (setting in motion the first separation/reunion pattern), after two days of hiding, Ponthus determines that to starve to death is simply a form of suicide, and he and his thirteen companions leave the safety of the cave where they have been hidden. When the children are brought before Brodas, they are saved by the machinations of a Galician knight named Patrice, who has pretended to convert in order to have some say in the treatment of his fellow Galicians. Patrice convinces Brodas to let him oversee the deaths of the children by drowning and then places them on a fully-furnished ship, which carries them to Brittany.

During this first exile, Ponthus and his companions, including his cousin Pollides and his eventual betrayer Guenelete, are welcomed by the King of Brittany, who arranges for them to be taken into the households of various Breton barons. Ponthus stays with Herland, the seneschal, and is much admired by the court, including the king's daughter, Sidone.

Three years after Brodas conquered Galicia and after Ponthus was forced to flee, Karodas, another of the Sultan's sons, lands in Brittany; this is the second step in the narrative pattern involving the Sultan's sons. This time, Ponthus is able to fight. He accepts the challenge to a one-on-one battle from Karodas's messenger, is knighted by the king, and goes off to the battle, which Ponthus wins against all expectations except his own. While the body of the slain Saracen is returned to his lord, Ponthus advises the Bretons to form an army, which they do. The Breton army engages the Saracens in a great battle, and Ponthus kills Karodas by striking "so grete a stroke that he fellyd hum to the grounde—that he brake his nek" (*King Ponthus* 29).

The general admiration for Ponthus, however, is not shared by his companion Guenelete, who becomes envious of him and sets in motion the second period of exile and return and of separation and reunion by convincing one of Sidone's ladies to tell her that Ponthus does not love her. Sidone tells Ponthus no more than that she no longer trusts him, and he decides to leave the court secretly. He refuses to go too far away because the king is old and might need his help,

so he sets up a tent in a forest and then has a message carried throughout France that on each Tuesday of the year through Pentecost “the blake knight with armes whyte” (40) will joust with another knight, the loser to be sent to the most beautiful woman in Brittany. Many famous knights come to try their luck, but Ponthus defeats all of them and sends them to Sidone. At the end of the year, Ponthus throws a banquet for all whom he has defeated, including giving gifts to the best jousting knight, and invites the King of Brittany and Sidone. They realize who he is, chastise him for being gone so long without word, and welcome him back to the court, ending both the exile and the separation.

Guenelete, of course, is not pleased with the return of Ponthus, and he once again forces Ponthus into exile, this time by telling the king that Ponthus intends to seduce Sidone. Guenelete encourages the king to insist that Ponthus swear an oath that this is not so, knowing that the tradition of Galicia is that a king’s son should never swear an oath when judicial combat is possible. Because of Guenelete’s machinations, the king refuses to allow Ponthus to prove his innocence by arms, and Ponthus refuses to swear an oath, despite Sidone’s encouragement, because doing so will dishonor him. Ponthus and Sidone agree to separate for seven years, and he leaves Brittany for England, his third exile and the beginning of the third separation.

During this third exile, Ponthus lives in England and takes on another name, Le Surdite de Droyte Voy. The French version explains the name as “*the accused one* who sought in vain the *straight path* of vindication by combat” (Mather xi, italics in original). While in England, Ponthus becomes as much a part of the English court as he was of the Breton court. He is befriended by the younger of the two English princes and loved by the elder of the two English princesses. When the King of Ireland makes war on England, Ponthus captures him and then advises the King of England to marry the younger of the princesses to the King of Ireland, a solution that everyone finds acceptable.

The other narrative pattern, the deaths of the Sultan's sons, again intrudes. The Sultan's third adventuring son, Corbatan, lands in England, and during the battle both of the English princes are killed. The younger, Ponthus's friend, is mortally wounded by Corbatan but survives long enough for Ponthus to show him the Saracen's head before he dies. The lords of England recommend that the king ask Ponthus to marry his eldest daughter, variously referred to as Gener or Geneuer, and to assume the throne after him. Ponthus, of course, declines, and the court recognizes that his heart is already taken.

As the seven years agreed upon by Ponthus and Sidone near their end, Guenelete's machinations allow him to replace Herland as seneschal. In this position, he accepts a bribe from the King of Burgundy in return for Sidone's hand in marriage. Because she cannot simply reject the marriage, Sidone instead asks to have it postponed until Pentecost, which marks the end of the seven years, and she sends Herland's son to search for Ponthus. After being attacked in an English forest, thereby being delayed until almost too late, Herland's son finally arrives at the English court, where he recognizes Ponthus and delivers his message.

The third exile and period of separation ends with Ponthus returning to the Breton court on the day of the wedding disguised as a beggar. He invites himself to the wedding feast as one of the thirteen poor men who eat at a table near the bride and to whom she gives a drink from a golden cup. When it is his turn to drink, Ponthus drops a ring into the cup so that Sidone will know him. He then finds arms and fights in the wedding tournament, where he knocks the King of Burgundy from his saddle. Unfortunately, the king's horse falls into a pit, trapping the king under its weight and killing him.

Ponthus reveals himself; the story of the past seven years is told, and then Ponthus and Sidone are betrothed. However, Ponthus vows that he will not complete the marriage until he has regained his country from Brodas. He raises an army and sails to Galicia, marking the end of the

first exile and the beginning of the fourth period of separation. After landing in Galicia, Ponthus meets Patrice and his uncle, the Earl of Destrue, in a hidden chapel, and together they develop a plan for retaking the city. During the battle, Ponthus kills Brodas, completing the narrative pattern involving the Sultan's sons. Following Patrice's advice, Ponthus sends letters to the Saracen captains, apparently from Brodas, asking them to come to the city. In this way, the Galicians retake their country. Ponthus is then crowned king, and during his coronation feast his uncle recognizes Ponthus's mother as one of the thirteen poor people at the feast. Mother and son are reunited, completing the first pattern of separation and return, and then, following a dream, Ponthus prepares to return to Brittany, leaving his uncle as lieutenant and Patrice as seneschal and constable, ordering them both to pay attention to the commands of his mother.

Back in Brittany, Guenelete has produced forged letters claiming that Ponthus has been killed and ordering Sidone to marry Guenelete. Sidone, remembering that Guenelete has previously falsely reported Ponthus's death, retreats to a tower with some of her people and with food and drink. Guenelete responds by imprisoning the king and then convincing the people of his version of the story. Sidone continues to refuse him until the food and drink have run out and her father's life is in jeopardy. Ponthus arrives in Brittany in time for the wedding of Sidone and Guenelete, completing the fourth and last pattern of separation and return. He and his men enter the hall for the feast disguised as common people dancing, and then Ponthus reveals himself and kills Guenelete. After finally wedding Sidone, Ponthus helps the King of England solve England's succession problem by recommending his cousin Pollides as a husband for Gener, a recommendation which the king happily accepts. He then returns to Brittany and Galicia, where Ponthus and Sidone live long good lives before dying.

All three narrative patterns (exile/return, separation/reunion, and defeating the sultan's sons) are initiated by the same event early in the work, Brodas's defeat of Ponthus's father.

These particular elements (all noted as 1a in Figure 3 on page 40) are not resolved until near the end of the narrative. Although they begin at the same narrative point, they are not resolved at the same narrative point. That Ponthus's return from exile and his reunion with his mother are two separate narrative events indicates that the exile/return pattern is different from the separation/reunion pattern. Another sign that these patterns are separate is that the last separation/reunion cycle (noted SR 4a and SR 4b in Figure 3) contains no elements of an exile/return pattern.

The plot structure of *The Three Kings' Sons* is very different. The simplest description of the plot—the crown princes of France, Scotland, and England become close friends while helping Sicily repel the invading Turks—provides the pattern for the narrative (see Figure 4 on the following page). Many events are trebled, allowing a number of possibilities to be presented rather than just one.

After the opening chapters present the births of Philip and Iolante, the primary hero and heroine of the narrative, the action is set in motion when Iolante is fourteen. The Grand Turk asks for Iolante to wed for his eldest son, and when Alfour, the King of Sicily, refuses, the Turks wage war against Sicily. The Turks are so successful that Alfour must ask for help from his fellow Christian kings. Although Philip urges his father to aid Sicily, his father refuses, as do the kings of England, Scotland, and Spain (Alfour's father-in-law) and the Emperor. Nonetheless, one by one, each of the three princes leave home for Sicily.

The first to leave home is Philip, who runs away to Spain, calling himself Le Despurveu—the “ill off” one (*Three* 210). The rigors of the journey and a six-month illness render him no longer recognizable as the Prince of France. Meanwhile, Alfour sends his seneschal, Ferant, to Spain to ask, again, for aid. Philip meets Ferant and becomes part of his household, where Philip is known for his fighting ability and even captures the Grand Turk's brother, Ferabras, King of Persia. He eventually is introduced to the Sicilian court by Ferant, and Iolante renames him Le

Philip	David	Humphrey	Other
Philip is born.			Alfour marries; Iolante born.
Leaves home for Spain and Sicily.			Grand Turk invades Sicily.
Becomes part of Ferant's household, and begins fighting Turks.	Leads navy to Sicily and shipwrecked.		
	Becomes part of Ferant's household.	Leaves home; captured by Turks.	
			Ferabras agrees to a truce and to release Christians.
		Rescued by Ferabras; sent to Sicily; becomes part of Ferant's household.	
Captured by Turks.	Capture Orcays in response.		
Philip rescued by David, Humphrey, and others.			
			Grand Turk killed; Alfour named Emperor.
All three leave for home, then return for tournament.			
Marries Iolante.	Marries Humphrey's sister.	Marries Orcays's sister.	
All live happily and children prosper.			

Figure 4. Plot Structure of *The Three Kings' Sons*

Surnome, “well named” (Trivedi), because she finds Le Despurveu to be “gyuen you with wronge” (*Three* 37). Subsequently, the Sicilian court subsequently knows him by this name.

The second prince leaves home when the kings of France, England, and Scotland agree to raise an army to fight for Sicily, with the eldest son of the King of Scotland, David, in command. The Christian navy arrives at Sicily, but does not know exactly where to land, and so it is met by the Turk’s army rather than by Alfour’s. Once the Sicilians and the navy make contact, however, the navy is swamped by a storm. David is shipwrecked; he and his companions are surrounded by Turks, and David survives only because the Grand Turk’s son, Orcays, saves him. Orcays remembers that an old tradition says that a prince has the option of releasing the first man he takes as prisoner with all the equipment that man might need, and so he releases David, supplies him, and has him taken to Size, where Ferant and an army of two thousand men (including Philip) await the Turkish army. David, calling himself Athys, is welcomed by Philip, and the two become friends.

The third prince now leaves home. Humphrey, the King of England’s only son, also wishes to go to Sicily even though his father refuses to allow him to do so. He decides to get a ship and sail to Sicily anyway, and his friends agree to help him, sailing away with him when the time comes. Unfortunately, they are driven by a storm to land at a port controlled by the Turks and are imprisoned. Meanwhile, Ferabras negotiates a truce between the Turks and the Sicilians which includes his own release. Part of Ferabras’s agreement for his freedom is that he will release any Christian prisoners in his or his brother’s lands. When Ferabras and the Grand Turk arrive in the town where Humphrey is being held, Ferabras releases Humphrey, has him nursed back to health, and then arranges for him (who is calling himself Ector) to be taken safely to Sicily, advising the young man to seek out Le Surnome, i.e., Philip, because he believes the

young men could become friends. When Humphrey arrives in Sicily, he, like Philip and David, ends up in the household of Ferant and so becomes friends with the others.

The playing out of three options for events does not apply to the end of the war. The truce Ferabras has negotiated lasts for one year. When that year is over, the Grand Turk returns to Sicily, determined to defeat Alfour by besieging Naples. When Ferant and his men, including the three princes, emerge from Naples to fight, Philip is captured by the Turks. Ferant, David, and Humphrey capture Orcays, planning to exchange him for Philip. The Grand Turk, however, makes plans to hang Philip, a plan he continues to act on, even after Ferant suggests that he will hang Orcays in return. David and Humphrey, accompanied by Ferant's other men, ride out and rescue Philip as he is being led to the gallows. The Grand Turk's behavior and the Sicilians' triumph in rescuing Philip demoralize the Turkish army. The Turkish council advises the Grand Turk to lift the siege, but before he can act on this advice, the Sicilians attack once more, and the Grand Turk is beheaded by some Sicilian foot soldiers. Alfour retakes all the towns in Sicily except two on the coast, which he decides to leave for the following summer. Meanwhile, the Emperor Frederick dies, and Alfour is chosen as his successor. While Alfour is away being crowned, Philip, David, and Humphrey recapture one of the coastal towns, and Alfour then retakes the other. Alfour and Orcays come to terms, including a three-year truce. Following a tournament in celebration of the truce (where Philip, David, Humphrey, and Orcays do the best), Alfour declares that the following May 15 will be the first day of a three-day tournament for the hand of Iolante. All four young men plan to try for Iolante. Orcays leaves first, and then Philip, David, and Humphrey also leave, after promising Alfour that they will return for the tournament.

Once again, we have three variations on the events of the hero's return to his home. First is Philip. During Philip's time in Sicily, his father, believing his son dead, has died, leaving the Duke of Burgundy as regent. Philip reveals himself to his uncle and arranges for the Duke to

attend the tournament. They do not tell anyone else that Philip is still alive at this point. Humphrey returns to England to discover that his father is dying. He sends word to the earl of Warwick of his return, and Warwick brings him to the king. Father and son are reconciled, and Humphrey is reconciled to the fathers of his companions, and then the king dies. After his coronation, Humphrey prepares to leave for the tournament. David arranges with some men of the court that his father learn of his presence in stages, so as not to cause death by shock. The two are reconciled, and the king arranges for David to go to the tournament in Sicily. However, before David can leave, his father takes ill and dies, and David is crowned King of Scotland. David still travels to Sicily, where he is welcomed by Alfour and chastised for having hidden his identity earlier. The next to arrive for the tournament is Orcays, and then Humphrey. Philip arrives as part of the retinue of the Duke of Burgundy, and when the tournament begins, he wears armor like his uncle's, so the crowd believes that it is the Duke who is fighting. However, at the end of the second day, Ferant forces him to reveal himself, and his uncle explains that Philip is the rightful King of France.

The marriages of the three heroes are also variations on the possibilities. The most exciting is Philip's winning of Iolante. On the third day, Philip once again wins, and three days later he and Iolante are married. The feasting lasts for fifteen days, during which Humphrey falls in love with Orcays's sister, who finally agrees to convert to Christianity after a day-long debate with several clerics. She and Humphrey marry before the party breaks up. Humphrey, his wife, and her brother journey to England; David, to Scotland; and the others, to France to see Philip's mother. They then travel to England, where they meet all the others and where Orcays and David marry Humphrey's sisters. In the end, Alfour dies, leaving Sicily to Philip, and Orcays dies without children, so his English wife returns to her brother's home. Philip, David and Humphrey all have many children and happy lives.

The primary similarity in the plots of *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons* lies in the narration of the marriage of the hero's parents and his own birth. Repetition continues to play a role in both works, although, as with form, repetition does not function in the same way in each work. In *Ponthus*, the repetition can be seen in the narrative patterns, where the same sort of event happens to the hero multiple times. In *The Three Kings' Sons*, the repetition continues to be most clearly seen in the variations on an event as each of the heroes experiences it.

Narrative Voice

The third element is narrative voice. The narrators of both romances are omniscient and generally speak in the third person; both also directly comment on the action of the stories they tell. The narrator of *Ponthus* explicitly takes sides during the battle between the Bretons and the Saracens, “about that tyme thre batells of oure people were comyn to gedre in the side of the Saresyns [. . .] and our people to putt fyre to their luyng” (*King Ponthus* 27), while the narrator of *The Three Kings' Sons* comments about the loss suffered by the joint French, Scottish, and English fleet due to miscommunication between the fleet and the Sicilians, “I shall leue of this sorowe, for the writyng therof annoieth me [. . .]” (*Three* 46).

The narrator of *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* claims a didactic purpose for the work—“Now I wolle you tell a noble storye, wherof a man may lerne mony goode ensamples, and youge men may here the goode dedes of aunciente people that dide mucche goode and worschip in their days [. . .]” (*King Ponthus* 1)—but leaves it up to the reader to understand the lesson. The narrator of *The Three Kings' Sons* makes no such general claim for the work, but intersperses the narrative with comments that indicate a wish for the reader to learn lessons about how to be a good leader. For example, he points out the lesson to be learned from the loss of life

resulting from the assumptions on the part of the Sicilians and the joint fleet that each was responsible for communications: “For lakke of sendyng eche of them to other, grete harme befille, wherof was grete pite” (50). The narrative voices of both romances reinforce the didactic elements of the works, suggesting another possible characteristic of the genre of the Middle English prose romance.

Setting

The fourth element is setting. Both *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings’ Sons* are set in a number of countries. The first ranges from Galicia in northwest Spain to Brittany to England, with two short asides in Babylon. The second contains events in France (particularly Paris), England, Scotland, Spain (particularly Toledo), Sicily, and several unnamed towns in the Turkish-held area of the eastern Mediterranean. The majority of the action in *Ponthus* is split between Brittany and England, the two places where the hero lives during his exiles. The primary setting for *The Three Kings’ Sons* is Sicily, though the heroes return permanently to the lands of their births. The geography of northern France in *Ponthus* is accurate (Mather xvii), as is the geography of Sicily in *The Three Kings’ Sons* (Grinberg 134).

Balancing this spatial realism is a more imaginary temporal setting. *Ponthus* never specifies a time in which it takes place, while *The Three Kings’ Sons* claims that it tells the story of a time

Aftir the crucifyng of oure lord Ihesu crist, and that the holy cristen feith was magnified and augmented in alle the Reaumes that at this day be cristened / and that were founde in oure holy feith by the Apostells, and aftir by the holy doctoures / that same feith of oure lord Ihesu crist was so moche honoured and

kepte that alle cristen Reaumes were in so good tranquillite and pees, that there was no warre a-monges them. (*Three* 1)

In addition, time is rather fluid in both works. While the narrator of *Ponthus* specifies that Ponthus is fifteen years old when he is driven from Galicia and that he does not return for fifteen years, the work does not account for all those years. Ponthus spends three years in Herland's household, one year in the forest following Guenelete's first betrayal, and seven years in England during his third exile, leaving four years unaccounted for. Likewise, even when time spans are specified in *The Three Kings' Sons*, it is often difficult to determine how they relate to one another. For example, the narrator tells of the birth and education of Philip, commenting that the prince is nineteen years old, before turning to Alfour's marriage and the birth of Iolante. The beginning of the trouble with the Turks is specified as happening when Iolante is fourteen years old, but there is no way to determine if this is supposed to equate to the time when Philip is nineteen years old or not. Equally, while it is clear that Philip does not immediately leave for Sicily, there is no way to determine how many years pass between Philip first urging his father to aid Sicily and his flight from Paris when he is twenty-five.

There is an additional layer to setting, however, beyond the specific places named in the work. These are more abstract settings which indicate that both narratives are more urban than rural. Even when events occur in natural areas (the cave where Ponthus and his companions hide from Brodas's men, for example, or the forest where Ponthus hosts a year's worth of jousts), they are overlaid with a metaphorical, urban setting—that of the court. Much of the action of both narratives occurs in royal courts or in the equally confined space of military camps, often overseen by royalty or its direct subordinates. The military camps of *Ponthus* always have at least one royal in charge, while those in *The Three Kings' Sons* vary, depending on the circumstances. In those cases where a camp is not overseen by a royal, the person in charge is

Ferant, acting as the king's seneschal. This is related to the greater degree of realism in *The Three Kings' Sons*: of course, the king cannot be in charge at every walled town or castle in the midst of a war fought largely by sieges. Even during the final siege of Naples, Alfour is not in charge of the military operations. Ferant is responsible for the defenders of Naples, and a general has been appointed to oversee the Sicilian forces outside Naples.

Another important and shared setting is the battlefield. The battles of *Ponthus* are less realistic than the battles of *The Three Kings' Sons*, where it is clear that a city here or a town there may change hands. *Ponthus* contains none of the plotting or sense of a country under siege that pervades the battles of the other narrative. In fact, the descriptions of the battles in *Ponthus* resemble the descriptions of the tournament, offering opportunities to celebrate the great families of France by using their names, as in this sentence: "The third batell was taken to gouerne to the Erle of Mayne and barounes and knyghtes of Aniou, Guyllen de Roches, Andrewe de La Tour" (24). In *The Three Kings' Sons*, on the other hand, battles are not always organized beforehand. Near the end, the Sicilian general attacks the Turks from behind without the Sicilians in Naples knowing of the attack beforehand: "Than was the crie and the noise so moche, that they herd it in-to the Towne than they opened the gates and fferaunt and his company went first out, and went streight vpon the Turkes wacche, whiche they lightly destroyed" (141).

This examination of setting in both works shows that both are interested on some level in mirroring the world of their readers. However, even though the geography of *Ponthus* mirrors that of Brittany, the work is considerably less realistic in other areas. *The Three Kings' Sons*, with its emphasis on fifteenth-century siege warfare, relies even less on the fantastic than does *Ponthus*. This interest in geographical verisimilitude and the emphasis on organized fighting rather than random duels may be additional characteristics of the genre.

Character

The fifth element to be examined is character. The characters of both *Ponthus* and *The Three Kings' Sons* tend towards high social status, and many of the characters are of royal birth. The characterizations in both tend toward the stereotypical—the heroes are brave and accomplished, the heroines are beautiful and virtuous, and the villains are dishonest and despicable. The multiplication of heroes complicates the presentation of *The Three Kings' Sons* because not only Philip, but also David and Humphrey and perhaps Orcays represent the hero of the narrative. As stereotypical as they may be, the characters of *The Three Kings' Sons* are presented as having more fully developed interior lives than those of *Ponthus*. Grinberg comments, “The most powerful passages in the *Three Kings' Sons* turn out to be dialogue, usually spirited and expressive of character [. . .]” (2). This can be seen in the passage below, where the King of Scotland worries about whether to allow his son David to lead the joint forces of France, Scotland, and England to Sicily.

The kyng of Scottes [. . .] that neur coude put this matier out of his mynde,
 thynkyng yn hym self that it was in maner leide vnto hym by the kyng of ffrance
 & of Englund / & sith auised hym by the .iij. estates of his land / & so restid it but
 at him self; wherfore hym thought, as a man constreyned by honour, he might not
 refuse in this viage to sende forth his sone. And then ayen aftir thies
 consideracions he wolde argue yn hym self to the contrary / thinkyng, “this arnee
 may not be put on me without grete charge / I am the leest of the .iij. kynges, &
 the despenses ar like to tourne on me / it behoueth me to take grete hede that I
 haue a notable aide of eche of them / it behoueth alway that my sone be
 acompaynyed with people of this land, & that the grettist company come with
 hym, whiche may not be without grete empouerishment vnto this land, wherof y

am nowe full sorowfull / And if y shold sende forth myn eldest sone / whiche is
 the thinge yn this worlde that y best loue / yif he diede, y shold be so sorowfull /
 that y sholde neuir aftir haue ioie nor rest in my herte / wherfore y wote not wele
 what y may sey / But y pray the, my creatore, to counsell me aftir thy pleasir, & to
 myn honoure /” thus all nyght stroue he & argued in his mynde / & wist not what
 wey he might holde[.] (26)

The demands of honor and of parental love conflict here, as expressed in the king’s conversation with himself.

In *Ponthus*, the group of characters tends to be very simple. There are the hero, his lady love, the villain, the lover’s father, and the people whom he meets during his adventures. In *The Three Kings’ Sons*, on the other hand, there are multiple heroes, all of whom have adventures and meet people during those adventures. The heroine also multiplies from Iolante, the princess on whom they are all focused, to more than one princess in order to provide marriages for each of the heroes. Also, the secondary characters of Ferant and Ferabras are rather more completely drawn than the secondary characters of *Ponthus*, such as Herland.

Since the character of the hero is of particular interest in the narratives (these are, after all, the stories of these heroes), we will begin discussion of specific characterizations by examining the heroes. The following discussion will, in modern fashion, refer to the characters by a single name (e.g., Ponthus); the narrators of both works refer to the characters who assume pseudonyms by the name by which the character introduces himself to the community he is in (e.g., while he is in England, Ponthus is consistently referred to as Surdite).²

² In the most complicated case, *The Three Kings’ Sons*, Philip is referred to as Le Despurveu until Iolante renames him, at which point he is referred to as Surnome until he is reintroduced as King Philip of France.

Ponthus is presented as perfect. In spite of his martial prowess, he remains humble. Although the court of Brittany knows that Ponthus is a king's son, he does not think of himself as a worthy candidate for Sidone's hand since she outranks him, for she is a king's daughter while he is "a kynges son disheret" (*King Ponthus* 15). Even after they fall in love, they remain chaste. In fact, the narrator and the characters more than once insist that the relationship between the hero and his lady has not been defiled by sex: "So they loued mytch to gedre and of trewe, clene love" (32). Another of Ponthus's virtues is generosity. When he captures the Saracens' treasure ships, he shares the bounty among his knights and men; after the year of jousting, all the knights he fought return for a great feast where he presents to the best jouster a "sper and goganoun and a cercle of golde full of margarites" and to the best swordsman "a swerd hernyshed, with gold fringed" (40). While Ponthus values honesty, he is willing to lie for a good cause. This is shown, along with early signs of the strength of will and of the cunning that will stand him in good stead during his exile, when he and the other children are captured by Brodas. Ponthus decides that two days of hiding from the Babylonians is enough, for if they are going to die, it would be better to die by the sword than by starvation since they would then be responsible for their own deaths. When they are captured shortly after leaving the cave where they have been hiding, Ponthus hides who they are from Brodas by claiming that they are children whom King Tiber raised "for the loue of Gode" and for their service when grown as hound or hawk keepers or as upper servants "in hall and in chaumbre" (3-4).

After Guenelete creates trouble by telling one of Sidone's ladies that Ponthus loves a woman other than Sidone, causing her to reject her lover, Ponthus refuses to go too far from Brittany just in case he is needed, but he also realizes that he must do something during his exile. He devises an elaborate plan for a series of one-on-one battles with the notables of France, which in the end solidifies his reputation as a fighter. He disguises himself as "the blake knyght with

armes whyte” (40) and has a dwarf announce at all the courts and tournaments in France that he will battle with one man each Tuesday for the next year. The candidates for each month will be selected by an old damsel and a hermit (actually Ponthus in disguise) who will announce the winners by firing gold-fletched arrows at the candidates’ shields, the order of the arrows showing which week of the month a knight is expected to return. The rules of the games are simple, a single pass with a spear and then a battle with swords. Ponthus wins all fifty-two contests.

In addition to his more worldly virtues, *Ponthus* presents its hero in obliquely hagiographic terms, such as being the leader of a band of thirteen followers. When Gunelete, his traitorous follower, makes the decision to betray him, his action is clearly reminiscent of Judas’s: “Bot envy that neuer lakked was putt in oon of his xiiij fellawes of his contrey, that was a grete speker and a flaterer and couth mony fals engynes” (34).³ In *The Three Kings’ Sons*, the primacy of Philip as hero is clear—he is the only one we follow from the beginning of his life. If he is presented as perhaps slightly better than the other princes (David, Humphrey and even Orcays) at certain courtly skills, the various young heroes are equally virtuous. Unlike Ponthus, who enters his first battle certain he can win against insurmountable odds, the heroes of *The Three Kings’ Sons* do not necessarily win, as can be seen by David’s capture following his shipwreck, Humphrey’s capture and time in prison, and Philip’s capture by the Turks outside the walls of Naples. In this world, young men need to learn how to play their role in the wider world, in contrast to the way Ponthus at eighteen is suddenly named constable of Brittany. In fact, Ferant

³ While the number usually associated with the disciples is twelve (the lists in Matthew and Luke, for example), in Acts, following the betrayal and suicide of Judas, a new disciple is selected, so the total number is twelve plus one (thirteen). This twelve plus one enumeration also occurs in counting the twelve tribes of Israel, where the most common listing omits the tribe of Levi (the priests).

chastises Philip when the young man's desire to participate in battles conflicts with Philip's social responsibilities. While religious devotion is important—Philip, for example, considers his religious duty when making the decision to run away from home—there are no hagiographic overtones in *The Three Kings' Sons* as there are in *Ponthus*.

The basic goodness of the multiple heroes can be seen in their interactions with others. For example, as mentioned earlier, Orcays befriends David (who is calling himself Athys) after he captures him. In response to this friendship, Orcays talks his father into honoring an old tradition that allows a prince the option of releasing the first man he takes as prisoner with all the equipment that man might need. Having received reluctant permission to do this, Orcays releases David, supplies him, and has him taken to Size, where Ferant, Philip, and an army of two thousand men (including Philip) await the Turkish army. When the Turks finally attack Size, David captures Orcays and then, in return for the other prince's earlier kindness, releases him.

The princesses, Sidone and Iolante, are also an interesting contrast. Sidone is more active than Iolante. Sidone initiates the relationship with Ponthus and sets most of the conditions for the relationship. She is not, by any means, perfect. Her greatest failure is believing Guenelete's lies as passed on by her serving woman and refusing to believe Ponthus. However, when Guenelete sets in motion the last of his betrayals by forging letters that proclaim Ponthus's death and command Sidone to marry Guenelete, Sidone remembers that Guenelete has reported Ponthus's death falsely in the past. She retreats to a tower with some of her people, supplied with food and drink. She shows herself able to do more than simply respond to the situation; she can make plans to protect herself. Guenelete responds by imprisoning the king and then convincing the people of his version of the story. Sidone, however, continues to refuse him until the food and drink have run out and her father's life is in jeopardy; to save the life of her aging father, she finally agrees to marry Guenelete. Iolante, on the other hand, does very little outside of group

behavior; she does not indicate a particular preference for Philip. Her clearest action is renaming Le Despurveu to Le Surnome, but for the most part, Iolante is simply one of the women of the court watching events rather than initiating them.

The villains of both narratives behave in ways which are clearly seen as dishonorable. Guenelete is envious of Ponthus, wanting what Ponthus has for himself. He attempts to tear down Ponthus physically and metaphorically. Guenelete's greed is shown by his willingness to use his position for his own purposes, as when he takes bribes once he becomes seneschal of Brittany. Guenelete schemes to advance his position, which ultimately leads to his death at Ponthus's hand.

The Grand Turk of *The Three Kings' Sons*, on the other hand, is wrathful and irrational in his anger. Both Orcays and the Grand Turk's brother, Ferabras, are able to force the Grand Turk into behaviors which are not driven by this destructive desire, but they are indeed forced behaviors, and the Grand Turk's stubborn refusal to deal with the Christians except under duress ultimately hastens his death. First, his refusal to honor the agreement about releasing Christian prisoners that was part of the truce leading to Ferabras's release, which is illustrated by his attempt to remove Humphrey from Ferabras's house by force, results in Ferabras withdrawing to Persia, upset at his treatment by his brother. Then, after the war has resumed (without support from Persia), he values his revenge, the chance to act upon his anger, over the life of his son. After Philip is captured by the Turks, Ferant, David, and Humphrey capture Orcays, assuming that they can swap him for Philip. The Grand Turk, however, refuses and proceeds with plans to hang Philip by having a gallows built within sight of the town. Ferant then has a gallows built on the town wall, implying that he plans to hang Orcays in response, while preparing his men for a raid on the Turkish camp. The Grand Turk's refusal to halt Philip's execution in the face of the threatened death of his son and heir demoralizes his army. Orcays begins to negotiate with

Alfour over an end to the war after his father's death, an event which occurs shortly thereafter, when the Grand Turk is beheaded by some of the Sicilian foot soldiers in the next attack.

Like the princesses, the heroines' fathers provide an interesting contrast, but here it is the character in *Ponthus* who is less active. The King of Brittany in *Ponthus* is a rather weak man. For example, Guenelete tricks the king into promising he will not reveal who has given him advice, thereby allowing Guenelete to arrange for Ponthus's exile from Brittany without fear of being caught in a lie. The king also believes what Guenelete says about the death of Ponthus, even though he should, like Sidone, remember that Guenelete has lied in the past. To be fair, the King of Brittany is also presented as old and physically weak, a man quickly nearing the end of his life and worrying about the disposition of his kingdom. Alfour of Sicily, on the other hand, is a very important character in his own right. Although the final decisions are clearly made by Alfour, he seeks advice before taking action. For example, when Ferabras proposes the one-year truce, Alfour appoints two members of his court to argue the pros and cons before the council, insuring that he makes the best possible decision. Alfour also recognizes that he cannot be in charge of all the details of ruling and protecting Sicily. When the Grand Turk returns at the end of the one-year truce to besiege Naples, Alfour and his council put Ferant in charge of defending Naples (even though the king remains in the city), garrison the other towns, move the people into protected towns, and determine which general will be in charge of the troops outside Naples. It is this care for his people and his success against great odds in resisting the Turks which are valued by those who elect him Emperor.

While Ferant and Ferabras are secondary characters (the latter disappears from the narrative following his return to Persia), they do not simply function as extensions of or foils for the more important characters. One example of these characters' importance in the courtly world of *The Three Kings' Sons* is their discussion about whether it is possible to end the war. They

determine that negotiating a ceasefire will not be possible—the Grand Turk will insist on terms to which Alfour will not agree. Both are intelligent and trusted to make decisions, even if the Grand Turk later resents some of the terms Ferabras has negotiated. Ferant also functions as a mentor to the three European princes, particularly to Philip, who is with him longest. This contrasts with the presentation of Herland in *Ponthus*. Although the seneschal is presented as trustworthy, he is rebuked for making decisions on his own when he substitutes Pollides for Ponthus at a meeting with Sidone. Even after the king has removed Herland from power, however, he remains loyal to Sidone and helps her recall Ponthus by sending his son to find Ponthus to ask him to return to Brittany.

Another feature that suggests something about character but also something of the way in which each work views the world is the presentation of religious conversion. Some Saracens in *Ponthus* are merely neutral, but none are presented as positive characters. In *The Three Kings' Sons*, on the other hand, there are positive Turkish characters, particularly Orcays before his conversion or Ferabras, who honors his word to release Christian prisoners even when no one except himself would be aware of his failure to do so. Religious conversion is seen quite differently in each work. The conversions in *Ponthus* are those of Sir Patrice and the Earl of Destrue, Ponthus's uncle, who only claim to have converted to Islam as part of their political machinations to protect the people of the country until the rightful king can be restored to the throne. Patrice's feigned conversion even allows him to ensure that the prince survives because it allows him to get the boy out of the country. The conversions in *The Three Kings' Sons* are not feigned, and the presentation of conversion is much more personal and more deeply held. Orcays determines that if he must become Christian in order to have a chance to marry Iolante, he will do so, but he does not publicly commit himself to conversion until it is necessary in order to participate in the tournament. Even though he does not win Iolante, he maintains his new belief

until his death. Orcays's sister, on the other hand, when faced with converting in order to marry Humphrey, takes a long time to do so. Although she has fallen in love with Humphrey, she agrees to convert to Christianity only after long theological conversations with Christian doctors of the faith.

While the similarities between the characters in both works do not particularly suggest avenues for further study, the differences in the number of heroes and in the attitude of each work towards its non-Christian characters provide contrasts worth considering in terms of the possible range of options available to the genre. In addition, the presentations of Ponthus and Philip reinforce the greater degree of realism in the presentation of *The Three Kings' Sons* since Philip is still clearly learning while Ponthus is simply presented as perfect.

Connection to Other Works

The sixth element looks at the connections a work has with other works. Many Middle English secular narratives are translations or adaptations of earlier materials as in the case of *Ponthus* and *The Three Kings' Sons*, both of which are Middle English translations of French narratives. While it is possible for a translation to be so different as to qualify as a separate work, in both of these cases, the French and English texts belong to the same work, that is, the same intellectual construct. This is not to say that the English narratives are simply word-for-word translations of the French narratives. The English *Ponthus* has “condensed its story and omitted many proper names, long descriptions, and various unessential details” (Krappe xl), and the English *The Three Kings' Sons* likewise “shortens and tightens much that is prolix in the original” (Grinberg 2). The latter remains a largely French narrative. Except for the single Middle English manuscript, all other manuscripts (seven) and printed versions (ten) are French (1). *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, on the other hand, was popular throughout much of

northern Europe for many decades. In addition to the single remaining Middle English manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 185), there are two leaves of a *Ponthus* manuscript in Oxford, Bodleian MS Douce 384. There was also at least one printed edition, produced by Wynkyn de Worde in 1511. Only one complete copy of this edition survives, though a surviving fragment of four leaves is probably from this same printing (Krappe xxxi). Not surprisingly, most of the remaining manuscripts are in French, with twenty-nine manuscripts (three of which are fragmentary). Three of these French manuscripts are in England, including London, British Library MS Royal 15.E.VI, which was given to Margaret of Anjou by John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury, “probably upon the occasion of her marriage in 1445” to England’s Henry VI (Krappe xv). There were, in addition, nine French printed editions, of which few copies survive. *Ponthus* retained its popularity longest in the German-speaking Empire. The narrative was translated into German by Eleanor, daughter of James I of Scotland and wife of Sigismund, duke of Austria, sometime between 1448 and 1456. There survive only a half-dozen manuscripts of the German translation, but there were some twenty printed editions from 1483 to 1769. There is evidence as well of translations into Low German and Dutch. There are also some ten manuscripts containing the Icelandic *Pontus-Rimus*, a sixteenth-century translation most likely based on the German version of the narrative.

While *The Three Kings’ Sons* has no connections to other works beyond a general repetition of stock scenes—“battles, jousts, processions, ceremonies, and other stock features” (Grinberg 2)—*King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* belongs to the same narrative family as the older Middle English poem *King Horn*.⁴ Of the various works in the narrative cluster of what

⁴ During the fourteenth century, the Anglo-Norman poem *Horn et Rimenhild* was adapted into prose using the names of local celebrities to place the tale in Brittany. In the fifteenth century, this prose adaptation was translated into English.

could be called the “Horn story”—*Horn et Rimenhild*, *King Horn*, *Horn Child*, and *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*—the last is the only one in which the hero is not called Horn. Likewise, the name of the heroine in *Ponthus*, Sidone, is significantly different from the heroine’s name in the other works, Rimenhild or Rigmel. However, the names of the other characters vary across all the works. Ponthus’s father is Tiber; Horn’s is Murray or Aatholf. The villain is Firkengild or Wikel or Guenelete. Of particular interest are the narrative connections of *Ponthus* to the earlier poems, both *Horn et Rimenhild*, from which the French *Ponthus* was originally adapted, and *King Horn*, which it is easy to imagine an English audience would have known. Most of the events of the earlier poems occur in the prose work, but the adapter adds two significant narrative passages. The first is the addition of information about the Sultan of Babylon and his problem with how to divide his goods among his sons, which provides motivation for what are otherwise unmotivated, or, at least, unexplained, events in the poems. The second addition is the story of Guenelete’s first betrayal, when Ponthus withdraws from the court because of Sidone’s distrust. The jousts Ponthus engages in during his year in the forest are the otherworldly trappings of a work such as Chrétien’s *Yvain*, but the sense that the mysterious knight jousting in the forest is not quite human has been removed. Ponthus, in late medieval fashion, plays the role of the enchanted knight in order to occupy himself. This addition emphasizes Ponthus as a courtly lover and is also the primary example of the influence of late medieval culture on the work; this influence will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Comparing *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* to *Horn et Rimenhild* shows that much of the plot of the prose narrative and quite a bit of its characterization are derived from the earlier narrative. The changes made in the plot serve to make the narrative seem more realistic, even though the world of *Ponthus* remains more tied to the supernatural than the world of *The Three Kings’ Sons*.

Cultural Influence on the Work

The seventh element examines cultural influences on work. If connections to other works are considerably more important for *Ponthus* than for *The Three Kings' Sons*, then cultural influences on the work are considerably more important for the *The Three Kings' Sons* than for the former. The Brittany of the adapter of *Horn et Rimenhild* only superficially marked *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, notably in the names of the myriad minor characters who fight with and against Ponthus. In contrast, *The Three Kings' Sons* “is strongly identified with the reign of Philippe le Bon [Duke of Burgundy, 1419–1467]. It is so marked by four of the French manuscripts’ bearing dedications to Philippe [. . .]” (3). The dedication in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS fr. 92 (ancien fonds, 6766), the oldest French manuscript of *The Three Kings' Sons* (dated 1463 by the scribe), “states that the book was produced at the command of Duke Philippe” (Grinberg 65). Although there is no evidence that Philippe le Bon ever owned this particular manuscript, there is evidence that it belonged at some point to his youngest sister, Agnes de Bourgogne, Duchess of Bourbon (Grinberg 65–67).

The Duchy of Burgundy was a cultural center in the fifteenth century. The narrative of *The Three Kings' Sons* has many obvious references to the concerns of Philippe’s court, and while a translator in England perhaps a generation later might not share all those concerns, the work itself would probably draw attention to Burgundian affairs. The Duke of Burgundy, for example, appears in the romance as an important and sympathetic character—much more sympathetic, in fact, than the King of France. Since the English translation is probably a product of Edward IV’s reign, his sister’s marriage to Philippe’s son no doubt increased the awareness of Burgundian affairs in England.

A more general aspect of late medieval court culture, the tournament, influenced the presentation of the life of the hero in both *The Three Kings' Sons* and *King Ponthus and the Fair*

Sidone: “In England and France, the joust was almost a princely or ducal monopoly after 1340 [. . .]” (Barber and Barker 107). Jousts became part of royal ceremony, and they were increasingly dramatic. Although the Pas de la Fontaine de Pleurs (1449–1450) occurred too late to have influenced the presentation of the year of jousting in the forest in *Ponthus*, it provides an example of how such challenges worked. Jacques de Lalaing, Philippe le Bon’s chamberlain, vowed to set up a pavilion in a meadow near Chalon sur Saone where the ‘Fountain of Tears’ ran on the first day of each month for a whole year [. . .]. Outside the pavilion, a herald was to accompany a damsel with a unicorn, whose attitude of grief gave the event its name: the unicorn carried three shields, and the herald was to record the names of the challengers and the shields they touched. The first arrival on each day was to fight within the first week of the month, and so on up to a maximum of four challengers for each new month. (118)

Marriages provided occasions for particularly elaborate multi-day tournaments. In 1424, the union of two French families was celebrated in Paris with “lavish jousts [. . .] lasting fifteen days” (108). When Charles the Bold (Philippe le Bon’s son) married Margaret of York in 1468, the groom’s half-brother, the noted jouster Anthony the Bastard, arranged an elaborate tournament based on “a contemporary romance” with “[a] very carefully defined ritual [. . .] to be followed by all the challengers” (121). The tournaments of *The Three Kings’ Sons*, with their connection to celebration, reflect the tournaments of fifteenth-century Burgundy, but without the level of detail provided in *Ponthus*, where the first three jousts are described nearly blow by blow.

The influence of fifteenth-century court culture on both texts is obvious in their presentations of tournaments. This mirroring of the world of their readers highlights the tensions

in both works between realism and the supernatural since the tournaments of the fifteenth century could themselves be the acting out of fantasies.

Cultural Influence of the Work

The eighth and final element is the cultural influence of the work, the lessons it teaches its readers. The lessons taught by *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons* are similar. *Ponthus* illustrates how to be a good man, and the didactic function is stated at the beginning of the work. The most explicit example of this didacticism is near the end, when Ponthus lectures his cousin Pollides on how to behave now that he is married. *The Three Kings' Sons* is less openly didactic, but it also aims to teach its audience, which it does by example rather than by explicit statements. The concern in *The Three Kings' Sons* is how to be a good ruler. Philip, for example, is reprimanded by Ferant for acts that would be standard hero-fare in earlier narratives, such as not withdrawing from battle, an act which leads to Ferant being taken prisoner (16). The assumptions made by the joint Scottish/English/French force and the Sicilians point out the importance of communication between allies in a multinational action (*Three* 50). This concern with the proper way to lead extends to the Turks. Praise is given to Ferabras while the Grand Turk's behavior is reprehensible not because he is Muslim but because he violates the code of behavior of a good king.

The narrative emphasizes that good rulers ask advice. When the Turks want to arrange a temporary truce, they ask Alfour to ransom Ferabras, knowing that the latter can then suggest a truce. Alfour determines that he cannot release Ferabras without consulting with Ferant and Philip because they took Ferabras prisoner. The decision to ransom Ferabras and declare a truce is taken only after a number of conversations among all the involved parties. This emphasis reflects the ruling style of Philippe le Bon: "The Treaty of Troyes may have been arranged by

Jean de Thoisy, and the Treaty of Arras by Nicolas Rubin, but the number of memoranda which the preparation of this last-mentioned treaty occasioned—memoranda which have been preserved—illustrates clearly the procedure: the duke’s decision was only taken after all the factors had been given due consideration” (Calmette 169). The cultural influences on and of a work can be closely connected. In this case, the cultural influence on *The Three Kings’ Sons*, the ways in which Phillippe le Bon conducted himself as a ruler, becomes a model for the cultural influence the work wishes to have, teaching the reader how to be a good ruler.

Although *The Three Kings’ Sons* is not as overtly pious as *Ponthus*, the reactions of the three kings to their sons’ disappearances emphasize the need to consider more than worldly concerns. The English king sees the presumed deaths of both Philip and Humphrey as God’s judgment on him and on the King of France. The King of France dies of grief after naming his brother, the Duke of Burgundy, regent with the understanding that if Philip is not found in the next nine years, the Duke shall become king. The Scottish king clearly sees his sin as one not of action but of intent: although he took the correct action in sending his son, he did it for the wrong (worldly) reasons. A good ruler, the work teaches, concerns himself with more than worldly affairs.

The emphasis of both works on the growth of a prince from birth to power, with concern about his education, both martial and religious, clearly bind these two works together. While the specific point of the didactic purpose may be different, both works seek to educate as they entertain.

As similar as *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings’ Sons* may be, the lack of fantastic exaggeration in *The Three Kings’ Sons* indicates as well the differences between the two. For all its fifteenth-century cultural trappings, the narrative of *Ponthus* remains that of

older secular prose narratives while *The Three Kings' Sons* is a new work created for a specific cultural moment, the court of Phillippe le Bon during the height of Burgundian power.

Now that we have examined literary culture, the work, we will turn to the second reception context—that of material culture, which focuses on the text.

CHAPTER 4

MATERIAL CULTURE: OXFORD, BODLEIAN LIBRARY MS DIGBY 185 AND LONDON,
BRITISH LIBRARY MS HARLEY 326

Reading is a physical experience as well as an intellectual one, and that physical experience varies depending not only on where the reader is, but also on the physical form that the work has been given in a text. Michael Camille eloquently describes the sensory experience of reading a medieval manuscript, whatever the physical surroundings of the reader:

For, when I open a medieval manuscript, this is entirely different from the experience of opening a modern printed book, for I am conscious not only of the manuscript—the manual handling of materials in production, writing, illumination—but also of how in reception the parchment has been penetrated, of grease stains, thumb marks, erasures, drops of sweat, places where images have been kissed away by devout lips, holes of various animal eating places; in short, of how bodies, human, animal, and insect, have left their imprints upon it.

(“Sensations” 42)

To work extensively with a manuscript is to develop a relationship with it, a relationship that includes a sense of awe at being in the presence of something that has survived for centuries despite its own vulnerabilities. While parchment is a strong material, it remains susceptible to fire and water, to neglect and insects, to human need or greed that results in pages being cut or cut out for the usable parchment or pictures. And reading descriptions of a manuscript can no more prepare a reader for the actuality of the physical object than descriptions, even really good ones, can prepare one to meet a person for the first time. Manuscripts have character. Oxford,

Bodleian Library MS Digby 185, which contains *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, is a work-a-day practical fellow, with the occasional surprise. On the other hand, London, British Library MS Harley 326, which contains *The Three Kings' Sons*, is an elderly aristocrat fallen on hard times—there is fascination with what it is, and grief, as well. The vulnerability of the manuscript is inescapable, as wide swaths of ink are faded.

This section of my dissertation will focus on the manuscripts themselves, the placement of the works into material culture, the second reception context to be examined. When a work—the intellectual construct that both lies behind each text and is created or changed by the act of reading each text—becomes a text, it does so within the bounds of a particular time and place. In late medieval Europe, texts could be handwritten on paper or animal skins with decoration also added by hand or they could be printed on paper and decorated by wood-cut prints. When a work is placed into material culture, a number of factors should be considered: the choice of physical material, the choice of decoration (if any), the choice of typeface or style of handwriting, and how it was bound in relationship to the conventions of the times. Since the technology for creating manuscripts is older and applies to most Middle English romances, I shall focus on the placement of works into material culture through handwritten rather than printed books, though a full rediscovery of Middle English prose romances would require a consideration of both handwritten and printed books.

Reading texts as physical objects requires that we expand our theories and practices of reading to include fields such as paleography and art history. Art historian L. M. J. Delaissé argues for what he calls an “archaeology of the book,” a term he thinks works better than “paleography” or “codicology” to describe the process he believes necessary for understanding medieval books. He argues that these books (manuscripts) must be examined first as artifacts—

physical objects which have survived from the past that can be examined for evidence of method and place and time of manufacture:

Therefore we can undoubtedly be deprived of essential elements in our research if, when using manuscripts, we limit ourselves to an exclusive interest and neglect any of the technical aspects of these books. We must, on the contrary, go first to the book as a whole, see how it is made, examine all aspects of its contents and only then can we appreciate the consequences of this complete analysis on our personal interest. (79)

After a manuscript has been examined completely there is evidence available to scholars who are interested in a particular aspect of it, whether that be the contents, the handwriting, the decoration, or the binding. When Delaissé wrote his article some thirty years ago, what he hoped would result was the creation of ways to identify the time and place of manufacture based on a number of factors, including hands, style of decoration, and style of miniatures. Once these have been identified, it would be possible to determine the origin of manuscripts which bear no explicit marks of origin. For example, fifteenth-century Burgundian manuscripts from production centers in Lille, Valenciennes, and Bruges can be grouped together on the basis of visual examination—layout, decorative style—and also have content preferences (80, note 20).

Delaissé's archaeological method provides the raw data for further analysis. A full examination of fifteenth-century Middle English prose romances would require this archaeological interaction with all surviving manuscripts. The results of this type of examination may or may not prove fruitful for any particular manuscript on any particular question, but that in itself may be important for the history of the genre. In this chapter, two manuscripts will be examined for signs of how the romances contained within them were read and received at the time the books were created.

Numerous decisions had to be made during the production of a manuscript book, and the resulting book bears witness to these decisions. We can extrapolate from the physical object to the decisions made about it to the ways in which the work was read. Below I will move through the major stages of production, focusing on the clues left to us in Digby 185 and Harley 326, the two late fifteenth-century manuscripts which contain our romances.⁵ While both manuscripts are clearly artifacts of their time, particularly in terms of the style of their artistic decoration, they represent two very different ways of placing romances in manuscripts. In Digby 185, the romance is simply one of several works from various genres, while Harley 326 was originally nothing but the single romance.

Physical Material

The majority of medieval manuscripts are written on parchment or vellum.⁶ While the condition of the parchment can never be an absolute indicator of the value placed upon the

⁵ Manuscript dating is an imprecise science as a number of elements, including artistic and calligraphic styles, can be used to determine the date. For example, the Early English Text Society printing of *The Three Kings' Sons* notes in the title page “about 1500 a.d.,” while Grinberg estimated the date as “c. 1480” (16). More recently, Scott estimates “c. 1475–1485” on the basis of the art work (*Later* 2:331–332). The dating of Digby 185 has moved in the other direction, from 1450 (Mather xxvi) to c. 1487 (Meale 129–30).

⁶ The terms *parchment* and *vellum* are used interchangeably and have been for centuries, as evidenced in this early sixteenth century comment: “That stouffe that we wrytte upon: and is made of beestis skynnes: is somtyme called parchment somtyme velem” (qtd. in Hamel 8). Although vellum is technically only cow skin, personal or institutional preference, rather than the actual origin of the material, dictates usage—in the early 1990s, for example, Oxford’s Bodleian

narratives contained in a manuscript, it may provide some clues. The process of making parchment could easily produce a material which was a less than ideal writing surface: the color of the animal could leave variations on the final product, while skin conditions or wounds, or a slip of a knife while removing hair and flesh, would leave holes that would need to be written around. If the parchment-maker noticed the problem early, he could sew the gash together before the skin dried, but sometimes the stitches broke under pressure from the drying skin. The fewer defects in a completed manuscript, the more likely the patron paid additional money to insure clear folios. While many English price lists for parchment in the fourteenth century come to about 3d. a sheet, the parchment in “best calf” for Westminster Abbey’s Litlington Missal, for example, “cost just over 6 ½ d. a sheet,” and indeed, was only exceeded by the gold for the illuminations in being the most expensive part of the book (Hamel 13). Digby 185 contains several holes, while the parchment section of Harley 326 contains almost none. This is one indication that the Harley romance manuscript may have been a more expensive book than the Digby at the time of creation. While the state of the parchment would not in itself be proof of the status of the work (or the patron), it must be considered.

Manuscripts may be grouped in a number of ways, one of which is size. A number of terms have developed to describe the general height and width of a manuscript, based on the size of the writing areas produced by various ways of folding the original skins. A folio manuscript, for example, is the largest and resulted from folding the skin once, producing four writing surfaces. A quarto manuscript was folded twice, for eight writing surfaces; an octavo manuscript was folded three times for sixteen writing surfaces; and so on. A complication in terminology is that *folio* also refers to the front and back of a physical page in a book. So a folio manuscript

Library used *parchment*, while the British Library used *vellum*, in both cases to mean any animal skin used as a material for writing (Hamel 8).

would have two folios per skin; a quarto manuscript, four folios; and an octavo manuscript, eight folios. Unless it is clearly adjectival, *folio* in this dissertation will be used in this latter meaning. Both Digby 185 and Harley 326 are quarto manuscripts.

Layout and Writing

Once parchment was purchased, folded, and cut, the scribe would mark the lines for writing on the folios, using one of a number of methods to insure that each folio had the same number of lines for writing. Since handmade books were special-order items, decisions on layout were often made before the scribe began work. Such decisions included the measurement of the area on which writing and decoration occurs. For some manuscripts, such as elaborate Books of Hours, the written space is considerably smaller than the size of the folio because the illuminated decorations tend to completely surround the written words. By the late fifteenth century, whether a selection was prose or verse would also affect the layout, which was determined before the scribe began to write. In Digby 185, for example, the contents include both prose and verse, and the folios for the long prose texts have been laid out with narrower margins than those for the primarily poetic ones. Once folios were lined, the scribe could begin to write, copying from an exemplar owned by the shop or lent to the shop by the person who ordered the book.

Like other decorative elements of manuscript production, scribal hands—calligraphic styles—tended to travel to England from continental Europe. As bookmaking became a secular business activity rather than a monastic devotional one, scribes who made books borrowed hands developed by scribes who took dictation or otherwise produced governmental or ecclesiastical documents where it was necessary to write substantial amounts of text quickly and to get large amounts of text into a fairly small space (Parkes xiv). The primary late-medieval English bookhands are known as Anglicana (a native English hand) and Secretary (which can be traced

back to scribal innovations in Italy, from where it then traveled to France and eventually England). There were also more elaborate versions of these hands which combined features with higher status presentation hands, such as the Textura of early medieval liturgical manuscripts. Since these were mixtures of a high status hand with a low status hand, they are called “Bastard Anglicana” and “Bastard Secretary.” Like modern-day computer fonts, Anglicana and Secretary differed in specific letter forms as well as in overall appearance. For example, an Anglicana *a* looks much like a backwards B, while a Secretary *a* looks like the letter in modern cursive writing (Parkes xiv–xvi, xix–xxiii). Because it took more than a century for Secretary to replace Anglicana as the standard English bookhand, fifteenth-century manuscripts are often a mixture—Digby 185, for example, is written in a primarily Anglicana script (letter forms, vertical strokes), but shows Bastard Secretary influence in style (angular, horns on letters). The marginal glosses in the second selection (Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes*) include the Secretary a-form as well as the Anglicana. The primacy of Anglicana would suggest an earlier production date for the manuscript, but other indicators place production later in the century. The prevalence of Anglicana may indicate that the patron specified that hand for his book, but the scribe was no longer able to write a pure Anglicana hand even when so desired. It is more likely a sign that the manuscript was not produced in London, where the influence of Secretary would have first been felt and where it would have replaced Anglicana most quickly.

The scribal hand of Harley 326 provides more information than does that of Digby 185. The scribe for Harley 326 (or a scribe with a nearly identical hand, suggesting the same center of production) also wrote New York, Columbia University MS Plimpton 256; London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian B.IX, folio 41 and following; and two Latin manuscripts, Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS Fairfax 4 and Digby 235 (Grinberg 7, 10). Evidence from these manuscripts places the origin of Harley 326 with a bookseller in London. As with the evidence

from the parchment, the evidence of the hands in Digby 185 and Harley 326 cannot be considered definitive in themselves, but they play a role in determining the history (the archaeology, to use Delaissé's term) of these books.

Quires

One result of the production of medieval books is that a number of folios are naturally grouped together by the act of folding and stitching, so folios almost always were originally grouped in even numbers. These groups are the *gathers* or *quires*. Most medieval manuscripts are foliated rather than paginated, meaning that each physical sheet, or folio, is counted rather than each page of content. While the back of a folio is usually noted as "v" (from the Latin *verso*), the front of a folio may or may not be noted with an "r" (from the Latin *recto*). (Occasionally, the front and back will be noted as "a" and "b.") The production of books was priced by the unit, so the writing of a manuscript book would be quoted per quire. In 1467, the Pastons paid 20d. a quire for the writing of a Psalter (this is in addition to the cost of the parchment or any decoration) (Hamel 41). The twenty-six quires of Digby 185, for example, may then have cost over two pounds simply to pay for the scribe's work.

Since manuscript books were made in units which might not be stored in order throughout production, scribes provided catchwords to help put the book together in order when the time came to bind it. A catchword is the first word or two of a quire written in the bottom margin of the preceding quire. This allowed the person putting the quires in order to do so quickly. A scribe might also include quire signatures that mark folios within quires as well as indicating the order of the quires. Because manuscript folios were often trimmed during binding, and during subsequent rebinding, catchwords and quire signatures cannot be found in all manuscripts. Harley 326, for example, has been so closely trimmed that on some folios there is

barely any margin at all, much less enough margin to contain the scribe's notes. Digby 185, on the other hand, not only retains its quire signatures and catch words, but the latter have also been decorated, which will be discussed below (see page 81).

Historically, manuscripts were considered as wholes, with any divisions within them being either into quires (the small groups of folios that are folded to make a set) or changes in content. However, in the last twenty-five years, modern scholars have also considered whether the manuscript is composed of booklets, smaller units of more than a quire that are “structurally independent production[s] containing a single work or a number of short works” (Robinson 46). Pamela R. Robinson argues for the existence of booklets as a way to consider the structure of manuscripts, and she suggests that there are ten possible indicators that a manuscript or a section of a manuscript constitutes a booklet. The primary indication of the existence of a booklet is that there is a self-contained unit within a manuscript—these ten indicators are additional signs that may draw attention to the booklet's existence:

- (1) The dimensions of its leaves may differ from those of other parts of the manuscript [. . .].
- (2) Its handwriting may differ[.] [. . .]
- (3) Its style of decoration or illustrations may differ [. . .].
- (4) Its catchwords may run only within the “booklet,” there being no catchword at the end of its last gathering to link it with the first quire of the next “booklet.”
[. . .]
- (5) It may have its own series of quire signatures. [. . .]
- (6) Its outer leaves may be soiled or rubbed[.] [. . .]
- (7) Its number of leaves to a quire may differ from the number(s) in other parts of the manuscript.

(8) A scribe may have had difficulty in fitting a text into the quire structure of a “booklet” and, consequently, have modified that structure [. . .].

(9) The last page (or pages) of a “booklet” may have been left blank because the text did not fill the “booklet.” A “booklet” in which the concluding text is complete may lack its last leaf (or leaves), suggesting that a blank endleaf (or leaves) has been cut away when the “booklet” was bound up with others [. . .].

(10) Sometimes text has been added on an originally blank endleaf (or leaves) by the scribe, collector or later owner. (47–48)

It is easy to see that the modern Harley 326 could be considered to have two booklets because the first selection of the manuscript, a Yorkish chronicle in seven folios, is on paper, while the second, the prose romance *The Three Kings’ Sons*, is on parchment. Harley 326, as it exists today, is mixed: part paper, part parchment; part chronicle, part romance. It is quite possible that this connection post-dates D’Ewes ownership of the romance since the records we have of it from his account book (Watson, *Library* 258) make no mention of the chronicle. However, it is also possible that D’Ewes owned both texts in what is now Harley 326 because we know that he owned many historical works.

Digby 185 is also made up of booklets, but unlike the booklets and manuscripts Robinson discusses, the three sections of Digby 185 did not circulate separately. Of course, it is hard to tell when the blank leaves were cut out, but I see nothing in the manuscript that suggests that the booklets were ever bound individually; they were clearly designed to go together, for the large illuminated initials of the manuscript all include shields, some of which are repeated (see pages 83–84). While Digby 185 has five selections—1) a prose *Brut of England*, 2) Thomas Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes*, 3) Hoccleve’s story of Jerelaus, 4) Hoccleve’s story of Jonathas, and 5) *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*—it only has three booklets. The first and

third booklets contain the prose selections. The *Brut* runs for ten quires, from folio 1 to 79r, while 79v is blank. The last folio of the last quire (what would have been folio 80) has been cut out. This booklet contains quire signatures (the letters a through k) corresponding with the order of the quires in the booklet. *Ponthus* runs for five quires (four of eight and one of six), beginning on folio 166 and ending on folio 203r, about half-way down the front side of the folio. The blank space at the bottom of the folio, like the blank folio on the first booklet, has been cut away. The selection also retains quire signatures (a–d) for its first four quires. That the three poetic selections belong to a single booklet can be seen from both the foliation and the quire signatures. Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes* begins on folio 80 and runs through folio 144, which is the seventh folio of the eighth quire in this booklet. The two minor poems fill out the booklet, from folio 145 to 165r. Two blank folios were cut out of the last quire. Of the 11 quires in this booklet, only five have quire signatures—the third and fourth (c and d) and the eighth through tenth (h–k). It is easiest to assume that the order in which these booklets are currently bound was the order desired by the patron, but that is not definite because the current binding is post-medieval.

Decoration

After the scribe wrote the words, the quires of a manuscript then went to the limners, the illuminators, who worked in separate shops or from their homes, rather than for the bookseller. While this pattern of separating the artisan who wrote from the artisan who drew or painted was part of manuscript production since it moved out of the monasteries, there does not seem to have been a separate guild for limners until the end of the fourteenth century (Scott, “Limning” 160). “Illuminating” narrowly refers only to using gold or silver in decorating a manuscript, but more broadly covers any artistic method.

The decorations in a medieval manuscript were not simply decorative. There was a hierarchy of decoration in manuscripts, so the importance of textual divisions could be seen at a glance by the style of decoration, much as modern texts may use a variety of font sizes and styles to indicate levels of subheadings. The height of the initial capital of a chapter is the simplest way to indicate levels of importance within an individual manuscript, but whether and how such initials were flourished (the term describes the patterns of vines and leaves in the left margin which emanate from a capital) could also indicate relative levels of importance. Scott's examination of manuscripts where the final cleaning up failed to remove notes left for the limner by the scribe reveals that the more the hierarchy of decoration depended solely on the limner's work, the more likely such notes were left. She theorizes that in simpler manuscripts, the orders to the limner would have been verbal, such as a request for a particular type of flourishing or a connection of a type of flourishing to the height of the capitals. But the manuscripts she looked at represent books where the initial capitals of chapters were of the same size, so the scribe had to note by each one which level of decoration was to be used.

The decorations in Digby 185 indicate breaks in the text (chapter divisions, paragraphs, and the like) or draw attention to certain parts of the texts in the manuscript, but they do not suggest ways of reading the romance. In fact, little of the decoration in the manuscript occurs in the romance (see Table 3 on the next page).

Clearly, the *Brut* received the greatest attention in terms of decoration; it contains numerous flourished initials and three nota bene hands, styles of decorations that do not appear in the other booklets. The catchwords are enclosed in drawings throughout the entire manuscript. While a majority of these drawings are simple scrolls, some play with the words they surround: for example, *Ponthus* is accompanied by the head of a visored knight (folio 181v), while *silver and gold* are enclosed in a silver and gold coin (folio 87v), respectively. Much of the decoration

in Digby 185 seems to be a form of artistic play, such as the occasional whimsical variations on the usual pattern of initial capitals being decorated with abstract designs

Table 3

Decoration of MS Digby 185

	Booklet 1: <i>Brut</i>	Booklet 2: Hoccleve			Booklet 3: <i>Ponthus</i>
		<i>Regiment of Princes</i>	Jerelaus	Jonathas	
Historiated initial					194
Marginal drawing				157v	
Catchwords	16v, 24v, 32v, 42v, 48v, 56v, 64v	87v, 119v, 127v, 135v	151v	161v	173v, 181v, 199v
Descenders		130v			181
Flourished initials	10v, 12v, 20v, 22v, 27v, 29, 23v, 39v, 51v, 52v				
Nota bene	10v, 66v, 71				
Coats of arms (large)	1	80		157v	166
Coats of arms (small)	18, 40v, 43v	104			

Source: Ann Eljenholm Nichols, Michael T. Orr, Kathleen L. Scott, and Lynda Dennison, *An Index of Images in English Manuscripts from the Time of Chaucer to Henry VIII c. 1380–c. 1509: The Bodleian Library, Oxford I: MSS Additional–Digby* (Turnhout, Belgium: Harvey Miller, 2000) 93–94.

^aThis term describes a letter containing a picture.

^bDescenders are the parts of lower-case letters which hang below the line of text. Here it indicates decoration on such letters on the bottom line of text on a page.

^cThis is an index mark. In Digby 185, all such signs are hands drawn in the left margin pointing to a section of text.

in red. These include a St. George's cross (23r) and a variety of flowers (for example, 23v and 25v). A flower hangs from the descender of a letter on the last line of 25r, while yet another form of artistic play in the *Brut* is to extend an ascender on the top line or a descender on the bottom line of a page. The first occurrence is on 11r, where the *k* on *kyng* on the top line has the top of the upright extended about three times higher than the line with penwork-like embellishments. More angular hatchwork designs accompany some ascenders on 24r, 25r, 60r, 60v, and 61v.

While these decorations amuse and draw attention to a few specific points in the first booklet of the manuscript, the manuscript decorations which initially draw attention—the shields of the initial capitals—provide clues to the patron, and therefore to the primary reader, of the manuscript.⁷ There are only four large coats of arms in the manuscript: in the initial capitals of the *Brut*, the *Regiment of Princes*, the story of Jonathas, and *Ponthus*. According to Macray, the arms are primarily those of Swillington, although they usually appear quartered with others (1:195). The initial capital of the *Brut* (folio 1) contains the Swillington arms quartered with those of Rivers or Swinlington. The initial capital of the *Regiment of Princes* (folio 80) contains the Swillington arms with, perhaps, those of Beauchamp. The initial capital of the story of Jonathas (folio 157v) contains ten coats of arms, including those of Swillington, Waterton, Vavasour, Fitzgerald or Gerard, Alford or Alesford, Townley, and Houghton. Finally, the initial capital of *Ponthus* (folio 166) contains “the arms of Swillington and Rivers, quarterly, impaling Townley [. . .] and Alford [. . .]” (Macray 1.195). The Swillington arms were taken over by the Hoptons in the fifteenth century, and it is possible this manuscript was made for Sir William

⁷ Black and white reproductions of the folios with the largest coats of arms (1, 80, 104, 157v, and 166) from Digby 185 have been printed in Meale. A reproduction of the first folio can also be found in Mather.

Hopton, who was the treasurer for Richard III, though Carol Meale now argues for dating Digby 185 to the second half of the 1480s on the basis of the strapwork decoration used on some of the shields. With this date, she also argues that the manuscript was originally ordered by Sir George Hopton, Sir William's son and a great-grandson of Sir Robert Swillington. The book, Meale argues, served to place Sir George, the son of a Yorkist, within a Lancastrian political milieu since Sir Robert, and many of the other families indicated by the shields, served in the court of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in the fourteenth century. The shields reinforced George Hopton's Lancastrian family ties rather than his Yorkist ones at a time when those Yorkist ties may have been detrimental to his political ambitions. Meale also speculates that the book was ordered as a guide book for Sir George's two young sons. In this context, the didactic prose romance *Ponthus* works in conjunction with Hoccleve's didactic poem, *The Regiment of Princes*, to show young males of the upper class how they should behave. In this respect, Digby 185 is similar to many other romance manuscripts, which tend to be compilations that "[seem] to cater to the reading needs of a range of household members, including children and servants in both gentry and mercantile households, and apprentices in the latter as well" (Riddy 237).

There are no such hints in the decoration of Harley 326 which might lead us to a single person as a possible patron. This manuscript is also decorated in a more "humanistic" style: there are no flourished initials or decorated catchwords here. Instead, there are miniatures, representational paintings, a form of decoration not found in Digby 185. The decorations of Harley 326 illustrate the romance.⁸ Art historian Sandra Hindman suggests some ways in which Delaissé's method might be profitably applied to the study of late medieval romance:

⁸ Scott's examination of fifteenth-century manuscripts (roughly speaking—the title places dates at 1390–1490; the introduction, 1395–1495) shows a shift in the relative number of the types of manuscripts which were illustrated. There are almost no illustrated Bibles from this century, for

Why are the earliest romances unillustrated? [. . .] Once romances were illustrated, what sources provided the conventions of illustration, and what does this borrowing imply about the group responsible for production as well as the meaning of the pictures? How do the conventions of illustration in later romances deviate from the earlier set of conventions, and does this reflect changes in the social organization of the culture and the audience for the books? (255)

While the placement of the illustrations in a manuscript like Harley 326 might signal to a first-time reader what elements to be prepared for or direct the reader towards a specific reading among a number of available ones, the decisions about what to picture and how to picture it can only be made after the text has become a work.

The design of miniatures was theoretically controlled by the patron or the bookseller, and in some cases it is clear that rather explicit instructions were given to the limner. Illustrations usually precede the chapters they accompany (Camille, “Books” 183), so, like flourished capitals, they help mark out sections of the text. Camille offers the following example of a romance manuscript where the instructions to the limner failed to be removed, the mid-fourteenth century French romance *Roman de la Dame à la Licorne* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS fr. 12562): “Alongside the miniature, a long written instruction to the illustrator

example; Books of Hours represent a large percentage of all illustrated manuscripts. In total, Scott estimates about one thousand illustrated manuscripts survive from the period covered in her book. In contrast, the work with the largest number of surviving manuscripts from the same period is the English Bible, with 250 or so surviving manuscripts. In fact, the three most popular works to be written in fifteenth-century manuscripts (the English Bible, the *Prick of Conscience*, and the *Brut*) together account for over eight hundred manuscripts, most of which are not illustrated (*Later* 1:34-35).

ensures that the illustration is correct by providing a ‘sub-text’ between the narrative itself and the task of its visualization. The written instructions are immensely detailed and guide the artist in every possible formal point” (Camille, “Books” 181). Camille argues that “[t]he artist was not seeking to evoke the visual surface of the text description [. . .] but [to] encode the significant parts of the story in a simplified visual form” (183). However, this pattern of production by which the limner was provided instructions by the scribe does not mean that the artist had no control over the picture. Some frequently illuminated types of manuscripts, Books of Hours, for example, would almost always contain a particular scene at a particular place, so there was no reason to describe a scene in detail, and the artist made decisions about style and color (Scott, “Limning” 153–54).

One way to give instructions to the limner was to provide the exemplar, the manuscript which the scribe had copied, so that the limner could copy the pictures. But even here a new text both reflected and changed the text upon which it was based and the work that both texts embodied. For example, in London, British Library MS Royal 14.E.III, an early fourteenth-century Lancelot-Grail manuscript, the words and the accompanying miniature reinforce a significant change from the exemplar and the work: a sail which is traditionally white with a red cross is red in Royal 14.E.III. This is probably the result of the scribe leaving out part of a sentence when copying, rather than a deliberate change, but the miniature reinforces the changed sail color. Since miniatures were often copied from previous manuscripts, and the closely related British Library MS Additional 10292 shows a white sail at this point, Elspeth Kennedy concludes “that the miniatures of this group of manuscripts are not just inherited but closely based on the text of the particular manuscript being illustrated” (99).

Harley 326 is illuminated in both the broad and narrow sense of the term—the decoration includes gold. The earliest methods for applying gold to miniatures involved gold leaf, which is

applied over a gesso mix as the first step to coloring the picture. Then the paint was applied to the rest of the picture. In the fifteenth century, an additional way of applying gold became popular. This is shell gold or liquid gold, a paint made from ground gold and applied as the last step over the paint. Shell gold was more expensive than the gold leaf used in manuscripts for centuries because the grinding of gold into a powder that could be used as a paint had a higher loss percentage than beating gold into sheets. Modern practitioners report that it is quite difficult to apply the shell gold designs since the gold does not easily adhere to the paint over which it is applied (Hamel 57). The pictures in Harley 326 include both gold leaf (crowns, parts of the framing borders, and horse harnesses, for example) and shell gold.

The illustrations not only indicate the status of the manuscript but also provide hints as to how the romance was read in the late fifteenth century. The status of the manuscript is indicated by the use of shell (or liquid) gold and by the connection of the manuscript's illustrations to others of the same time period. The hints to how the romance was read lie in the choices made of what incidents to illustrate. Philip, not surprisingly, appears in many of the miniatures, including the first and last. But the illustrations in Harley 326 also indicate that the character of Alfour was far more important than his simple role of the heroine's father. Of the twenty-two miniatures, eleven (50%) include Alfour and two (9%) are concerned primarily with him. The manuscript's second miniature (folio 9) shows Alfour wedding his wife in what is actually a larger picture than that of Philip and Iolante's wedding later in the manuscript. Alfour's position as a major character in the romance is reinforced by the decision to illustrate his election as Emperor, and a series of four miniatures near the end of the manuscript reminds the reader that Alfour is the dominant ruler in the romance.

Table 4

Illustrations in MS Harley 326

	Folio	Description
1	8	Compartmentalized picture: Philip is born (left side) and christened (right side).
2	9	Alfour marries.
3	13v	Philip leaves Paris.
4	29v	David's navy arrives at Sicily.
5	40	David is shipwrecked during a storm.
6	45v	The Grand Turk listens to reports.
7	67v	The Grand Turk and his army on the march.
8	77	Continuous narrative picture: The Grand Turk plans to hang Philip. (At the upper left is Turks' camp; at the upper right is the Sicilian city with the gallows on the wall closest to the Turk camp. Coming from the city gate is a troop of men led by a man on a white horse with red trappings. This same troop and its leader appear at bottom engaged in a fight with Turkish knights. At the left, Turks escort Philip to see the Turk. At just-right-of-center, we see Philip at the gallows.)
9	88v	The Electors meet to choose the new Emperor (left side) and a message is sent (right side).
10	90	The Turks abandon Sicily.
11	96v	Continuous narrative picture: The three princes leave Sicily. (To the lower left, the three young men discuss their plans to leave Sicily. The upper center of the picture shows the three princes taking their leave of Ferant. The right side of the picture shows them being sent off by Alfour and his wife.)
12	98v	Continuous narrative picture: Alfour visits his new realm. (The left side of the picture shows Alfour and his retinue being greeted by men. At the bottom right, a man speaks to the people crowded in the city gate. The upper right corner is either Alfour's second coronation in Milan or his audience with the Pope.)
13	99v	Continuous narrative picture: Philip arrives in France. (First, in the upper right hand corner we can see Philip taking leave of David and Humphrey. At the bottom right, we see Philip riding towards a castle. In the left side of the picture, we see two pictures of the same room in that castle. In the left-most one, Philip in a visor meets his uncle, while in the right one, the visor has been discarded (it lies on the floor) and Burgundy embraces Philip.)
14	102	Continuous narrative picture: Humphrey arrives in England. (At the upper right, Humphrey reveals himself to his Sicilian companion. At upper left, they stop at a house and speak with a peasant. The just-right-of-center grouping of men in the gate of a city may be the people who were walking barefoot as part of their prayer for the king. It is perhaps more likely, however, that they represent the common people welcoming home their lost prince. The largest part of the picture is a group of mounted men, one wearing a crown, riding toward the castle on the right side of the picture in which lies an ailing king.)
15	105v	Continuous narrative picture: David arrives in Scotland. (In the upper left are three figures on horseback. Just above center, David, in a house, is speaking to three or four men. On the right side is shown an audience with the king. In the lower left quadrant, the King, prince, and court are riding.)
16	106v	Alfour and his court greet David and his retinue.

	Folio	Description
17	107v	Alfour and David greet Orcays.
18	108v	Alfour, David, and Orcays greet Humphrey.
19	109v	Continuous narrative picture: Alfour, David, Orcays, and Humphrey meet the Duke of Burgundy and Philip (visored) at the bottom of the picture; at the top, Philip (still visored) rears his horse before Iolante while the rest of the procession passes.
20	113	Iolante watches the tournament.
21	117v	Philip and Iolante are betrothed before her parents (right side) and then marry (left side).
22	120v	Alfour, Sybil, Philip, Iolante and their retinue travel to France.

The majority of Harley 326's miniatures are "small-format" miniatures: "a rectangular picture space, framed or unframed, which usually occurs at a text division and which is ruled into a justification of long lines of text from either vertical margin [. . .]" (Scott, *Later* 1:41).⁹ They are clearly functioning as markers at the beginning of approximately 50% of the chapters of *The Three Kings' Sons*. According to Scott, Harley 326's miniatures reflect both older and, more frequently, newer tastes. The very first miniature reflects an older style, with two separate narrative scenes presented in clearly compartmentalized fashion. Only eleven of the 140 manuscripts selected for Scott's survey contain such pictures, and over half of those are from the early part of the century. More of the miniatures represent "continuous narrative," where a number of sequential scenes are presented in the same framed space. Scott writes that four such illustrations are present in the manuscript (illustrations 11, 13, 14, and 19; folios 96v, 99, 102, and 109v). However, where Scott sees two- or three-part pictures in illustrations 8, 12, and 15 (folios 77, 98v, and 105v), I would claim that these are also continuous narrative miniatures based on the relationship of the picture to the chapter it accompanies. While the illustrations in the romance may help with reading and understanding the text, the text may likewise help with

⁹ Miniatures from Harley 326 have been reproduced in modern books: black and white reproductions may be found in Barber and Barker, Grinberg, and Scott, *Later*, while full-color reproductions appear in Porter's *Medieval Warfare* and *Courtly Love*.

reading and understanding the illustrations. The “continuous narrative” miniatures focus on the three princes of the title: one shows the Grand Turk’s attempt to hang Philip (illustration 8, folio 77), a second shows Alfour’s first progress as Emperor (illustration 12, folio 98v), another four show the three deciding to leave Sicily and then their individual returns to their homes (illustrations 11 and 13–15, folios 96v, 99v, 102, and 105v), and finally another shows Philip’s return to Sicily (illustration 19, folio 109v), connecting this style of illustration with the series of miniatures showing Alfour greeting his guests.

Illustrations 16–19 (folios 106v, 107v, 108v, and 109v) form a small series, with Alfour as the primary focus. In the first, Alfour greets David, now King of Scotland, as the latter returns for the tournament. The second shows Alfour, with David in attendance, welcoming Orcays. In the third, Alfour, accompanied by both David and Orcays, meets Humphrey. The last miniature shows Alfour, David, Orcays, and Humphrey meeting the Duke of Burgundy and a disguised Philip. The middle two miniatures are almost identical. The first follows the same pattern, but Alfour is on the right rather than the left. The final miniature in the series is one of the limner’s multi-scene pictures. The foreground follows the pattern of the previous miniatures, while in the upper right corner, a disguised Philip acknowledges Iolante as the group returns to the town:

[T]he hors wheron he rode was so plesaunt, that his maister might guyde him as he wold / and he made ij. or iij. lepes fulle mannerly [. . .]. At their coming in-to the Towne, was not seen suche estate of richesse sith the worlde began / the wyndowes and the streets were alle hanged with riche clothes / and alle the wyndowes fulle of ladies & gentilwomen / and whan they shold passe by themperesse & hir faire doughtir, the yonge kyng knewe them wele y-nough, ye may wele thinke / the cawcy was to litil for his hors & him / for alle that was

possible for hym or his hors to do / was done before the ladies ther [. . .]. (*Three* 185)

While it is not possible to trace the patron of Harley 326 from internal clues (as it is with Digby 185) the topic of the work and the style of decoration, both influenced by Burgundian culture, provide clues to the social position of any possible patron. There are manuscripts that Edward IV bought in Bruges which have more miniatures than Harley 326, but the ratio of miniatures to folios is rather high in Harley 326. The miniatures seem to be from the same hand as that in Lambeth Palace MS 265, a manuscript commissioned by Anthony Woodville, Lord Rivers, for presentation to Edward IV. The elaborateness of the manuscript and the connection with a workshop that we know did work for members of the royal court, suggest that this manuscript was originally meant for someone in the court, if not for a member of the royal family.

Binding

The final step in the manufacture of a handwritten book was binding. This step is erased in the history of most manuscripts because later owners have often rebound the books. Because the new binding reflects the desires of a later owner, these later bindings are part of what I call the “culture of collection.” The bindings of the two manuscripts examined here both are post-medieval, so they will be discussed in the next chapter.

Although critical opinion has tended to see the Middle English prose romances as “debasements, vulgarizations in the bad sense, of stories that had been better told” (Mather xlvi), the evidence of the manuscripts Digby 185 and Harley 326 indicate that for the fifteenth-century patrons who ordered and paid for the books, the romances were valued highly enough to spend a

significant amount of money in order to have a personal copy. In the case of Harley 326, the patron may also have commissioned the translation and the cycle of illustrations, perhaps at additional cost. In addition to the evidence of the value placed on the work provided by the manuscript, Harley 326's illustrations also suggest ways in which the romance may be read, both in terms of the continuous narrative pictures but also in the importance of Alfour to the scheme of illustration.

Now that we have examined material culture, the text, we will turn to the third reception context—that of the culture of collection.

CHAPTER 5

THE CULTURE OF COLLECTION: THE LIBRARIES OF SIR KENELM DIGBY AND SIR
SIMONDS D'EWES

After a manuscript left the hands of its makers, it not only became part of material culture, but also of the culture of collection as groups of manuscripts were put together by various owners. The culture of collection is the third reception context to be examined here. While this chapter will focus on two libraries from the seventeenth century, collecting is not, of course, an activity of that century alone. Pamela R. Robinson's discussion of booklets argues that some manuscripts were themselves collections, groups of booklets that had circulated separately now bound together. In fact, there are cases where groups of booklets were bound together in one order by early medieval owners and in a different order by post-medieval owners (Robinson 56).

For my purposes, a library is any group of books, but a library may be either a collection or an archive. Modern research into medieval manuscripts which contain a variety of material has come to be concerned with distinguishing anthologies—"guided by a controlling literary intelligence"—from miscellanies—"largely haphazard or practical assemblies of material" (Lerer 1255). Collections, like some of the manuscripts contained within them, are anthologies, while archives are miscellanies. Because collections are the product of an individual intelligence, any given collection may be read against itself, just as the contents of an anthology can be read against the rest of the contents of that anthology. Archives, on the other hand, are less concerned with satisfying personal taste and more concerned with size and completeness, making the exercise of reading the contents of the archive against itself at best frustrating and at worst futile. A number of questions may be asked of a collection that might help indicate how specific works

and texts were received by the collector; for example, we can consider how many manuscripts of a given type were in the collection, how were they bound, which manuscripts were shelved near one another, and what interests are indicated by the entirety of the collection (printed books and unbound papers as well as manuscripts). Knowing something of the life and intellectual interests of a collector is also an important element in reading a collection because such biography may help explain certain trends visible in the contents of the collection or may run counter to expectations arising from the collection's contents. In the latter case, it may be necessary to look for alternative explanations. For example, while a large number of scientific manuscripts might be expected in the library of someone interested in science, if a similar number were found in the library of someone not interested in science, their presence might be better explained by an interest in the manuscripts as artistic artifacts rather than in the contents of the books.

Any given medieval manuscript might have belonged to more than one collection, with the explanation for its place in the entire collection potentially changing from one collection to another. An example of how different collectors could organize the same material can be seen in a quick comparison of a handful of manuscripts from the Digby collection with the same manuscripts as they appeared in the catalog of the Allen collection. Thomas Allen's library was catalogued by Brian Twyne in what is now Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Wood F. 26 in 1622, a decade before Allen died, leaving his library to Digby. Although only fourteen of approximately thirty pages are in Twyne's hand, the descriptions were probably all originally done by Twyne, and he corrected some of the pages that he did not write (Watson, "Appendix" 2.159). The Allen/Twyne catalog is divided by size, so there are four series of numbers: one each for folio, quarto, octavo, and sextodecimo volumes. Table 5 on the next page shows the same folio manuscripts or parts thereof, first in the order suggested by the Allen/Twyne numbers and then in the order suggested by the Digby manuscript numbers. This comparison reveals some widely

Table 5

Selected Manuscripts from the Allen and the Digby Collections

Selected Manuscripts from Allen and Digby Collections, Sorted by Allen/Twyne Number			Selected Manuscripts from Allen and Digby Collections, Sorted by Digby Manuscript Number		
Allen/Twyne #	Digby MS #	Contents	Digby MS #	Allen/Twyne #	Contents
32	191, ff 1–78	mathematical and musical tracts (mostly geometry)	143, ff 1–63	50	John Robyns's "De stellis fixis" (Macray 1:142)
33	186	a wide selection including a <i>Brut</i> , excerpts from William of Malmesbury, injunctions from papal legates for St. Mary's abbey in York, and prophecies attributed to Hildegard and Merlin	186	33	a wide selection including a <i>Brut</i> , excerpts from William of Malmesbury, injunctions from papal legates for St. Mary's abbey in York, and prophecies attributed to Hildegard and Merlin
34	217	philosophy, particularly Avicenna	187	52	Robert Melodunensis, "Summa sententiae theologica" (Hunt and Watson, "Notes" 2:86)
36	190, ff 128–210	mathematical tracts	190, ff 29–37	39	Roger Bacon, "de Principijs naturæ" (Watson, "Appendix" 2:164)
36	191, ff 103–167	mostly astronomical tracts	190, ff 54–65	37	"Alredus Abbas Rhievallensis de Spirituali Amicitia" (Watson, "Appendix" 2:164)
37	190, ff 54–65	"Alredus Abbas Rhievallensis de Spirituali Amicitia" (Watson, "Appendix" 2:164)	190, ff 128–210	36	mathematical tracts
39	190, ff 29–37	Roger Bacon, "de Principijs naturæ" (Watson, "Appendix" 2:164)	191, ff 1–78	32	mathematical and musical tracts (mostly geometry)
40	191, ff 168–172	Robert Grosseteste, "de cura pastoralis" (Macray 1:206)	191, ff 103–167	36	mostly astronomical tracts
50	143, ff 1–63	John Robyns's "De stellis fixis" (Macray 1:142)	191, ff 168–172	40	Robert Grosseteste, "de cura pastoralis" (Macray 1:206)
51	236	philosophy, including a commentary on Plato and several tracts by Averroes	192	53	Raymond Lull, "Ars demonstrative" (Hunt and Watson, "Notes" 2:89)
52	187	Robert Melodunensis, "Summa sententiae theologica" (Hunt and Watson, "Notes" 2:86)	217	34	philosophy, particularly Avicenna
53	192	Raymond Lull, "Ars demonstrative" (Hunt and Watson, "Notes" 2:89)	236	51	philosophy, including a commentary on Plato and several tracts by Averroes

Source: R[ichard] W. Hunt and A[ndrew] G. Watson, *Digby Manuscripts*, Bodleian Library

Quarto Catalogues 9 (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1999).

different ways of grouping the same manuscripts or parts thereof. If we imagine both the Allen/Twyne and the Digby numbers as indicating books lined up on a shelf, the four manuscripts grouped together by Allen as numbers 50 through 53 not only end up separated by dozens of volumes in Digby's order, ranging from number 143 through number 236, but the order of these manuscripts also changes, with numbers 52 and 53 being shelved between numbers 50 and 51. On the other hand, the comparison of the two sorting orders also shows more minor variations indicative of a similar sorting impulse on the part of both collectors. The manuscripts represented by Allen/Twyne numbers 36, 37, 39, and 40 not only remained close together in Digby's collection, but actually merged, as these four Allen manuscripts were rebound into two manuscripts after coming into Digby's hands. Allen manuscripts 37, 39, and part of 36 are now in Digby manuscript 190, while more of 36 and 40 (along with 32) are in Digby 191. In Digby 191, the order within the manuscript parallels the Allen order, but Digby 190 reverses the Allen order, with 39 coming before 37, which in turn is before the section from 36.

When examining a medieval narrative's place in a post-medieval collection it may or may not be possible to trace the manuscript's history from its creation to its presence in a collection. In the case of *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons*, some 150 years passed between the creation of the manuscripts and the point they are again accounted for in the libraries of Sir Kenelm Digby and Sir Simonds D'Ewes. We have no evidence to suggest where they were during the intervening century and a half. Since we are dependent on the survival of handwritten records to be able to reconstruct such histories, and no such records have as yet been found, we may never be able to account for those 150 years.

Medieval manuscripts have survived to the present day partially by the grace of those who became fascinated by old books and actively collected manuscripts. Some of these activities

have left their mark on modern names for manuscripts. The fanciest manuscript shelfmarks are probably those of the Cotton collection at the British Library, where Cotton's own system of shelving his books has been preserved in the modern shelfmarks. The shelfmarks allow us to imagine precisely where the manuscripts would have been shelved—for MS Cotton Nero A.x, the top shelf of a bookcase on which rested a bust of the Roman emperor Nero, ten books from the start of the shelf. But even these more elaborate names do not connect the name to the contents. Scholars of Middle English literature simply learn that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl* are found in Cotton Nero A.x. In contrast, Library of Congress numbers contain more clues to content than do manuscript shelfmarks. While the Library of Congress shelfmarks are also arbitrary, they are designed to group books of like content together: British literature is classified as PR, for example, while American literature is PS. Even the entirely numeric Dewey shelfmarks depend upon the initial digits indicating the general content of the books being classified so that like books are grouped together. While the shelfmarks of manuscripts within a collection may group like books together, we cannot assume that they do, so it is necessary to study what is known of the history of the collection itself.

The original homes of the Digby and D'Ewes manuscripts are not indicated in any way by the modern shelfmarks. In fact, we do not know whether the Digby collection ever sat on shelves because the numbering comes from the catalog made especially for the collection's transfer to the Bodleian Library. As for the D'Ewes collection, much of D'Ewes's original plan has not only been obscured by later ways of sorting it, but we may also not have an "original plan" since the earliest catalog dates from after D'Ewes's death. In the end, Digby's activities as a collector continue to be recognized by the names of his manuscripts, while D'Ewes's have been erased.

Some collections are too big to be “read” in useful ways; there comes a point when a single manuscript is simply too small a part of the whole to make the exercise fruitful. In these cases, it may be better to find a way to consider only a part of a collection. In the examples which follow, this narrowing has occurred in two ways. The first is that rather than considering the entire Harley collection, where *The Three Kings’ Sons* ultimately ended, we look instead at the collection of Sir Simonds D’Ewes. D’Ewes’s 1643 account book is the first record we have of the manuscript now known as Harley 326. The D’Ewes manuscripts and related materials make up a significant portion of the Harley collection, but we can still look at them as a smaller unit. While Humphrey Wanley, for example, may have had principles guiding his purchases on behalf of Robert Harley, there is nothing to suggest that individual books were his guide—what he wanted were the libraries. The second narrowing works in the opposite way: roughly half of the Digby manuscript collection came to him in its entirety from Thomas Allen, so I have considered only those manuscripts in the collection which were not inherited from Allen. In a sense, what I have done in each case is try to establish a way of looking at an active collecting mind. Since Digby inherited Allen’s collection, rather than buying it, and he owned those books for such a short period of time, Allen’s books have been excluded in the discussion below because they represent a competing collecting mind.

Digby’s collection is easier to examine—it is significantly smaller, especially when the Allen manuscripts are not considered, and we have a complete catalog overseen by Digby himself. D’Ewes’s manuscript collection was nearly three times the size of Digby’s (including the Allen manuscripts), and no single or complete catalog seems to have existed, especially not one overseen by D’Ewes himself. In fact, there is some indication that D’Ewes occasionally had trouble directing someone else to a particular book (Watson, *Library* 51).

Sir Kenelm Digby and His Library

The Digby collection considered here is about fifteen years older than the D'Ewes collection because Digby's 1634 donation to Oxford's Bodleian Library completed that particular collection while D'Ewes's continued to grow throughout his life. The story of the first half of Digby's life is in some ways summed up in the report that the Venetian ambassador "told the King [Charles I] it was very strange that his Majesty should slight so much his ancient amity with the most noble state of Europe, for the affection which he bore to a man (meaning Sir K.) whose father was a traitor, his wife a whore, and himself a pirate [. . .]" (Bligh 91), a not entirely unfair description. This summation, however, does not indicate the breadth of Digby's intellectual interests.

Kenelm Digby was born on 11 July 1603, the son of Sir Everard Digby. In 1605, Sir Everard, a twenty-four-year-old convert to Catholicism, became part of the Gunpowder Plot, his role being to retrieve the Princess Elizabeth, who was at a country estate, and to raise other Catholic gentry into an army following the death of King James. Sir Everard was captured on 8 November 1605, tried, and executed on 30 January 1606 by being publicly drawn and quartered: "Since [Guy] Fawkes's tortured body collapsed, it was the death of Sir Everard [. . .] which turned out to be the grand spectacle [. . .]" (Petersson 23).

Digby, therefore, grew up not only Catholic in an England which distrusted Catholics but also the son of an acknowledged traitor. His paternal uncle, Sir John Digby (who was created first Earl of Bristol in 1618), took a fourteen-year-old Kenelm with him on a diplomatic mission to Spain, where the elder Digby was negotiating a marriage between the English Prince Charles and the Infanta Maria. Following Digby's return at the age of fifteen, he attended university at Oxford for a time, although his Catholicism did not allow him to reside in any of the colleges; instead, "he enrolled as a commoner, did not wear an academic gown, and did not work for a

degree” (Petersson 35). He was not intellectually excited by the still fairly medieval style of instruction at the Oxford of his day, although while there he developed a close friendship with mathematician Thomas Allen, who reportedly called the young man “the *Mirandola* of his age” (37). Digby’s early intellectual reputation can be seen by his nomination to the planned but never-established Royal Academy, along with the likes of Sir Robert Cotton, Inigo Jones, and Ben Jonson.

When Digby was seventeen years old, he went on a grand tour of the continent, which lasted nearly three years. His own version of why he left on such an extended tour can be found in London, British Library MS Harley 6758, which was published in a bowdlerized version as the *Private Memoirs of Sir Kenelm Digby* in 1827. These memoirs have been described as “the strangest mixture of Arcadian love, heroic exploits, shallow philosophy, baroque fantasy, and special pleading for a lady’s reputation [. . .] an allegorical autobiography written in the style of a romance” (Petersson 43). The impetus for his trip was his mother’s unhappiness with his infatuation with Venetia Stanley, a young woman three years his senior whom he had recently met. After spending some time in France at the court of Maria de Medici, he spent nearly two years in Italy, especially Florence. While in Italy, he began to collect the manuscripts that he would later give to the Bodleian Library. His tour ended when his uncle requested his presence in Spain, where Bristol was again fruitlessly attempting to negotiate a marriage between the future Charles I and one of the Spanish Infantas. Kenelm Digby was knighted for the role he played in the negotiations upon his return to England in October 1623.

After his return, Digby once again courted Venetia Stanley, who was very much a woman of the world. She had first attended court in her very early teens and was acknowledged as one of the great beauties of her time. In the *Memoirs*, Digby writes “For her beauty [. . .] I need not say much, since my weak expression of it that is so much above the power of words to describe,

would but sully the idea that, I am sure, you conceive of it” (qtd. in Petersson 69). She was courted by a number of well-placed gentlemen, including both the third and fourth Earls of Dorset, the latter of whom apparently fathered one of her children. When, as part of Prince Charles’s Privy Council, Digby was expected to journey to France for the negotiations of the marriage of Charles and Henrietta Maria, Venetia provided the money to allow him to do so. Her generosity firmed his commitment to her. As Digby reports in the *Memoirs*, “He resolved to get her for his wife whom he could not enjoy as his mistress (which neither, although he might have done, his regard to her honour, and the leveling of his own joys to a happy end, would have permitted him)” (qtd. in Bligh 52). They secretly married in late 1624 or early 1625, and their first child was born on 6 October 1625.

At the encouragement of his uncle, the Earl of Bristol, to do more than attend Charles’s court, Digby received letters of marque in 1627, outfitted three ships, and spent over a year as a privateer in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. While in the Mediterranean, he was responsible in June 1628 for capturing ships at Scanderoon (Iskenderun), a Turkish port. This so displeased the Venetians that the latter imprisoned as many Englishmen as they could get their hands on and demanded a significant ransom for their release. But if his actions at Scanderoon had made Digby *persona non grata* with the Venetian ambassador, they also led to him being named Naval Commissioner, a post which allowed Digby to participate in the scientific community at Deptford, “one of the main nerve centres of the important, organized scientific activity of the country” (Petersson 85).

Digby’s friendships were as wide-ranging as his interests. In addition to Allen, Digby numbered among his friends Ben Jonson, who named Digby his literary executor; Anthony Van Dyck, who painted a number of portraits of both Kenelm and Venetia; and Archbishop Laud,

who was pleased by Digby's conversion to Anglicanism in 1630 and asked him to reconsider his return to Catholicism in 1635.

The life of a happily married courtier ended suddenly on 1 May 1633, when Venetia Digby failed to awaken in the morning. There were rumors that she had been poisoned by her husband; an autopsy revealed that her brain was "much putrefied and corrupted," and Digby's letters to his brother John suggest she had numerous headaches (Petersson 103), perhaps suggesting a cause of death. Digby spared no expense in her monument, which was made of black marble, and he wrote poetry for her:

And j see those bookes are false wch. teach
 that absence makes betweene two soules no breach
 when they wth. loue
 to each other moue
 and that they (though distant) may meet, kisse, and play;
 for our bodie doth so clog our minde
 that here no means of working it can finde
 on thinges absent
 or iudging present
 till the corp' orall senses first do leade the way. (qtd. in Bligh 182)

Following his wife's death, Digby withdrew to Gresham College, where he performed various scientific experiments and reconsidered his conversion to Anglicanism. His significant contribution to botany, that plants need air to survive, was a side effect of his experiments on palingenesis (Petersson 108–9). His departure from England for France in 1635 marks the end of this stage of his life.

The last half of Sir Kenelm's life revolved around the court of Henrietta Maria and attempts to ensure better conditions for English Catholics. He was occasionally exiled and at least once accused of treason, but political and religious concerns did not drive scientific concerns out of Digby's life. After the Restoration and his return to England, for example, he was accepted into the nascent Royal Society in December 1660 and served as a member of the first council in 1662.

Kenelm Digby died in England on 11 June 1665 while traveling back to France. He was buried next to Venetia in London. Their black marble tomb was destroyed the following summer in the Great Fire, leaving a handful of Van Dyck portraits and the collection of manuscripts in the Bodleian Library as the last physical monument to Kenelm Digby's interests.

Digby's life as a book collector can be divided into two periods: "the first during the years up to 1635 when, having given his manuscripts to the Bodleian, he retired to Paris with a portion of the printed books; and the second from then until his death in 1665 when, living mostly abroad, he accumulated a second library of printed books" (Watson, Introduction 2.1). When he left England, he had to leave books behind—so the remainder of that library was lost or given away. The library in France numbered about 3500 volumes, with only one book written in English; this library contained books written in French, Latin, Italian, and Spanish, languages "he evidently handled in any degree of complexity, both in reading and writing" (Petersson 245). At Digby's death, the library in Paris "devolved by French law to the Crown"; his cousin, George Digby, second Earl of Bristol, bought the library, but after George Digby's death, the books were sold at auction in 1680 (Bligh 213).

Digby not only collected books, he was also happy to give them away. His first donation was that of his manuscripts, which he donated to the Bodleian Library at the end of 1634. On 19

December 1634, Archbishop Laud informed the Bodleian that the manuscripts had been acquired and were on their way:

That which I know will be very beneficial to you is a parcel of manuscripts which I have obtained for your library from a very learned and noble gentleman, Sir Kenelm Digby. These manuscripts (many of them being very good) he hath been at the charge to bind up, and put his arms fair upon them, and I think there are very few but so bound.... For myself I do not think it fit any way to meddle with them, but have left them in their several trunks, as they were packed up by himself, and so sent them to you. (qtd. in Bligh 207).

The books arrived in Oxford eleven days later (Watson, Introduction 2.2–3).

Laud was also instrumental in arranging Digby's 1642 donation of some thirty-six Oriental manuscripts to Oxford's St. John's College. These manuscripts, along with the Oriental manuscripts Laud himself had donated to the college at the same time, were part of the Bodleian's collection by 1656. At about the same time as the donation to St. John's, Digby donated "about forty volumes, mainly theological" to the library of the then new Harvard College in Massachusetts (Petersson 243). One of Digby's volumes is reported to be the single surviving volume from the 1764 fire that destroyed everything except one book which had been smuggled out by a student (243).

The importance of public access to his books is evident in a letter Digby wrote to Dr. Gerard Langbaine, the Provost of Queen's College, Oxford, two decades after the donation to the Bodleian. In this letter, Digby comments on his desire "that whensoever a deserving person desired to make use of any of these bookes I gaue (especially for printing of them) they to whom the care of the library was committed, might pleasure him by the lone thereof" (qtd. in Watson, Introduction 2.2). Digby's manuscripts show both his travels and his wide-ranging interests.

Around thirty manuscripts, including his first acquisition, are of Italian origin, while the majority of Digby's seventy or so other manuscripts were of English origin (2.1). Not surprisingly, many of Digby's acquisitions were scientific—his first purchased manuscript was “the twelfth/thirteenth-century manuscript in geomancy that is now MS Digby 50” (2.1)—and Watson notes that “acquisitions of a scientific nature were probably purposeful, and so may have been his acquisition of the quite large group of Middle English manuscripts [. . .]” (2:1). Of the thirty-two books and rolls containing Digby's acquisitions written in English, seven contain Middle English literature (MSS 14, 87, 171, 232, 133, 181 and 185). There is a *Piers Plowman* manuscript (171), a manuscript of Lydgate's *Siege of Troy* (232), a manuscript containing selections by Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Chaucer (including *Troilus and Criseyde*) (181), a manuscript containing plays (133), and two manuscripts containing Rolle's *Prick of Conscience* (14 and 87) (Macray 1:193, 1:243; Watson, Introduction 2:1; Hunt and Watson, “Notes” 2:84). Digby 185 may have appealed to Kenelm Digby because it contained a romance since a number of the works in his collection could be considered romances, and his own *Memoirs* strongly suggest an interest in the genre. However, it seems more likely that Digby 185 appealed to him because of the Hoccleve poetry in the verse section of the manuscript; with this manuscript, he owned a copy of a major poem by Chaucer and by both of Chaucer's successors, Hoccleve and Lydgate. If this is the reason for Digby's purchase of the manuscript, the survival of the only manuscript copy of the Middle English *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* is simply an accident of the construction of the manuscript.

Nearly all (196 of 236) the manuscripts Digby donated to the Bodleian are bound in uniform calf bindings with clasps, and 192 have the Digby coat of arms on the covers (Watson, Introduction 2.3). Much of the binding must have done between Digby's inheritance from Allen (December 1632) and his donation to the Bodleian two years later because the Allen manuscripts

are primarily bound in the Digby uniform binding. Of Digby's Middle English literary manuscripts, only two are not currently in the uniform binding: the "Digby plays" (Digby 133) is now in a Bodleian binding, so it may or may not have once been in the Digby binding, while Lydgate's *Siege of Troy* (Digby 232) is probably not in a Digby binding, but has had the Digby arms stamped on it (Watson, Introduction 2.3). If Watson is correct that Digby had two reasons for the exceptions to the rebinding done in 1633 or 1634—either a sense that the book was not important enough for the expense or a desire to preserve old bindings (2.3–4)—then we can deduce two things about Digby 185 from its Digby binding: it was important enough, or, perhaps, simply old enough, to rebind, and it did not come to Digby in a binding that he thought interesting enough to preserve.

In the end, Digby's ownership of the manuscript containing *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* suggests little to us of how the romance was read and received.

Sir Simonds D'Ewes and His Library

In contrast to Sir Kenelm Digby, the son of a family that could trace itself back to the time of William the Conqueror, Sir Simonds D'Ewes was born in 1602 into a family on its way up. His great-grandfather, Adrian, was a Flemish immigrant. Simonds D'Ewes insisted that Adrian "was a political refugee of noble origin" (Watson, *Library* 2). His grandfather, Garret or Geerhardt D'Ewes, "was a printer in London, at St. Paul's Churchyard at the sign of the Swan, and later owned a manor in [. . .] Essex" (2). Simonds D'Ewes's father, Paul D'Ewes, purchased a Clerkship in the Court of Chancery in 1607 and eventually purchased two estates, one in Suffolk and one near Bury St. Edmunds. This latter estate, Stow Hall at Stowlangtoft, was the primary home of Simonds D'Ewes's library.

D'Ewes attended St. John's College, Cambridge, for two years before, on his father's order, he began his study of the law at the Middle Temple (3–4). He began to acquire books while at the Middle Temple, but it was after his admittance to the bar in June 1623 that “he began to gather a library in earnest” (5). As part of his practice, he met Sir Robert Cotton and became fascinated by what he called “the studie of Recorde” (5). In July 1626, D'Ewes had a portrait of Sir Robert Cotton painted of which he writes, “[. . .] I now highlie value, & have placed in my librarie as a select & choice monument” (45–46). This was the same year that he was knighted and that he left the practice of law to devote himself to historical studies, almost none of which were completed and none of which were published during his life (5). The only one to be published was the *Journals of Parliament of Elizabeth*, which finally saw print in 1682, over three decades after D'Ewes's death (55). In addition to the more straightforward historical treatises, D'Ewes was one of a number of scholars of his day who were working on an Anglo-Saxon dictionary (10), and he was actively working on numismatical treatises at the time of his death on 8 April 1650, of which the notes now in Harley 255 are all that remain (13–15).

Where Digby was clearly a Royalist, D'Ewes was a Parliamentarian, serving from November 1640 until December 1648. D'Ewes's political career was fraught with difficulties. His appointment as High Sheriff of Suffolk in 1639 saw him brought up before the Star Chamber for not collecting enough taxes, and his value to Parliament was his “ability to quote, almost offhand, the records of the past [. . .]” (Notestein, qtd. in Watson, *Library* 6). In July 1641, he became a baronet, a title that died out a mere ninety years later with the death of his great-grandson in 1731 (7, 61). While D'Ewes's knowledge of old records was useful at the beginning of his term in Parliament, over time the need for this service waned, and D'Ewes's personality did not make him friends. A fellow scholar, Roger Dodsworth, regularly referred to him as “the beast” in letters to a mutual friend: “[. . .] I know no more of the Saxon Grammar then what the

beast averreth, and beleive he will not ly, viz. that itt is ready. My cosen Rushworth hath taken his Saxon Testament from him, and doth much distaste his prittle prattle; hee hath a desire to procure some helps to perfect your Saxon Dictionary which the Beast undervalued to my Cosen [. . .]” (11).

Dodsworth’s dislike of D’Ewes did not prevent him from making use of the D’Ewes library: between 1640 and 1652, Dodsworth transcribed excerpts from a number of manuscripts in the collection (both original or themselves transcriptions done by D’Ewes). He also transcribed over three hundred deeds and many charters from the originals D’Ewes owned (42–43). Dugdale also transcribed sections from D’Ewes’s manuscripts from as early as 1635 (as can be seen in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Dugdale 15) to after 1660 (Dugdale 20) (43). Another scholar who made use of D’Ewes’s library was Francis Junius, who was a frequent visitor during 1645–1647; evidence of those visits may be seen in the collations in his hand in Harley 55, Harley 307, and Harley 596 (43–44).

D’Ewes acquired the first substantial bulk of materials for his collection when he purchased a dozen manuscripts that previously had been part of Henry Savile’s collection in the winter of 1624–1625. These may have been purchased from an intermediate owner; Savile died in 1617, and we know from Cotton’s 1621 catalog that some of Savile’s books had already come into Cotton’s library. Other large purchases made by D’Ewes include about fifteen manuscripts from John Dee’s collection in February 1626 (21–22) and the complete collection of Ralph Starkey in 1628 (24–25).

No plans survive for the library during D’Ewes’s lifetime, so any assumptions about physical appearance must be based on what we know about the press-marks assigned to various documents in London, British Library MS Additional 22918, a 1687 copy of an earlier catalog (55). A second manuscript catalog, Harley 775, is nearly identical to Additional 22918; both are

likely copied from the same original, which was probably done after D'Ewes's death, and appears to have been incomplete (at least a few press-marks were omitted entirely) (64–66).

There is also a printed catalog, Edward Bernard's *Catalogi manuscriptorum Angliae and Hiberniae* (1698), which, while containing an ordering of the manuscripts that is nearly identical to Additional 22918 (55), includes only two hundred of D'Ewes's manuscripts (67).

The books were ordered by medium (manuscripts vs. printed books) as the primary classification. Then manuscripts were ordered first by size, then age, then subject matter. Printed books were ordered by subject matter and then size. However, none of these systems of ordering the collection were consistently applied. Even the first division was violated in press-marks Mm and Oo where the subject matters (genealogy and numismatics) were primary: manuscripts and printed books intermingled here. Occasionally a post-medieval transcript would be shelved with medieval manuscripts, but most were shelved as a group. Likewise, some of the historical material was clearly ordered by date, but not all (46). Watson notes that, while “their contents were so familiar to [D'Ewes] that the lettering was unused and he had no need to write the press-marks on the volumes themselves [. . .] as late as 1646 and 1649 he seems to have had no clear way of describing the location of a volume when he wanted it sent from Stow Hall to him in London” (51).

The printed books from the D'Ewes collection “seem, in fact, to have almost entirely disappeared [. . .] swallowed up firstly in the 90,000 volumes of Harley's library, and secondly in their sale in 1743–45” (62). From the catalogs, we can tell that the majority of the printed books were histories (about two hundred volumes), with a significant number of theological works (about one hundred volumes), law and classics (fifty volumes each), coins (thirty volumes), language (twenty-four volumes), and genealogy and heraldry (twelve volumes). There were also a few works on logic (37–38). There were few literary works: “several copies of Barclay's

Argenis in English or Latin, a Chaucer, Tasso's *Godfrey of Bulloigne* in English, Drayton's works, Sydney's *Arcadia*, *Ariana* and a very few more" (38). The only drama in his collection is a Middle Temple Masque published in 1613 (38). A final group of printed books consists of those Watson labels as "practical": books on horsemanship, husbandry, and the education of children, such as Ascham's *Schoolemaster* (38).

The majority of D'Ewes's collection, however, was not books of any sort. While the D'Ewes manuscripts represent about 10% of the modern Harley collection of manuscripts, his rolls and charters represent nearly two-thirds of those parts of the Harley collection (62). These materials were a primary source of the knowledge of past Parliamentary action that made him a valued member of the Long Parliament, at least for a time.

D'Ewes was proud of his collection of manuscripts; in fact, his will required that his library not be sold and that it should be available to those who wished to use it (54). He even included an elaborate scheme of inheritance should his primary heir not be willing to abide by his wishes. Another sign of his pride in his manuscript books was the way he added title-pages to a number of his manuscripts (thirty-six survive): "Most of them are fairly elaborate in wording and layout and many are in colour or at least have red initials" (50). "The same sort of pride," Watson comments, "was perhaps behind D'Ewes's touching up of other manuscripts—a rubric made clearer in MS Harley 218 and faded words inked over in MS Harley 526" (50). Watson notes, "This kind of thing is fairly harmless [. . .]" (50), but it is clear that Watson is "scandalised" (the word he uses to describe the following quotation from Wanley) about Harley 266, a fifteenth-century *Brut* with the 1418–1430 continuation:

It seemeth a little extraordinary to me that Sir Simonds D'Ewes should (as he hath done with his own hands) take his old Book, and cutt off the first leaf or leaves; rase off the 3 first lines in another place wherein were the conclusion of a former

Chapter, & the Title of the next; write thereon a new Title for the Book; that he should rase off the remaining Numbers of the Chapters, & sett new Numbers thereon [. . .]; that he should do the same by the Numbers of the leaves; that he should rase out the first Words of the first Chapter now remaining (except the principal Letter) and write other Words in the room thereof, and that he should, to crown the matter, prefix a new Frontispiece or Title of his own Invention thereunto [. . .]. Q. Whether it be fair for any Gentleman to do these things by an old History, although the Book be his own Property. (50)

Clearly, D'Ewes's did not see manuscripts as being as untouchable as Wanley did several decades later. Watson is even more scandalized by D'Ewes having split up an manuscript containing a number of *vitae* into three sections, which are now Harley 315, the central section of Harley 624 (surrounded by D'Ewes's own historical transcriptions), and London, British Library Cotton Nero C.vii (50–51, 160, 277).

Less than fifty manuscripts survive with any part of D'Ewes's binding, and only about twenty survive completely (48). The most common binding was calf with the D'Ewes arms stamped on the front and back covers (48). Exceptions include volumes with the D'Ewes crest rather than the arms; a few with neither arms nor crest; Harley 189, a paper manuscript in D'Ewes's hand, in green velvet; and Harley 616, a thirteenth-century folio Bible, in parchment (49). The first record of what is now Harley 326 is in D'Ewes's account book for 1643, when he paid for it and an Evesham chronicle (Harley 229) to be bound. The current binding, reading

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obviously post-dates the move of the Harley collection to the British Museum.

Table 6 on the next page shows the manuscripts in the D'Ewes library which contained works listed in the volume on romances from J. Burke Severs's *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*. The chart also shows the category under which the works were listed in H. L. D. Ward's *Catalog of Romances in the British Museum* and the pages where more complete information might be found. The descriptions and the listing of other contents are drawn from Ward. The rightmost column indicates the number by which the manuscript is listed in Watson's *Library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes*. Of the nine manuscripts listed, only two contain works in English, Harley 326 (*The Three Kings' Sons*) and Harley 525 (a Troy poem and *King Robert of Sicily*, as well a work called *Sir Gy Warwick and Alquyne the Heremite, a sermon in verse*, which Ward does not identify as a romance). The reference to Guy of Warwick does suggest a relationship to romance for the entire manuscript, however, even if "sermon" appears in the title.¹⁰ In addition to these English manuscripts, D'Ewes also owned a French *Tristram* (Harley 49) and a manuscript (Harley 527) with both Latin and French including an *Alexander the Great* (Latin), *Gui de Bourgogne* (French) and a French *Horn*. This latter manuscript, however, included more obviously religious works as well, the *Chastoiement d'un Pere a son Fils* and extracts from *Isidorus de ortu et obitu patriarcharum*. The remaining manuscripts are all in Latin, and they are predominately versions of the history of Troy.

Since D'Ewes owned so little literature, one wonders why he owned any at all. D'Ewes's manuscript collection was some five or six times that size of Digby's collection, once the manuscripts from Thomas Allen are subtracted from the total. But Digby's collection included, arguably, three Middle English romance manuscripts (including Lydgate's *Siege of Troy* and

¹⁰ The first Middle English version of the romance *Guy of Warwick* was translated from Anglo-Norman in approximately 1300. The story was actively adapted for public consumption throughout the seventeenth century, including as a play early in the century (Severs 27–31).

Table 6

Romances in the Library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes

Manuscript	Narrative	Language	MS Contents	D'Ewes #
Cotton Cleopatra C.x	<i>Prophecy of Merlin</i> (Ward 1.298)	Latin	thirteenth cen <i>Chronicle of Radulphus Niger</i> (1–55); 1st page of <i>Prophecy of Merlin</i> ; fifteenth cen paper “rules for electing the Mayor of Norwich” (56–65b?); remainder of <i>Prophecy of Merlin</i> ; “Bound up with other MSS. of various periods.”	Appx. 1. B1
Harley 49	<i>Tristram</i> (Ward 1.358–59)	French	<i>Tristan</i> (entire volume): “On the last fly-leaf (f. 155) is written: ‘Iste liber constat Ricardo duci Gloucestre’; and at the bottom of the same page: ‘Sans r... yr. Elyzabeth’ (Elizabeth of York)”	A263
Harley 51	<i>Historia Trojana</i> (Ward 1.52)	Latin	<i>Historia Trojana</i> (3–105b); <i>Peccatorum Consolatio</i> by Jacobus de Theramo (or de Ancharano) (106–184b)	A215
Harley 176	<i>Historia Trojana</i> (Ward 1.47–48)	Latin	only text in manuscript (1–180)	A857
Harley 326	<i>The Three Kings’ Sons</i> (Ward 1.782–83)	English	“Preceded by an imperfect paper copy of a ‘breff tretis,’ compiled in the reign of Edward IV. (1461–1483), showing that king’s descent from Rollo and his claims upon the crown of France, in 7 leaves....” (1–7); <i>Three Kings’ Sons</i> (8–123b)	A224
Harley 525	<i>King Robert of Sicily</i> (Ward 1.765) <i>Romance of Troy</i> (Ward 1.84–86)	English English	“short poem on the Siege of Troy” (1–34b); <i>King Robert of Sicily</i> (35–43b); “ <i>Sir Gy of Warwick and Alquyne the Heremite</i> , a sermon in verse” (44–53) (in English, 1.84)	Int. n292, A890
Harley 527	<i>Alexander the Great</i> (Ward 1.113) <i>Gui de Bourgogne</i> (Ward 1.630) <i>King Horn</i> (Ward 1.468–69)	Latin French French	<i>Chanson of Gui de Bourgogne</i> (1); <i>Chastoiement d’un Père à son Fils</i> (32b); <i>Alexander the Great</i> (47); Extracts from <i>Isidorus de ortu et obitu patriarcharum</i> (56b); <i>Chanson of Horn</i> (59–73b)	A260
Harley 641	<i>Dares Phrygius</i> (Ward 20–21)	Latin	<i>Dares Phrygius</i> (1–8); <i>Chronicles of John Bever</i> (or Castor) (8–115b?); fifteenth cen <i>Chronicles of Martinus Polonus</i> (118–206b)	A159
Harley 655	<i>Vita Merlini</i> (Ward 1.288–89)	Latin	“Inserted in the middle of a copy of Higden’s <i>Polychronicon</i> of the second class, ending 1338, to which is added (at ff. 322–338) another chronicle of the years 1336–1345. ... inserted between the years 525 and 533”	A157

Sources: Andrew G. Watson, *The Library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes* (London, British Museum, 1966) and H. L. D. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*. Vol. 1. (London: British Museum, 1883. London: British Museum, 1961).

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as well as *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*), while D'Ewes's collection included only two. There are two possible explanations for the presence of *The Three Kings' Sons* in D'Ewes's collection, both related to his interest in history. The first explanation is that he may have wanted it for its relationship (or potential relationship) to royalty. The only completely French romance manuscript in D'Ewes's collection (Harley 49) is a *Tristram* that contains notes connecting it to the House of York: the flyleaf names Richard III and his niece, Elizabeth of York, as owner and reader of the manuscript (Ward 1.358–59). While this suggests that the book was valued as an artifact rather than as a book *per se*, the other possible explanation is more intriguing. It is possible that D'Ewes did not experience *The Three Kings' Sons* as a romance in the modern sense. D'Ewes may have experienced the work as it presented itself, as a history of a time long past, a way of reading that has more in common with medieval than modern notions of the historical and the fictional. This reading of D'Ewes's collection is supported by a look at the manuscripts which D'Ewes shelved near *The Three Kings' Sons*. The manuscript is the first to be listed in press-mark Ee, followed by the *Brut* (Harley 266) whose treatment so enraged Wanley, a chronicle from Evesham Abbey (Harley 229), two primers, a collection of sermons (Harley 504), the letters of Thomas Becket (Harley 215), a copy of Mandeville's *Travels* (Harley 204), an edition of Richard Rolle's works (Harley 275), a thirteenth-century Bible (Harley 507), the sermons of John Felton (Harley 238), and charters from St. Mary's Abbey in York (Harley 236) (125–26). These titles suggest that D'Ewes saw a relationship between *The Three Kings' Sons* and chronicles, particularly with church chronicles and related documents. The closeness of a copy of Mandeville's *Travels* may suggest an association with far-away places. However, little of D'Ewes's life suggests he had much use for the imaginative life or imaginative literature.

Since D'Ewes's library shows that his primary interests were historical, it seems quite possible that he experienced *The Three Kings' Sons* as he probably experienced the *Brut* shelved next to it—as a history.

D'Ewes's ownership of the manuscript containing *The Three Kings' Sons* suggests more about the romance's reception in the seventeenth century than does Digby's ownership of the manuscript containing *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, precisely because *The Three Kings' Sons* seems such an unlikely work for Simonds D'Ewes to own. It is also easier to compare the manuscript that is now Harley 326 to the rest of the manuscripts in the D'Ewes collection than it is to compare what is now Digby 185 to rest of the Digby collection since Harley 326 does not contain a range of different materials. In a manuscript like Digby 185, it is always possible that the particular work being examined was not the controlling factor for decisions such as shelving.

The examination of these two collections suggests that the similarity of an individual manuscript to the rest of the collection is of primary importance in determining how the work being considered was received. However, similarity to the collection may not be easy to determine. For example, if Harley 326 is considered a romance manuscript, then it is very different from the D'Ewes collection as a whole. On the other hand, if it is considered a history manuscript, as D'Ewes may have considered it, then it is not so different from the rest of the collection.

CHAPTER 6

PLOTTING A STAR CHART: FURTHER STEPS IN DISCOVERING GENRE

The biological metaphor which likens literary genre to a biological taxonomic category does not comfortably classify Middle English prose romances. While the use of the word *romance* implies that the prose romances should be classed with the verse romances of the early, particularly French, tradition, discussions of the prose romances tend to focus on how they differ from those earlier works. That they are long narratives in prose suggests a connection to novels, but the prose romances date from too early a century and are still too tied to a medieval worldview, to be classed as the first novels in the English literary tradition. With the exception of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, prose romances have been at best marginalized and at worst ignored, but in order to more clearly understand the genre of the medieval romance, it is necessary to start with these romances, precisely because they exist at the margins of current definitions of the genre. The discovery of genre must begin not with generic definitions, but with the works, the texts, and the collections which provide information about earlier ways in which the works and texts were read, so that the characteristics of the genre are derived from comparison of potential members of that genre rather than imposed upon those works. Furthermore, generating new, or renewed, generic descriptions is easier from works and texts for which significant inherited horizons of expectation do not already exist.

I have here analyzed three reception contexts for two of these marginalized Middle English prose romances. My purpose in looking at each of these reception contexts has been to develop a system that can be applied to multiple works and texts in order to determine generic characteristics. In the first reception context, literary culture, the focus is on the work. Discussion

of the narrative proceeds by examining eight literary elements: form, plot, narrative voice, setting, character, connection to other works, cultural influence on the work, and the cultural influence of the work. The second reception context, material culture, focuses on the text. In this discussion, the examination of material culture has focused solely on manuscripts and, thus, has excluded printed texts. Choices made by the creator or patron of a manuscript involving the quality of the parchment, the level of decoration, and the extensiveness of the pattern of illustration all imply something about the value and meaning assigned to the work which is being embodied, being made text, in the creation of the manuscript. When the name of the patron who ordered the book is known or can be deduced, what is known about the patron's life also plays a role because such biographical information may explain why that particular person would want a text of that particular work. The third reception context, the culture of collection, leans even more heavily on biographical information since it focuses on the interests of individual collectors as indicated by their owning specific books. Inferences about how specific books were read by their owners can be made not only from knowing about the life of the owner, but also from looking at the collection as an anthology "edited" by the collector.

Literary culture (the examination of the work, its sources, and its cultural background) provides most of the data to be used in discovering genre. Genre is, after all, a grouping of works. Material culture and the culture of collection provide snapshots of the reception of literary works and their texts at specific times, allowing us a potential glimpse of the ways in which the works were read in cultures different from our own. Looking at multiple reception contexts provides more data points for plotting a generic star chart.

For example, the presentation of the text in Digby 185 does not particularly influence a reading of the work *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, whereas Harley 326 and *The Three Kings' Sons* provide a striking example of how the reading which emerges from one reception

context may influence the reading of another reception context. Here one reception context, material culture—specifically, the plan of illustration for Harley 326—places a heavy emphasis on Alfour, helping to foreground his role. This insight can then be read back into the reception context of literary culture, where Alfour has already been recognized as playing a larger role in the work than does Sidone's father in *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*. The manuscript's illustrations intensify this perception of Alfour as an important character in the work, highlighting the ways in which Alfour is not only the heroine's father, but also a hero in his own right; the work is as much the story of how Alfour of Sicily becomes emperor as it is the story of how the future kings of France, Scotland, and England become good friends. One of the French titles for the work, the *Chronique de Naples*, also focuses more on Alfour than on the three young men. To the extent that characterization is a part of the genre, this focus on Alfour influences how *The Three Kings' Sons* might be plotted in the growing generic star chart of late Middle English prose romance.

Likewise, when we consider the third reception context, the culture of collection, the presence of *King Ponthus and Fair Sidone* in the collection of Sir Kenelm Digby seems to be such a happy accident that it does not provide enough data to plot into our generic star chart. On the other hand, the presence of *The Three Kings' Sons* in the collection of Sir Simonds D'Ewes suggests that this collector understood the work more as history than as romance. The result of the evidence from the culture of collection in plotting these works into the generic star chart is to solidify the sense that, while these works are within the same set—it is possible to look at them and see both at the same time—they are not particularly closely related. In fact, they stand at opposite ends of the multidimensional star chart.

While it is possible to examine the literary culture, the material culture, and the culture of collection for a single work, discovering genre requires scholars to apply these tools to more than

one work. After all, genre is about the similarities and differences of multiple works. The discoveries of one reception context may intensify or complicate the discoveries of another. It is necessary to consider each context in relation to each work and text being examined, even if the various reception contexts provide little additional data.

From the two narratives so far examined, the genre of the Middle English prose romance has the following eleven characteristics:

1. It is written in prose.
2. Repetition is an important element of its formal presentation and its plot structure.
3. Its narrator is both omniscient and directly addresses the audience.
4. Its focal characters are of royal birth.
5. The motivation for its characters' actions is explicitly provided.
6. Its geographic settings cover a wide area of the known world.
7. At least some of its geography is realistic.
8. While it presents individual duels, especially in tournaments, group fighting receives more attention, both in battles and in tournament *mêlées*.
9. There are few, if any, explicitly fantastic elements.
10. It has a didactic purpose (at least implicitly) as well as an entertaining one.
11. It overlaps hagiography on one side and history on the other.

As more works are studied, these characteristics may change, of course. Each new work or text to be considered would be examined according to the eight literary elements discussed in Chapter 3 (see pages 36–37), not the list of eleven generic characteristics listed above, which is only provisional and based on little data. The eight literary elements serve to focus readings of the works being examined so that they may be compared, while the list of eleven generic characteristics is derived from the resulting readings.

Discovering a generic star chart requires more than simply a couple of data points, of course. In many ways, the two works, two texts, and two collections discussed here are easily examined since there is, for each narrative, only one work, one text, and one collection. Each reception context can be more complicated. Works, for example, may have more than one version, and then the method presented here would need to be applied to as many versions as possible, preferably to all of them. For the reception context of material culture, a multiplicity of texts would likewise require that the method presented here be applied to each manuscript or printed book. This would likely result in more nuanced interpretations than result from a single text because not all manuscripts imply the same level of interest on the part of the patron or the bookseller. It is clear from looking at descriptions of the manuscripts containing the French version of *Ponthus*, for example, that a prose romance might survive in a wide variety of manuscript types, ranging from London, British Library MS Royal 15.E.VI, with its elaborate pattern of illustration—there are a total of thirty-six miniatures on the twenty folios of the text of *Ponthus*—to Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS fonds fr. 1487, which contains very little decoration—merely some “simple, large capitals” (Krappe xv, xlv). The implications of these physical differences would need to be explored both for individual manuscripts and printed books and for the entire group. Finally, for the culture of collection, in those cases where a volume has passed from one collection into another, both collections would need to be studied according to the method laid out above. Again, the pattern of examination would remain the same, simply involving the need to look at more data and the potential for more complex responses than in the two cases examined here.

Since I have focused here on two works which each survive in only one manuscript text, a possible next step towards discovering the generic star chart for the Middle English prose romances would be to expand the examination of material culture to include examples of works

which survive in printed books. The culture of collection would also need to be reconsidered since the form I have laid out earlier assumes a limited number of unique books, something that necessarily changes with the reproducibility of printed material. Issues to ponder include whether to focus on only one printing of a particular work and, if not, how many printings to include (any sixteenth-century ones, perhaps, or maybe only printings from the first quarter of that century). The examination of collections is made more difficult with printed books than with manuscripts because it is not always possible to tell exactly which printed edition is meant in a catalog—assuming there exists a catalog of the printed books at all. These are not insurmountable problems, and the history of the surviving texts will determine exactly how these issues should be answered for each exemplar.

While the eleven generic characteristics listed above provide a starting point for graphically plotting a generic star chart for the Middle English prose romances, they are not all equally useful for converting to points on a graph. The characteristics listed above tend to be stable, implying that all works in the genre will conform to them. This is particularly clear in the case of the first characteristic, that the prose romances are all prose. The speculative charts below look at elements where there exists a range of possibilities. The two primary elements (see Figure 5 and 6 on pages 123–24) chart the degree of supernatural elements (ranging from largely supernatural worlds at the left to an absence at the right) and the number of heroes (ranging from a single hero at the back, indicated by the smallest lettering, to multiple heroes, no one of whom is dominant, at the front, indicated by the largest lettering). Three separate sets of speculative multidimensional generic star charts are included below, based on three possible secondary axes (see Figures 7–9 on pages 125–27). The first charts the geographic range of the settings (ranging from myriad settings at the top to a single setting at the bottom). The second charts the attitude towards Saracens and Turks. Unlike the axes discussed so far, this one does not indicate a range

Table 7

Key to Romance Titles for Figures 5–13

Romance	Key
<i>The Three Kings' Sons</i>	3KS
Caxton's <i>The Foure Sons of Aymon</i>	4SA
<i>Arthur of Little Britain</i>	ALB
<i>Prose Alexander</i>	Alex
Caxton's <i>Blanchardyn and Eglantine</i>	B&E
Caxton's <i>Charles the Grete</i>	Char
<i>The Dublin Alexander Epitome</i>	DAE
Caxton's <i>Eneydos</i>	En
Caxton's <i>Godefroy of Bologne</i>	God
<i>Helyas, Knight of the Swan</i>	Hel
<i>Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux</i>	Huon
<i>Ipomedon</i>	Ipo
Caxton's <i>History of Jason</i>	Jas
<i>Prose Lyfe of Joseph</i>	LJos
Malory's <i>The Book of Arthur and His Knights (Le Morte Darthur)</i>	Mal
<i>Melusine</i>	Mel
<i>Prose Merlin</i>	Mer
Caxton's <i>Paris and Vienne</i>	P&V
<i>King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone</i>	Pon
Caxton's <i>The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye</i>	Rec
<i>Robert the Deuyll</i>	Rob
<i>Prose Siege of Jerusalem</i>	SJer
<i>De Sancto Joseph</i>	SJos
<i>Prose Siege of Thebes</i>	STh
<i>Prose Siege of Troy</i>	STr
<i>Valentine and Orson</i>	V&O
<i>William of Palerne</i>	WoP

Sources: J. Burke Severs, gen. ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*, vol.

1 (New Haven, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967) and Joanne A. Rice,

Middle English Romance: An Annotated Bibliography, 1955–1985 (New York: Garland, 1987).

from the lesser to the greater. The center point indicates an absence of Saracens, and therefore an absence of a chartable attitude towards them. Moving towards the top indicates increasingly positive attitudes, while moving towards the bottom indicates increasingly negative attitudes.

The third charts, as best as can currently be determined, the date of the first book (whether manuscript or printed) for each of the twenty-seven narratives commonly grouped together as the prose romances. The earliest (1425) is at the bottom, while the latest (1550) is at the top.

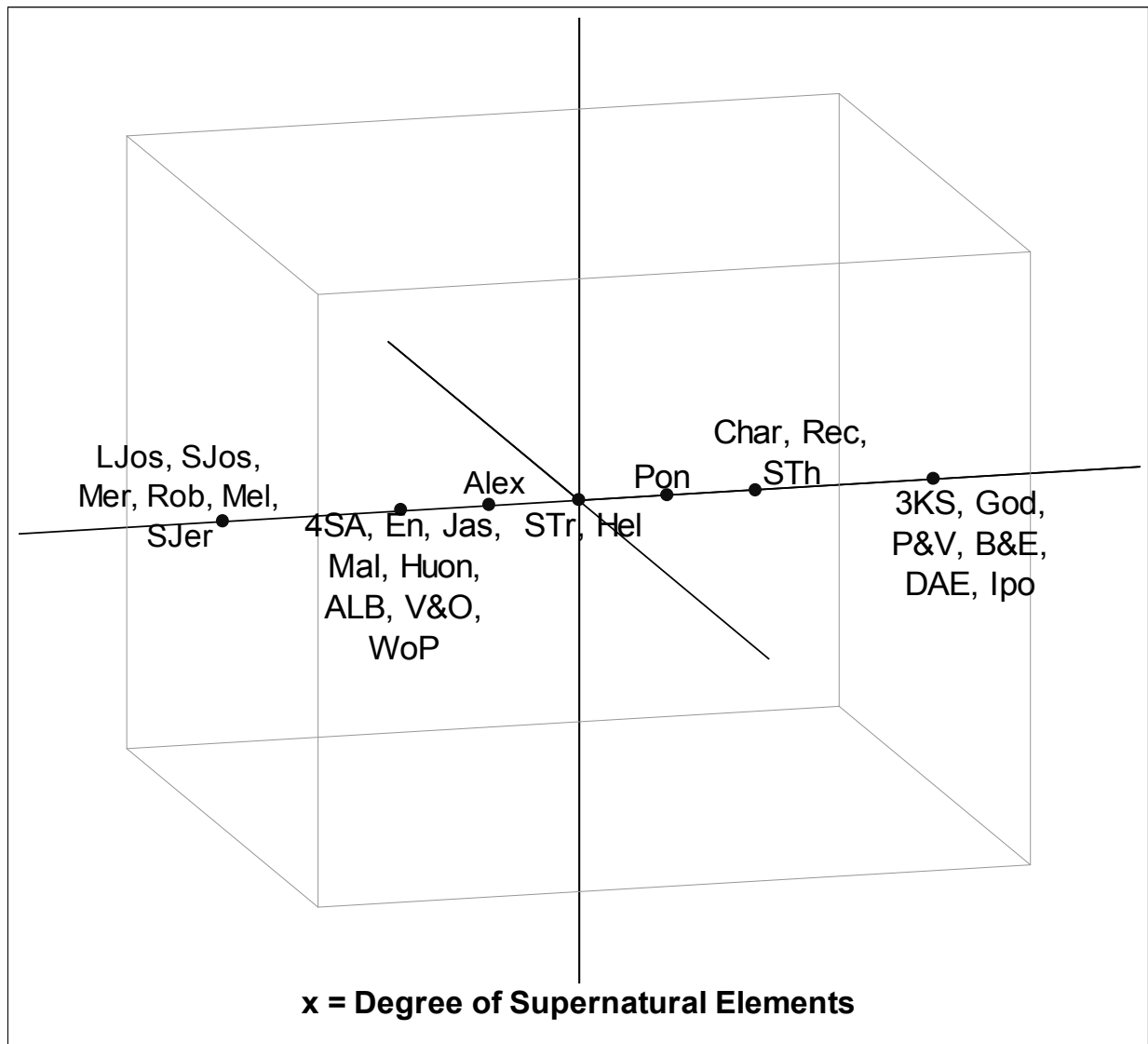


Figure 5: Primary Axis 1: Degree of Supernatural Elements. Works to the left contain more supernatural elements, while those to the right contain fewer supernatural elements.

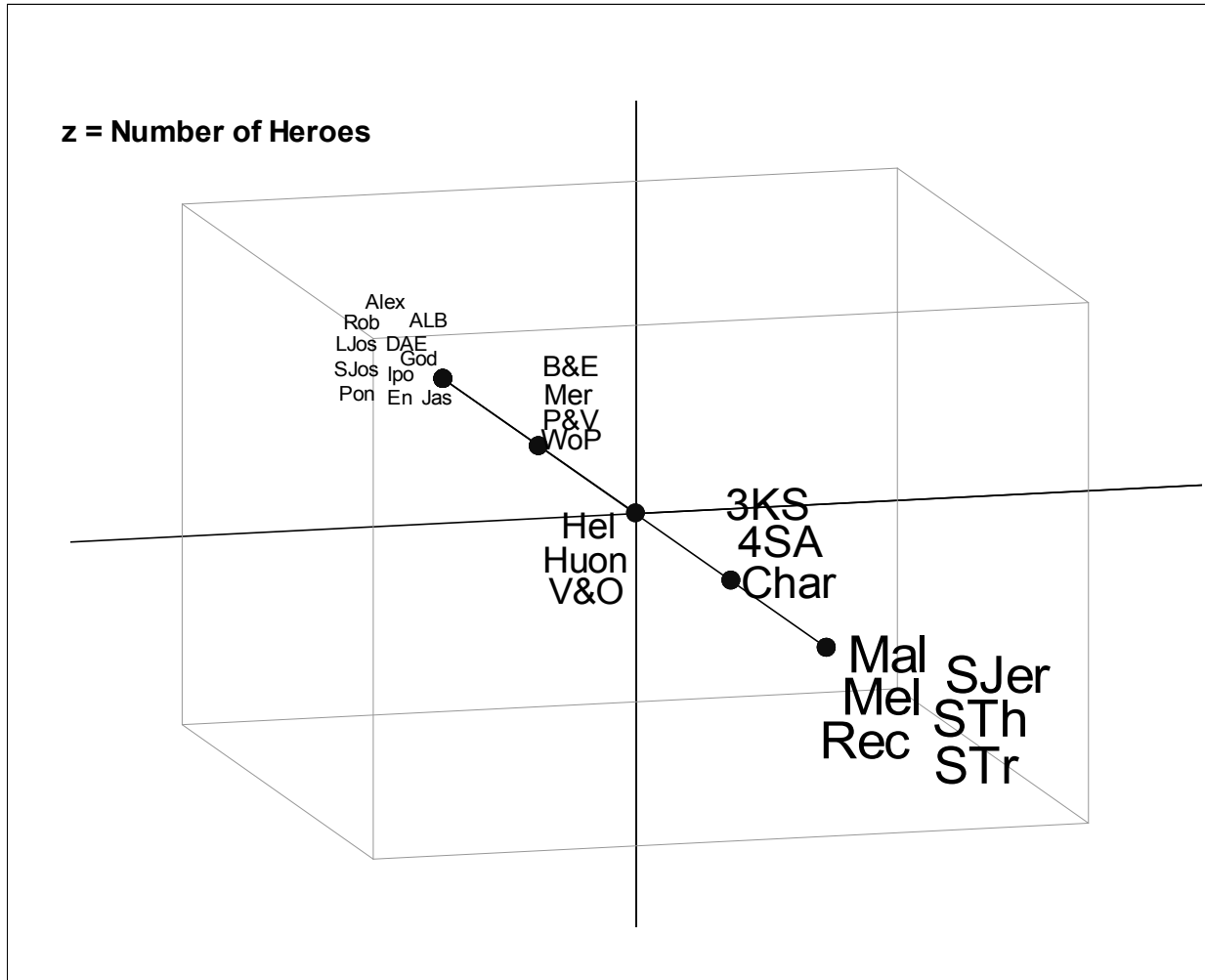


Figure 6: Primary Axis 2: Number of Heroes. Works to the back have fewer heroes, while those to the front have multiple heroes. The size of the label indicates relative closeness to the front, with the largest letters representing the works which chart to the front and the smallest letters representing the works which chart to the back.

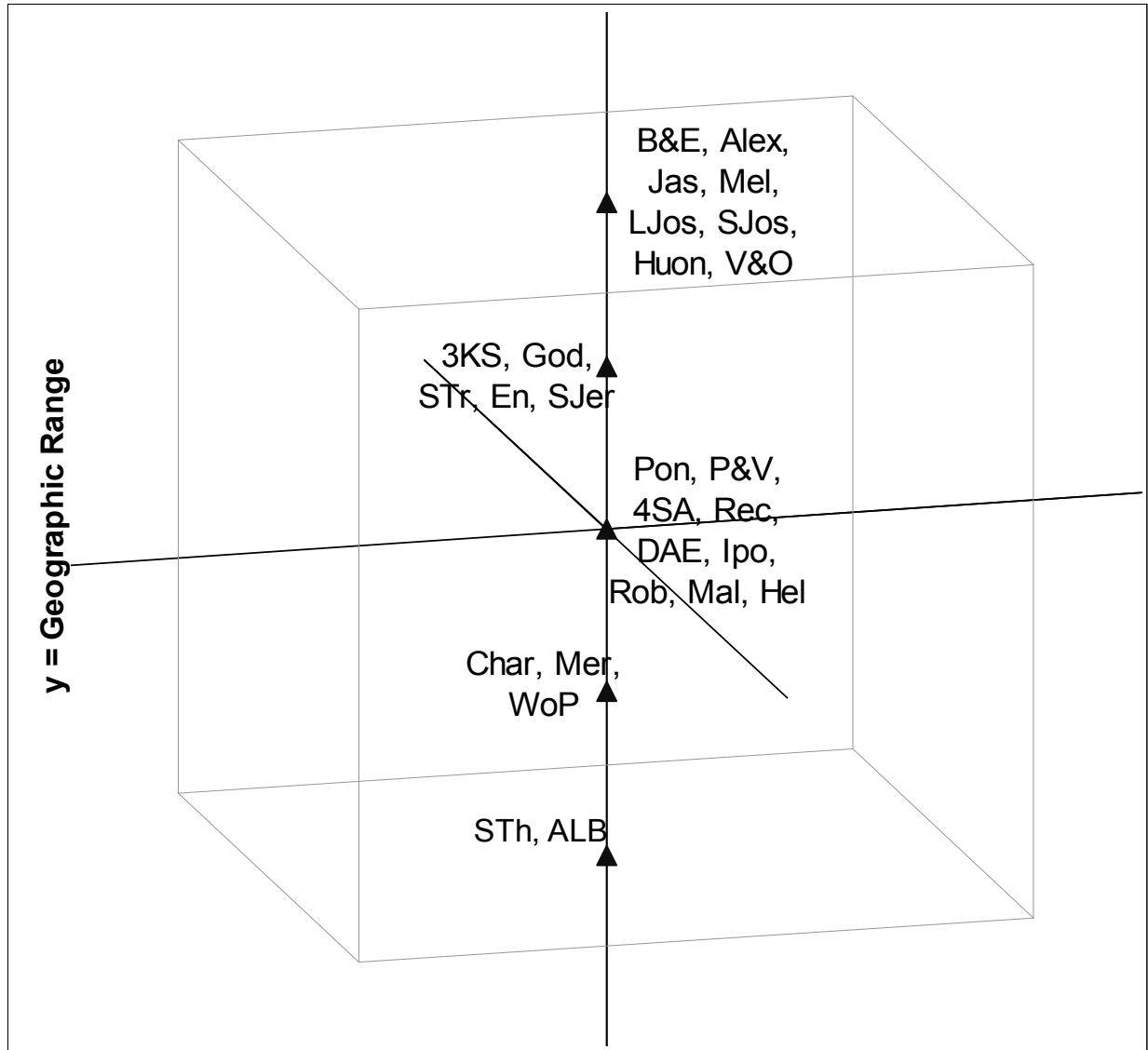


Figure 7: Secondary Axis 1: Geographic Range. Works to the bottom have one geographic setting while those to the top range widely geographically.

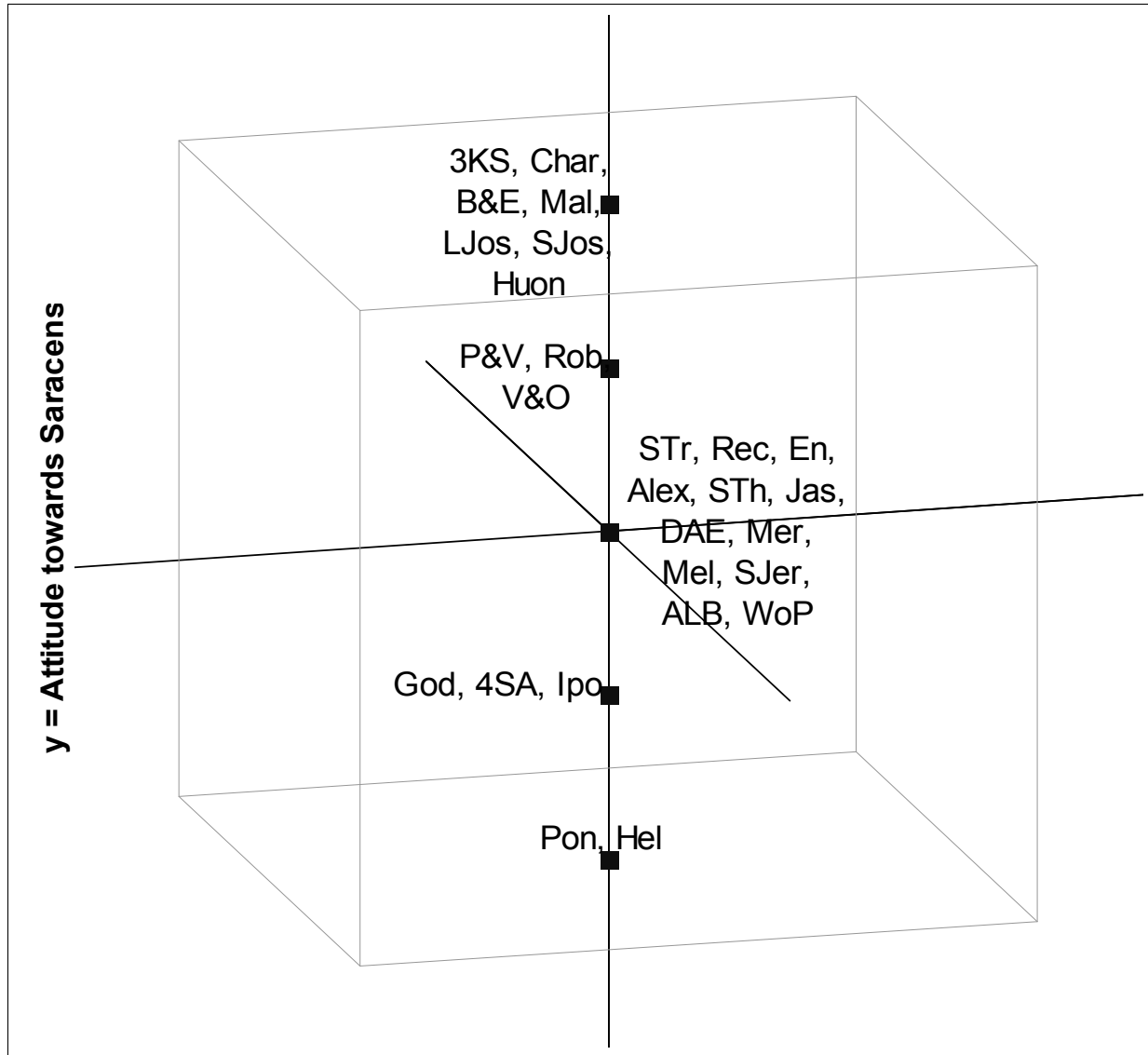


Figure 8: Secondary Axis 2: Attitude towards Saracens. Works which have no Saracen characters or are otherwise neutral towards such characters are in the middle. Works to the bottom have a negative attitude towards Saracens, while those towards the top have a more positive attitude.

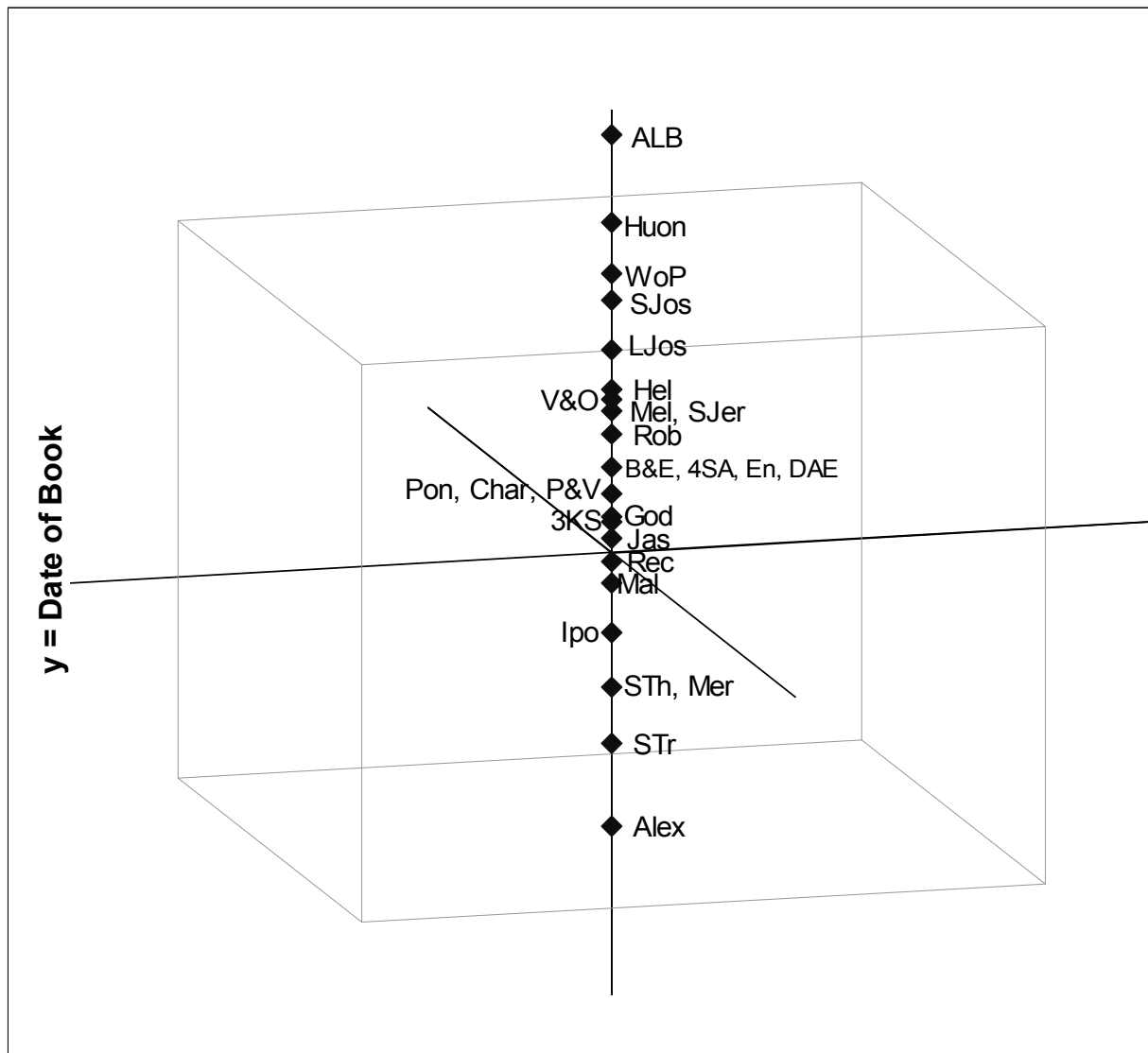


Figure 9: Secondary Axis 3: Date of Book. The oldest book is at the bottom (the *Prose Alexander*, 1425) while the newest book is at the top (*Arthur of Little Britian*, 1550).

The results of charting *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons* according to these axes can be seen in Figure 10 on the next page. The left-hand box (1) shows these two works plotted for number of heroes, presence of the supernatural, and geographic range of setting, while the right-hand box (2) shows them plotted for number of heroes, presence of the supernatural, and attitude toward Saracens. The bottom box (3) shows the two works

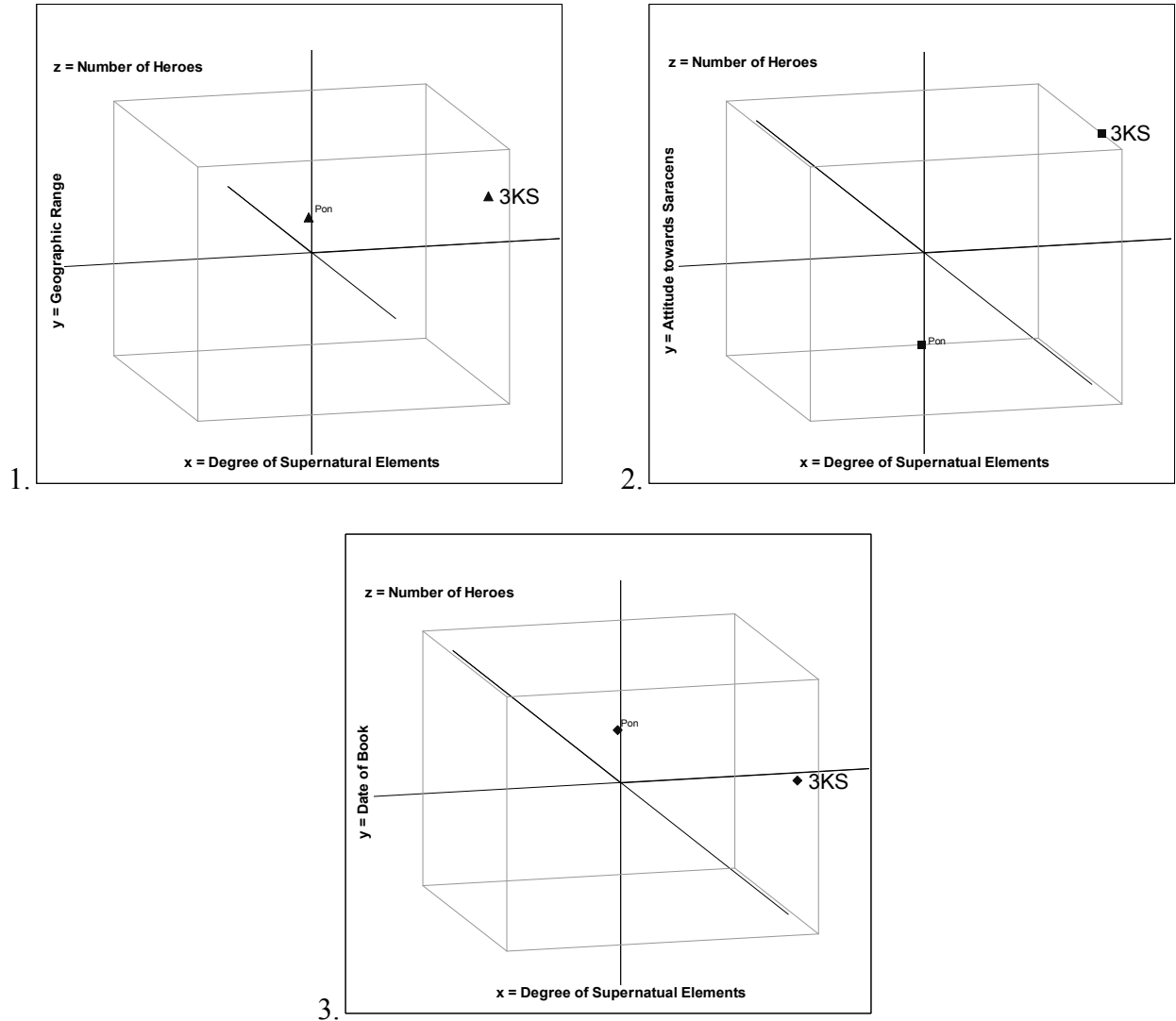


Figure 10: Three Speculative Multidimensional Generic Star Charts for *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons*.

plotted according to number of heroes, presence of the supernatural, and date of the first known surviving book. Because the axes indicate a range of responses rather than distance from an expected response, what is of interest is relative distance and, as more works are plotted, any fairly stable clusters of works. *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons*, regardless of the changes in the y axis, remain rather distant from one another in all three charts, indicating their differences.

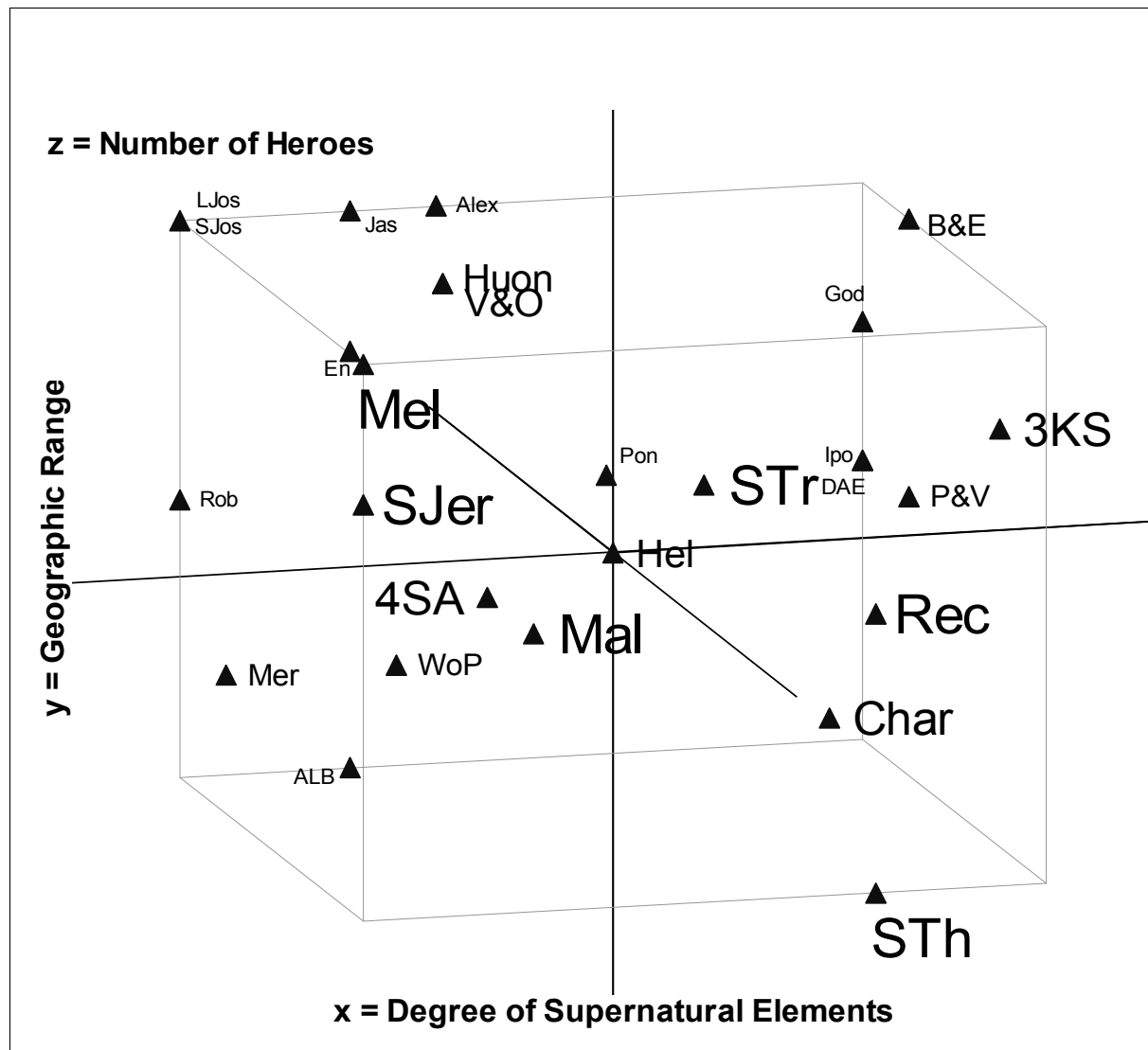


Figure 11: Speculative Multidimensional Generic Star Chart 1: Degree of Supernatural Elements, Geographic Range, and Number of Heroes.

The speculative multidimensional generic star charts on this and the following two pages are based primarily on literary culture because the axes of the the number of heroes, the degree to which the supernatural is present, the geographic range of settings, and the attitude towards Saracens can all be extrapolated from plot summaries. The fifth axis, the date of the first book, belongs to material culture and can likewise be easily found in Severs.

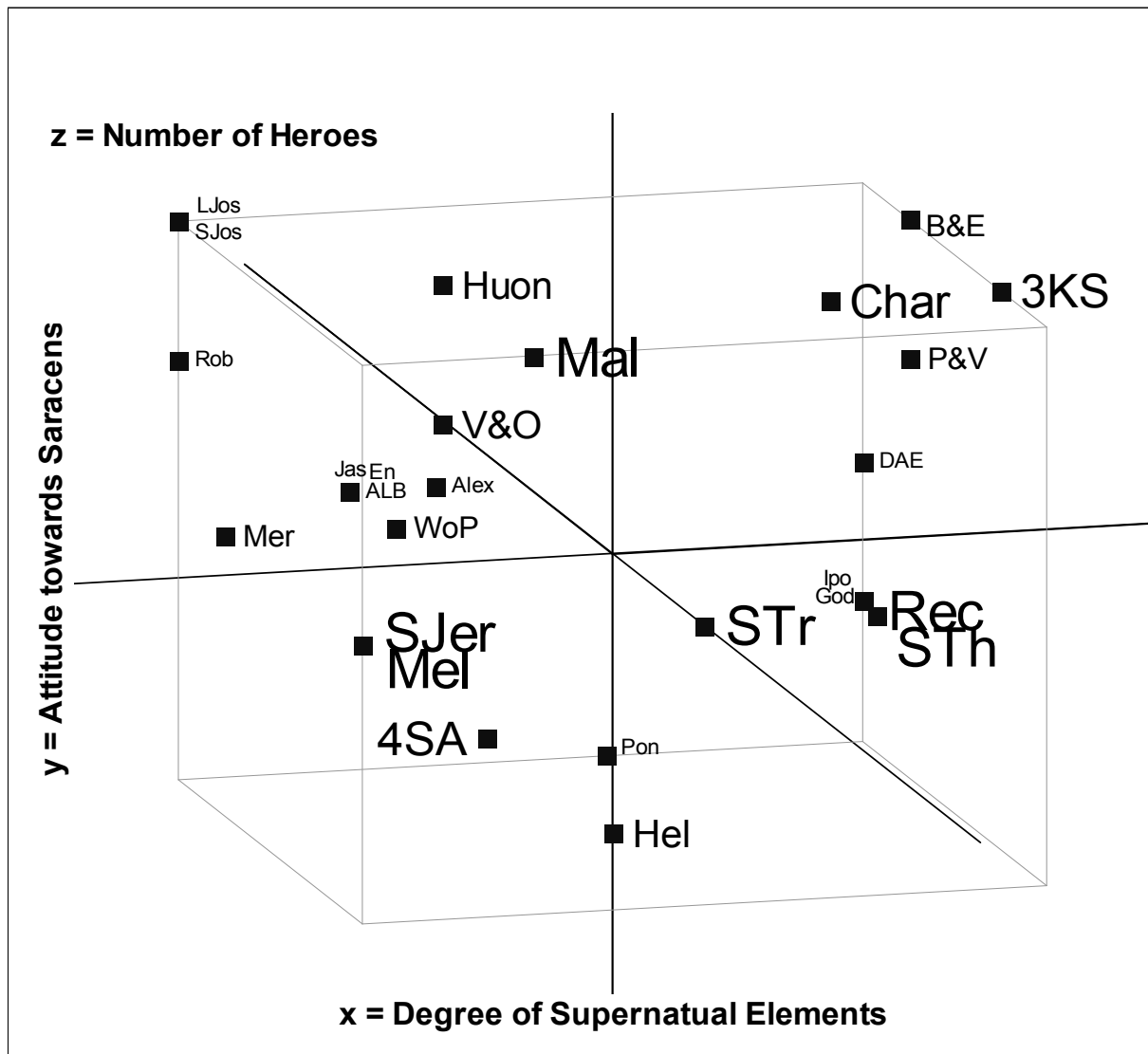


Figure 12: Speculative Multidimensional Generic Star Chart 2: Degree of Supernatural Elements, Attitude towards Saracens, and Number of Heroes.

Reading the star charts requires looking for patterns. Some works, such as the *Prose Siege of Troy* (STr) and the *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (Rec), which might be expected to cluster near one another do not actually do so on all three charts. While they plot to the same point in the chart above, on the previous chart, for example, they are separated by quite a distance. On the other hand, *De Sancto Joseph* (SJos) and *Prose Lyfe of Joseph* (LJos), which

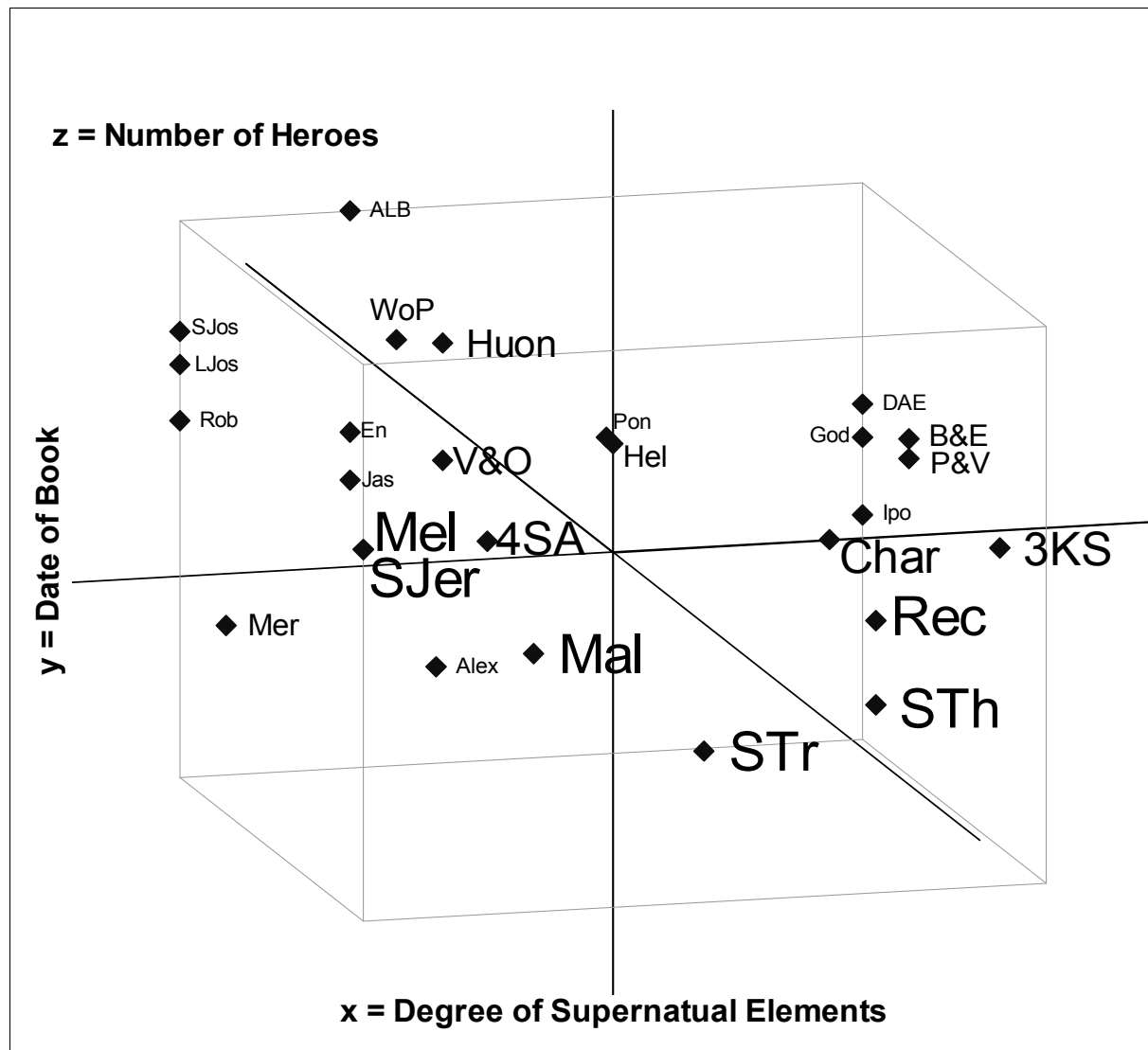


Figure 13: Speculative Multidimensional Generic Star Chart 3: Degree of Supernatural Elements, Date of Book, and Number of Heroes.

are also based on the same narrative, actually do plot to the same point on two of the three charts and are only fractionally separated on the third (Figure 13). This configuration of star charts suggests an additional five pairs of works which tend to cluster together. The closest relationship is perhaps the most surprising since the *Prose Siege of Jerusalem* (SJer) and *Melusine* (Mel) do not appear to have much in common, as the first tells a story of the destruction of Jerusalem in

the first century, while the later tells a story about a group of half-human, half-fairy sisters who are punished by their mother. The other pairs, which vary in how closely together they appear in each chart, are *Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux* (Huon) and *Valentine and Orson* (V&O), both late romances; *Eneydos* (En) and *History of Jason* (Jas), both of which were printed by Caxton and feature a single hero in a classical narrative; *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* (Pon) and *Helyas, Knight of the Swan* (Hel), another two which appear to have little in common; and *William of Palerne* (WoP) and *Arthur of Little Britain* (ALB). In addition, *The Foure Sons of Aymon*, while not really close enough to be a part of either the cluster made by the *Prose Siege of Jerusalem* and *Melusine* or the cluster made by *Ponthus* and *Helyas*, is consistently near both of those pairs, suggesting that a relationship may be seen between all five works. Such a relationship would probably be based on the fact that all three include either crusading or similar activities on the part of their heroes.

The five axes presented here do not represent all the possibilities that could be charted. Nor does the format, with two of the axes set while a third one varies. In an ideal world, the star charts would be more easily manipulated than is possible on paper, where they must be frozen in a single position. Plotting additional axes which cannot be extrapolated from plot summaries will require more than the two data points (*King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* and *The Three Kings' Sons*) currently available. Such possible axes can be drawn from each of the three reception contexts discussed above. For example, after examining the material culture of more texts, axes might include the social status of the material product or its projected readers; whether a work was made text in manuscript, print or both; and the date of production for each individual text, which would result in a much more complicated chart than that in Figure 13. Possible axes from the culture of collection include the similarity of the book under discussion to the entire collection, evidence of the value placed on the book or of its being read, and the ability to track

the provenance of a particular book. From literary culture comes the issue of exactly how to treat a work such as Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (Mal). It is plotted as a single work in the speculative multidimensional star charts above; however, if Vinaver's argument about the Winchester Manuscript is accepted, that it is a series of eight tales rather than one single work, then in addition to the single point represented above, each individual tale would need to be plotted as well. Finally, concerns raised by the study of literary culture require an axis (or perhaps two overlapping axes) on hagiography and history. On the evidence of the two works discussed here, this axis might be the most important for the genre as a whole since it plots relationships to the closest narrative genres. Plotting this axis must wait until the works have been examined because, although some romances are clearly hagiographic in terms of their plot, such as *Robert the Deuyll* and *Valentine and Orson*, the relation to hagiography may lie in character development, as it does in *Ponthus*, meaning it is only clear after an examination of the work.

Since no genre exists separate from other genres, plotting the generic star chart of the Middle English prose romances will also require looking at fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century saints' lives to see where hagiographic and romantic narratives overlap and at fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century chronicles, to look at the overlap between romantic and historical narrative. Plotting the prose romances according to an axis ranging from hagiography to history will only be possible after these steps. An additional step would begin the process of expanding the generic star chart from just the Middle English prose romances to all Middle English romances by looking at the verse romances of the fifteenth century.

While the genre for medieval romances is usually discovered from the reading of the canonical verse romances since those are the romances most readers first encounter, the project proposed here will discover a generic star chart that begins with the often ignored prose romances. Until we can describe the generic characteristics of the Middle English prose

romances, we cannot determine whether they do, in fact, represent a single genre nor can we discuss fully their generic relationship, if any, to the verse romances that have often been seen as the epitome of the genre. This dissertation has taken the first steps in plotting the generic star chart of the Middle English prose romance. Moving from the speculative multidimensional star charts presented here to a tested multidimensional star chart will require a careful study of the literary culture, material culture, and culture of collection for each of the remaining prose romances. Only after this study is complete will we be able to confidently discuss the generic relationship of the verse and prose romances.

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