"Þer watz mete, þer watz myrþe, þer watz much ioye": The Manipulative Sotilte of Middle English Romance

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“ÞER WATZ METE, ÞER WATZ MYRÞE, ÞER WATZ MUCH IOYE”:
THE MANIPULATIVE SOTILTE OF MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

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“þER WATZ METE, þER WATZ MYRþE, þER WATZ MUCH IOYE”:
THE MANIPULATIVE sotilte OF MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the
Dedman College
Southern Methodist University
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a
Major in English
by
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May 27, 2023
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“Per watz mete, þer watz myrþe, þer watz much ioye”:
The Manipulative *Sotilte* of Middle English Romance

Advisor: Professor Bonnie Wheeler

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The Middle English *sotilte* and its Middle French counterpart, the *entremet*, refer to the elements during a feast that conjure wonder. Like “feast” and “banquet,” both terms have been used interchangeably, with the *entremet* coming to signify a sweet dessert at the end of a meal in modern usage of the term. In Middle English romance, the *sotilte* of the feast builds upon the connotations that “subtlety” carry—guile, artifice, craft, even deceit.

Perhaps the most well-known of all Middle English *sotiltes* is the sudden intrusion of the Green Knight during the Christmastide feast in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Arthur awaits a marvel and receives one in the form of a giant green man who mocks the court, challenges Arthur, and brings Gawain into a deadly beheading game. The court is shocked, and their mirth turns to silent astonishment, with rumblings of their disquietude reverberating long after the feast and its *sotilte* conclude. Not all *sotiltes* are so literal, and my research turns to both the material and literal depictions of the *sotilte* as well as more figurative or metaphorical representations thereof of the festal element. I ultimately argue that the *sotilte* lingers long after the trestle tables have been cleared from the great hall—that is, the emotionally manipulative effects of the *sotilte* in Middle English romance are lasting and sometimes remain unresolved in the narratives.
My dissertation traces the affective manipulation that such *sotiltes* enact on gathered communities in three Middle English romances: *Richard Coer de Lyon*, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. I argue that the *sotilte* is a key feature of medieval romance that offers insight into the constellations of power that are ever in flux, and that the *sotilte* complicates rather than clarifies any tensions that may be present in the midst of communities. My approach to the Middle English feast builds upon art historian Christina Normore’s study of performativity at the late medieval banquet. While I model my approach to the English *sotilte* on Normore’s treatment of historical and fictional feasts from the Western European late medieval corpus, I delve more deeply into the affective aspects of the interlude and how such feelings influence a community. My dissertation is particularly concerned with how these groups of characters recover from a disruptive interlude—if they do at all.

Because my work concerns how both groups of people and individuals therein navigate emotional manipulation, I draw from three key scholars of the history of emotions to illuminate the relational dynamics that the *sotilte* influences: Barbara Rosenwein’s notion of emotional communities and their shared values and judgments illustrates how groups cohere and maintain bonds in the midst of beguilement and even treachery; William Reddy’s concepts of emotional regimes and emotives offer insight on the ways in which people do (and do not) express emotion; and finally, Mark Seymour’s figuration of emotional arenas explains how people condition their emotional displays depending upon the social spaces they inhabit. All three of these scholars of emotions’ history offer useful frameworks for illuminating social emotions as they appear textually.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF FIGURES

- 1.1
  - 16
- 1.2
  - 36

## LIST OF TABLES

- 1.1
  - xi
- 4.1
  - 198

## INTRODUCTION

1

## CHAPTER 1: FORM, FUNCTION, AND FEELING OF LATER MEDIEVAL FEASTS

- Late Medieval Feasting Practice
  - 14
- Medieval Interludes
  - 26
- Feasts and Feeling: A Palatable Combination
  - 37
- Communities, Regimes, Arenas: Some Approaches to the History of Emotions
  - 45
- Reading Emotional History at the Medieval Feast
  - 55

## CHAPTER 2: “THEREOF HAD THEY ALL GRAME!”: THE HORRIFIC SOTILTE IN RICHARD COER DE LYON

- Lionheart: A Most Uncouth Sotilte
  - 65
- Unwitting Cannibalism and Alimentary Transformation
  - 80
- Unyielding Horrors and Unsavory Feelings of the Macabre Sotilte
  - 90

## CHAPTER 3: “THAT MERVAYLYD MANY A MAN”: THE LONG SOTILTE IN THE WEDDING OF SIR GAWAIN AND DAME RAGNELLE

- Carnivalesque and Courtly Spaces
  - 121
- Ragnelle’s Grotesque Body and Presumed Character Defects
  - 126
- Ragnelle as Disruptive Courtly Interlude
  - 134
Gaynour’s “Alas” and Ragnelle’s Spectacle 142

Ragnelle’s Disruption and Late Medieval Marriage Practice 150

Ragnelle as “merveille” at the Wedding Feast 162

Ragnelle, the Long Sotilde 186

CHAPTER 4: THE NEVER-ENDING SOTILTE OF SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT 189

The Arthurian Emotional Community at Camelot 195

Arthur’s Custom of Awaiting a Marvel 211

Sotiltes in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 217

Intentional Emotional Manipulation at Work 233

The Green Knight’s Affects 242

Gawain’s Isolation 249

Hautdesert, a Paper Castle 252

CONCLUSION 266

BIBLIOGRAPHY 271
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Illumination from <em>La Queste del Saint Graal</em></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Jean de Wavrin, <em>Recueil des chroniques d'Angleterre</em></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menu</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Happy words in <em>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</em></td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To my parents, who have supported me with love, encouragement, and a safe place to complain as I navigated these uncharted waters, you are fantastic. In these final months, my dad’s oft-repeated phrase to friends who ask about me, “She just has one more paper to write,” has helped me reframe the immensity of the dissertation into something known and approachable. Here is that “one more paper.”
INTRODUCTION

The medieval feast has long captured the attention of scholars from various disciplines, including historians of all bents—particularly art historians, literary critics, and anthropologists, to name a few. The medieval feast has likewise captured the public imagination for quite some time (albeit frequently a loosely medieval recreation replete with culinary anachronism of roasted turkey legs, potatoes, tomatoes, and many other bits of magical imaginary). Nevertheless, the feast is an arresting affair that writers, chroniclers, chefs, and artists of the period often struggled to capture, for the event is as ephemeral as its primary material object, food, which is prone to rapid spoilage.

Because feasts are inherently fleeting, those hosting and staging the grand events leaned into the intangible facets of such celebrations to make a lasting impression, emphasizing its sensory and emotional aspects. One especially moving aspect of the later medieval feast is the interlude, in Middle English known as the sotilte. The sotilte is the Middle English counterpart to the French entremet, both of which function as interludes at the feast—be they fanciful or complex dishes (such as fire-breathing animals), dancing and other acrobatic feats, tableaux, music, the recitation of poetry, interactive plays, or mechanical marvels (many chronicles describe wine fountains featuring many different varieties). The sotilte or entremet overlap significantly, but in both cases, hosts frequently use such interludes to inspire their guests towards feelings of support, awe, fear, or whatever emotion may best suit the head of household at that time. Drawing upon art historian Christina Nomore’s study of the entremet in late medieval
I approach the Middle English *sotilte* as a tool of affective manipulation and explore how this feast element is used as a deliberate or otherwise oblique manner of moving feast-goers towards particular feelings. While I draw from feasts that are chronicled in the historical record, my dissertation specifically considers how affective manipulation unfolds in the *sotilte* as it appears in Middle English romance.

My dissertation chapters move from texts that are popular and sensational, *Richard Coer de Lyon* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, to a fully chivalric romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Each romance includes feast scenes and festal elements that engage with the manipulative *sotilte*, and I trace how such interludes influence the narrative and characters within. Throughout each *sotilte* in these Middle English romances, threads of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque and grotesque appear, for romance affords spectacular and impossible excess, and the genre is also able to sustain tensions from social upheaval and inversion far longer than any actual feast in real life might permit. As if by design, romance feasts frequently court failure.

Before delving into the romances themselves, Chapter 1 provides historical contexts for the feast and its functionality, outlining how feasts were staged and what effects they achieved, according to the historical record. After contextualizing the feast, I shift to the interludes of the *sotilte*. Normore’s analysis of the rich performativity of the banquet is foundational to my reading of Middle English romance. Normore acknowledges the affective valances of these *entremets*, but her study does not provide extensive, in-depth readings of the emotionally charged aspects of feast interludes as they appear in medieval chronicles, romances, or art. While Normore draws from Barbara Rosenwein occasionally throughout her monograph and mentions emotional communities, there is no framework for exploring the emotionological contexts of the late medieval feast interlude; instead, emotions are presented broadly throughout her study. Normore rightly identifies the interlude as an affectively rich performance and experience, and my work clarifies this stance by adopting a framework of the history of emotions applied to Middle English romance.

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1 Christina Normore’s monograph, *A Feast for the Eyes: Art, Performance, and the Late Medieval Banquet*, is a study in the late medieval feast interlude, and her compelling analysis of the rich performativity of the banquet is foundational to my reading of Middle English romance. Normore acknowledges the affective valances of these *entremets*, but her study does not provide extensive, in-depth readings of the emotionally charged aspects of feast interludes as they appear in medieval chronicles, romances, or art. While Normore draws from Barbara Rosenwein occasionally throughout her monograph and mentions emotional communities, there is no framework for exploring the emotionological contexts of the late medieval feast interlude; instead, emotions are presented broadly throughout her study. Normore rightly identifies the interlude as an affectively rich performance and experience, and my work clarifies this stance by adopting a framework of the history of emotions applied to Middle English romance.
sotilte and entremet, illustrating how scholars have attempted to delineate the two but ultimately conclude that the historical record shows that the praxis of such interludes either in England or France was not so divergent. Understanding the greater significance of the Middle French entremets helps to contextualize the Middle English sotilte, especially when considering the affective utility of these interludes. To understand the role that feeling and emotion play in the medieval sotilte, I turn to affect studies. Chapter 1 also presents the theoretical underpinning of affect studies to illustrate how the Middle English feast provides a rich emotionological context for understanding not simply emotions or emotional experience divorced from context, but as a means of understanding behavior “that reflects and is meant to enforce social norms.”2 I borrow this concept from historians of emotion Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, whose work developed the field of the history of emotions in the mid-1980s. The chapter additionally sketches an overview of the three key voices of practicing3 emotional history: historians Barbara Rosenwein (emotional communities—shared values and judgments amongst groups of people) and William Reddy (emotional regimes and emotives—who can feel and how, and how one’s declaration of emotion shapes that feeling), and Mark Seymour (emotional arena—how people temper their emotions in public versus private spaces—or those permeable spaces in between) into my work. The subsequent chapters my dissertation adopt the concepts from Rosenwein,


3 Barbara Rosenwein advises against thinking about “applying” the history of emotions as some sort of detached tool that is not fully enmeshed in the texts themselves and the broad history itself. Rather, Rosenwein conceives of the history of emotions—and especially her concept of emotional communities—as a heuristic that scholars can use to explore how emotions appear (and do not appear) in the written record.
Reddy, and Seymour as theoretical approaches to comprehend the manipulative nature of the Middle English *sotilte* as it appears in romance.\(^4\)

Chapter 2 approaches the deliberately manipulative *sotiltes* of the Middle English popular romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*. This fantastical historical romance reimagines the exploits of King Richard I—among many other wild alterations, his parentage is rendered of diabolical origins, he earns his famous epithet “Lionheart” by literally eating the heart of a lion, and he twice engages in crusader cannibalism with great relish. This chapter focuses on Richard’s performative consumption of a lion’s heart as a form of social manipulation, his unwitting but restorative anthropophagy as he wastes away for lack of pork, and his carefully planned cannibalism at a feast that functions as a most macabre, though highly effective, *sotilte*. For each scene, this chapter explores the community that each interlude punctuates, approaching the emotional words, repetition, and the deliberate narrative uses of varying perspectives. I ultimately argue that through acts of performative consumption, Richard disrupts and decenters communities that are otherwise stable, and that this long-term instability characterizes his own kingdom. Because of his grotesque actions—in the Bakhtinian sense, whereby there is tension between the canny aspects of Richard’s behavior and the threatening excess that seems almost uncontrollable—the narrative strikes an ambivalent stance regarding commentary about the English king’s alimentary habits. However I draw attention to the functional role of emotion in

\(^4\) This is not to say that Rosenwein, Reddy, and Seymour are the only ones who have developed foundational methods for studying the history of emotions, especially in a medieval context. Legal historian and professor of law William Ian Miller worked to set the stage for that sort of work by exploring the notions of humiliation, disgust, courage, revenge, and a number of other affective experiences and emotions starting in the early days of the turn to affect in historical and literary analysis. Miller shines when it comes to highlighting the emotions of individuals and subsequent self-assessment that they might undertake, and I incorporate his readings of specific emotions and their effects throughout my project.
this romance to illustrate that the repeated tale of the Saracen’s horror at Richard’s cannibalism offers a greater degree of critique and commentary than seems previously to have been considered.

Chapter 3 pertains to the unplanned *sotilte* in the boisterous Middle English popular romance *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. Various versions of this narrative appear throughout the corpus of medieval writing, with many Middle English treatments depicting this fairytale-like text. Unlike the previous chapter in which the *sotiltes* are calculated and deftly deployed to great manipulation, this chapter explores how the primary interlude unfolds when agency is seemingly taken from the performer, and while such disruption and societal upheaval appears intentional on the part of said performer. Ragnelle, the loathly lady and disenfranchised beautiful maiden, disrupts the Arthurian courtly community from the point at which she is introduced to the narrative until the very close of the romance, despite the apparently happy ending. Through Ragnelle’s long arc of disruption, I read what I call a “long *sotilte*.” By long *sotilte* I mean that the narrative develops and illustrates complex emotional reactions to the behavior of particular characters that all coalesce around the feast, with the denouement at once providing pleasant explanation to the broader community while simultaneously prohibiting full resolution from occurring. In short, the long *sotilte* is a way of reading a literary interlude in its broader narrative contexts and not simply limiting the interlude to the feast proper. This figurative, metaphorical treatment of the *sotilte* still centers upon the feast. Chapter 3 explores the characterization of the Arthurian community as it develops through its revulsion towards and tense acceptance of Ragnelle, which is presented primarily through the voice of Guinevere, who laments the loathly lady’s upcoming marriage to Gawain. Like the grotesque in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the characters in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* must face Ragnelle’s
voracity and repulsive figure even as she dresses like them, eats among them, and effectively becomes one of them through her marriage to Gawain. I consider who accepts and who excludes in this emotional community, and how the different emotional arenas require particular social critiques—some of which are verbal; others of which are indirect and nonverbal. I argue that Ragnelle tests the elasticity of this emotional community’s ability to balance trouthe and courtesy, and that once she embodies an acceptable form (as a beautiful woman) and acts with restraint and composure (that is, within the bounds of courtesy), the emotional community warmly embraces her. Despite the romance’s tidy explanation, however, Arthur remains perplexed: Gawain is changed by marriage, and Ragnelle turning into a beautiful, lovely woman does not magically reset the Arthurian community to the way it was prior to her intrusion.

Chapter 4 turns to one of the most well-known Middle English romances, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Of all the romances that my dissertation analyzes, this romance captures the fullest spirit of the Middle English sotilte and its potential for affective manipulation, for the sotilte occurs at the Christmastide feast at Camelot, where aesthetic beauty, decorum, revelry, and the anticipation of something extraordinary permeates the entirety of the scene. The Green Knight punctuates the just-begun feast and astounds the revelers—he appears as a hulking green figure dressed in a comeliest manner and the latest fashion, bearing a gruesomely sharp axe in one hand and a sprig of holly in the other, and he sits astride a completely green stallion with fine threads woven throughout his hair. He is a sight to behold, and his sudden entry shocks even Arthur, who awaits and expects a marvel. The Green Knight strikes an uncertain balance not only between the familiar and the uncanny but also between threat and play. Such juxtapositions of unstable signifiers that touch upon the known—his courtly dress, his knowledge of how such spaces operate, his impressive physique—but they ultimately burlesque such conventions with
very real, very threatening consequences. Likewise, this chapter draws upon Bakhtinian
grotesque to situate the Green Knight’s attractive but distorted and excessive appearance within
the emotional reaction that he causes in the Arthurian community.

Upon suddenly beholding Hautdesert, Gawain imagines its fashionable and formidable walls
to be like that of a paper castle—that is, like a decoration at the table of a feast. I explore this
metaphor, considering Gawain’s situation, assumptions, and hopes as he assesses what lies
before him. Gawain supposes that Hautdesert is a promise of hospitality and courtly comforts,
and he presumes—from a place of naivete or desperation—that the guiding principles of the
emotional arena of Camelot will hold true in this same space. Superficially, it seems so, and the
double entendre of the paper castle symbolizes both the *sotilte* and describes all of Gawain’s
encounters with the Green Knight (Lord Bertilak). Both are something of a façade and artificial,
yet both interact with Gawain (and by extension, the larger Arthurian community) in very real
ways.

This chapter traces the lasting—if not unresolvable—effects of the Green Knight’s
impressive affective manipulation of the Arthurian celebrants, beginning with the initial
disruptive event at the Christmastide feast and following Gawain in his journey to Hautdesert
and back. The Green Knight deliberately isolates one member of the emotional community of
Camelot, one characterized by their lightness and joy, and forces him to undergo not only the
shock of agreeing to a deadly game, but the physical and mental anguish of the arduous journey
to find the Green Chapel, only to be taken in by the allure of Hautdesert and its promise of
hospitality. Gawain is manipulated from the moment the Green Knight rides into the feast hall of
Camelot, and he remains so until he returns to Camelot.
Through all three of these Middle English romances, I aim to show how the literal and figurative *sotiltes* therein are a means of affective manipulation that the community cannot always maneuver or even recover from fully. While the feast often appears as a commonplace of medieval romance, there are elements of these tropes that reveal how deeply tied to complex character and narrative development—even devolvement—that the feast and its many aspects can play. While many aspects of the feast have been recently studied, the affective dimensions have not yet been deeply studied from an emotions’ history perspective. My dissertation approaches these romances and their feasts with this lens.

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5 Literary medievalists have turned their attention to the feast in the past decade or so, with two outstanding works illustrating the turn: Aaron Hostetter’s monograph *Political Appetites: Food in Medieval English Romance* (2017) and Melissa Riddley Elmes’s dissertation (2016) “Negotiating Violence at the Feast in Medieval British Texts” both establish the significant political valances that food and ritualistic consumption hold for later medieval English subjects. Elmes’s and Kristin Bovaird-Abbo’s recent co-edited collection of essays *Food and Feast in PreModern Outlaw Tales* (2021) includes essays that specifically consider the political overtones of the subtlety.
On February 17, 1454, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, hosted what has been called the Feast of the Pheasant, or *Banquet du Vœu du faisan*. The event featured lavish dishes, striking entertainment, and was staged with a very deliberate intent: Philip aspired to move his guests to support a crusade against the Turkish forces that had taken Constantinople but a year prior. The *entremet* that closed the feast was the spectacle in which the Order of the Golden Fleece vowed upon a live, bejeweled pheasant to undertake a crusade, but a number of deeply moving acted *entremets* that preceded this interactive spectacle all served to move spectators affectively.

The most striking elements of this Burgundian masterpiece were its strategic *entremets*. Philip the Good did not intend to sway his guests to support his aspirations for crusade by way of excellent food—although serving such an impressive spread would certainly speak to his abilities as a strategist and leader, given that the feast is the state in miniature. Food historian Ken Albala further explains that everything at the banquet “was an elaborate performance in cooking, serving, and eating,” and as such the feast served as “a mummmery or ‘dumb show’ for the real power relations that took place outside the banquet hall.” The rhetorical appeals made through the language of the feast take place in the *entremets* (in the French-speaking cultures). By design,

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the *entremet* moves people.

Prior to the eponymous pheasant, guests experienced fountains of wine and various *entremets* accompanied by music. Before the pheasant, however, was the climax of the banquet’s *entremets*: the Holy Church entreated the knights present to join in a crusade against the Turks. In this silent interlude, an armed giant wearing a long green silk robe with a turban atop his head enters the banquet hall leading an elephant covered in silk. A lady\(^8\) sat atop the elephant, and, as Normore describes, her dress “resembled the characteristic garb of both nuns and the pious laywomen known as the Beguines, a combination that conveyed the feminine holiness of the lady but at the same time removed her from any single real-world social group.”\(^9\) She demanded that the giant halt, and she spoke directly to the Duke at the dais, lamenting her fallen state—nodding specifically to Constantinople having fallen to Turkish rule.\(^10\) In her address, the Holy Church addresses Duke Philip five times directly,

> Oh you, oh you, noble Duke of Burgundy  
> Son of the Church, and brother to her children,  
> Heed me, and consider my need  
> Paint on your heart the shame and humiliation,  
> The grievous remorse that I carry and feel.\(^11\)

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\(^8\) This lady was actually Olivier de La Marche, according to Henri Beaune and J. D’Arbaumont. See their notes in the “Introduction,” in *Mémoires d’Olivier de la Marche, Maitre D’Hotel et Capitaine des Gardes de Charles le Téméraire*, Volume 4 (Paris, 1888), xxxv-xxxvi.


> “O toy, o toy, noble duc de Bourgoingne,  
> Filz de l’Eglise, et frère à ses enffans,  
> Entemps à moy, et pense à ma besoingne.  
> Paintz en ton cueur la honte et la vergoingne,  
> Les griefz remordz qu’en moi je pourte et sens.”
The interplay between affectation and affect—in that the personification of the Holy Church entreats Duke Philip directly and personally in a staged manner, and the Duke responds in kind so as to epitomize the “scripted and spontaneous interactions with the physical setting that were integral to forming the feast’s final meaning.” Duke Philip answers the Holy Church by producing a letter from his breast pocket that he claims will save Christianity, de la Marche chronicles. De la Marche does not censure Duke Philip’s premeditated emotional reaction as feigned; rather, he seems impressed by the Duke’s ability to express such passions and so move others present to react to this compassion and pity in kind. Following the Duke’s moving response, members of the Order of the Golden Fleece come forth led by Toison d’Or, the herald, along with Duke Philip’s illegitimate daughter Yoland and Isabeau of Neufchâtel, who bore a live pheasant upon which the purportedly “ancient” vows were to take place. Guests were moved to make the vow, but the crusade never materialized.

Staging such a complex feast required the services of a multitude of figures, from many industrious and lowly scullions to the esteemed maître d’hôtel, with the kitchen being ruled by the cook. Unlike in Master Chiquart’s Savoyan cookbook, wherein the master cook provides one

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12 Normore, *A Feast*, 44.

13 De la Marche, *Mémoires*, 2:367: “Mondit seigneur le duc, qui savoit, à quelle intencion il avoit fait ce bancquet, regarda l’Eglise, et ainsy, comme ayant pitié d’elle, tira de son seing ung brief contenant qu’il vouoit qu’il secourroit le chrestienté.”

14 Making vows upon live birds occurred at a number of continental and insular feasts. Gaston IV, comte de Foix gave a sumptuous banquet in 1457 at Tours in honor of an embassy from the King of Hungary, which concluded with the entrance of a live peacock bedecked with the arms of both the Queen of France on its neck and those of the ladies of the French court across its body. See Roy Strong, *Feast: A History of Grand Eating* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2002), 73-75.

15 See Normore, *A Feast*, 45.
of the most complex *entremets*, here, as Henri Beaune and J. D’Arbaumont note, the masterful *entremet* is owing to Olivier de la Marche and his colleagues: “Qui avait préparé, organisé ces entremets? C’était Olivier de la Marche,” but neither Beaune nor D’Arbaumont think that de la Marche did it all alone, underscoring the community effort that went into the staging of such a complex *entremet* as the Holy Church at the Feast of the Pheasant.

Olivier de la Marche offers some insights into this court, particularly the esteemed role of the cook: “Ce n’est pas estat ou office commun, c’est mestier subtil et sumptueux, et qui toute seureté sent, et dont on ne se peut passer. . . .” The uncommon nature of the cook’s esteemed role—ironically unnamed—is owing to the position’s relation to the head of household and the logistical acumen that kitchen management required. From the cleanliness of the kitchen to the order in which dishes are to be eaten, from the hand washing rituals in the banquet hall to the interactive *entremets* at the close of each course of the final course of the meal, the Burgundian Feast of the Pheasant is tightly controlled and each element works in concert to achieve the host’s goals.

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16 I reproduce an abridged form of that *entremet* in Chapter 4 to contextualize my analysis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.


“il n'en avit pas eu sans doute seul le soin puis qu'il avait ete de tiers avec un chevalier la Toison, Jean de Lannoy, et un ecuyer du nom de Jean Boudault, ce quit formait un petit conseil auquel furent souvent appeles de graves personnages, meme le chancelier mais il y prit une grande part et joua meme le role de Saint Eglise a la demande Philippe le bon.”

18 Olivier de la Marche, Mémoires, 51. D. Eleanor and Terence Scully translate de la Marche as follows: “It is not a common estate or office, but is a subtle and costly craft, one which is the essence of trustworthiness; and it is fundamental to the benefit of the Prince, and cannot be dispensed with…. “ See D. Eleanor Scully and Terence Scully, Early French Cookery: Sources, History, Original Recipes and Modern Adaptations (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 48.
This chapter establishes the affective dimensions of the later medieval feast by looking to a number of historical resources, such as conduct manual, cookery books, and chronicles. The historical record repeatedly illustrates an emphasis on hierarchy and order, thereby marking deliberate departures from this norm as noteworthy and disruptive. One such disruptive element baked into European feasting culture of the later Middle Ages is the interlude. Sometimes a fanciful dish and sometimes an interactive pageant, the interlude is emotionally charged. This chapter contextualizes the role of the interlude in the later medieval feast, addressing the overlap between the two primary modes, the French *entremet* and the Middle English *sotilte*. While I draw from the French *entremet* and will refer to it throughout the dissertation, my project is chiefly concerned with the Middle English *sotilte* and its affective valances. To make sense of such affects, Chapter 1 also provides an overview of emotional history, a branch of affect studies that considers the development and change of passions in their own contexts over time. I build my readings of Middle English romance through the work of three historians who offer key approaches to emotional history, namely Barbara Rosenwein’s emotional communities, William Reddy’s emotional regimes and emotives, and Mark Seymour’s emotional arenas. Each approach to emotional history helps to illuminate how affective manipulation operates through the medieval feast and *sotilte*. Furthermore, each approach to doing emotional history is complementary: Rosenwein’s work pertains to the complexity of social emotional interaction and the ways that people express shared emotional values and judgments. Reddy is primarily interested in the power and politics that inform and constrain emotional utterances and expression. Seymour’s interpretation of historical events and emotional history considers the ramifications of place and space on how people express and experience affect. I draw from these three historians individually and in tandem, particularly when the dominant community in a
given romance is emotionally troubled and experiencing difficulty understanding how the emotions suggested or encouraged by an interlude are challenging and discomfiting to that community.

**Late Medieval Feasting Practice**

Feasting is a powerful social rite and tool that plays a role “in fostering and strengthening a sense of community within various types of group.” Medieval historian Gerd Althoff stresses the public, performative aspects of effective social ritual—such as the feast—and contends that the feast “belongs to the sphere of rituals: in other words, the actions designed to express a basic ethos, take on obligations or prove conduct.” Althoff connects medieval practice to the Roman *convivium*, a feast that was “held to foster and strengthen the sense of community,” was likewise “of great significance for social bonds on a variety of levels during the middle ages too: friendships were concluded and strengthened at a communal meal; the event had a firm place in the life of co-operative unions.” Speaking of feasting generally, anthropologist Brian Hayden builds upon fellow anthropologist Michael Dietler’s commonly used definition of feasts: “forms of ritual activity that involve the communal consumption of food and drink” and “public ritual events.” Hayden finds Dietler only helpful to a point, asking whether, by Dietler’s definition, a

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meal simply shared by two people constitutes a “feast.” Furthermore, Hayden continues, what counts as “ritual activity” versus “ritualistic activity” might place feasting within a narrow religious framework, citing qualms with “ritual” as a descriptor: “To me, this use of ‘ritual’ is too general and obscure, especially in relation to its generally understood meaning. Similarly, restricting feasting only to public events seems to exclude private parties and intimate meals.” Hayden proposes this definition: “any sharing of a meal including some special foods (i.e., foods not generally served at daily meals) between two or more people hosted for a special purpose or occasion.” Feasts are attractive—who wouldn’t want to attend the ultimate dinner party? Hayden builds upon the work of Christine Hastorf, an archaeologist and anthropologist, who argues that the sensory elements of the feast, too, are designed to be attractive, and that “most large-scale feasting” includes elements of sensory overloads and euphoric blurring,” a “‘union of senses’, or synesthesia (to stretch the term a bit) characteristic of larger events.” Conceptually, late medieval feasts epitomize the sensory blurring that Hastorf describes, as evidenced by artistic visual representation, as seen in the illumination below:


Figure 1.1 An illumination from *La Queste del Saint Graal* (MS circa early 14th century), wherein Lancelot (kneeling) begs leave from King Arthur and Queen Guinevere.²⁷

²⁷ See BL MS Royal 14 E III f. 89, <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=
Note the splendid detail of the diners’ clothing and the hall (with the liberal use of gold leaf), yet neither the faces of those who gather to feast nor the food on the table has any color whatsoever. While the illumination may be unfinished, the effect is such that the food itself is of lesser importance than the more lasting, resplendent material goods of the feast (clothing, décor, the hall).28

Often used interchangeably with “banquet,” which has its own very specific usage, especially from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries,29 the feast is a ritual meal that places great emphasis on the host’s munificence, and the event either celebrates that same host or honors a particular guest. In modern usage, “feast” and “banquet” have come to connote the same event—a fancy meal for a number of guests—and even Normore uses the term “banquet” when she means the broader “feast.” In this dissertation, I use “feast” to refer to the meal itself and “festal”
to refer to the tenor of the feast, overall festivities, or dayslong feasts that comprise a larger celebration.

Feasts are exclusive, and this exclusivity distinguishes the medieval feast from other civic festivities, although many overlaps between such celebratory events exist. Hayden seeks to balance inclusion and exclusion in his figuration of the feast, but what Hayden describes aligns more closely with the festal—he is interested in pre-industrial communities wherein political power is continually being solidified and the feast functions as a power play to crystallize control. Nevertheless, his points about the tensions between inclusivity and exclusivity are worth exploring. In a hierarchal, stratified society, feasts operate within an “exclusionary logic,” that is, much of the feast is geared towards the setting and maintenance of boundaries. Hayden seeks to challenge this hard line, suggesting that because “the most fundamental logic of all feasting is the sharing of food with others in order to create social bonds (or debts); that is, an inclusionary logic.” To Hayden, “a feast that does not attract people to form some type of social bond seems inconceivable,” and historically speaking, there is assuredly some truth to this concern.

In literature, however, and in Middle English romance in particular, the community is established and rarefied through the feast. The various forms of festival in the later Middle Ages “share some characteristics and often accompanied each other: tournaments, civic entry parades, and feasts in particular were often held on the same day, planned by the same committees, and

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30 Normore, A Feast, 6.

31 Hayden, The Power of Feasts, 12.

32 Hayden, The Power of Feasts, 12, emphasis in original.

33 Hayden, The Power of Feasts, 12.
thematically linked,” although “Banquets differ from other court festivities primarily through their combination of visual, performing, and culinary arts.”

Hostetter explains that “food plays a fundamental role in the plots, pleasures, and purposes of Medieval English romance…The table, as well as what is served upon it, draws humanity together through shared appetites, but it also distinguishes them by means of an inflexibly drawn guest list.” The feast of Middle English romance paradoxically unifies and stratifies.

Medieval feasts have been treated with great interest in the past few decades, and these monographs have made it possible to dig into what romance authors mean by stock phrases as “great plenty” or “wondrously ample and diverse” when describing feasts. Chaucer’s overeager Squire, for example, participates in the trope of pretending to refuse to describe a feast and its opulent viands:

This Cambyuskan, of which I have yow toold,  
In roial vestiment sit on his deys,  
With diademe, ful heighe in his paleys,  
And halt his feeste so solempne and so ryche  
That in this world ne was ther noon it lyche;  
Of which if I shal tellen al th’ array,  
Thanne wolde it occupie a someres day,  
And eek it nedeth nat for to devyse  
At every cours the ordre of hire servyse.  
I wol nat tellen of hir strange sewes,  
Ne of hir swannes, ne of hire heronsewes.  
Eek in that lond, as tellen knyghtes olde,  
Ther is som mete that is ful deynte holde  
That in this lond men recche of it but smal;  
Ther nys no man that may reporten al.

34 Normore, A Feast, 6.


36 Hostetter, Political Appetites, 17.

Cambyuskan holds a birthday feast that the Squire proclaims beyond compare, and if one were to describe everything there, it would take a full day alone. The quantity and quality of this feast is beyond description, and the Squire attempts to pique the audience’s interest by teasing a bit with details. The Squire illustrates a generic feast while simultaneously insisting upon its extraordinary status. This move is commonplace to medieval literature, especially romance.

What might a feast in England during the later Middle Ages look like? “Without bread and wine and ale, / no one at a feast will be at ease” notes a thirteenth-century verse from the Anglo-Norman “Treatise of Walter of Bibbesworth.” Although feasts are recorded “only in complexly mediated fragments,” these morsels of information illustrate that “banquets nevertheless still have much to say about their own workings and those of their larger milieu.” The late medieval feast is an ephemeral affair “playing out over a set period and utilizing many elements subject to decomposition (foodstuffs and human bodies alike),” such that Normore calls the feast “a time-based medium par excellence” that “can never be truly reconstituted in the present.” “Any meal,” Albala argues, “past or present, thus contains a script. It might be said that every participant in the eating event is equally an actor,” for “a meal is a form of theater.” The scripts to the feast are well known in courtly circles, and they are expected to be followed. Chronicles,


39 Normore, A Feast, 3.

40 Normore, A Feast, 6.

41 Albala, The Banquet, 4. Although Albala writes of the practices of the late Renaissance, many of the conduct manuals that he cites and the overall form of the feasts are indistinguishable from late medieval practice.
conducted manuals, and cookery treatises likewise reflect such decorum and order. Despite
convention, the historical record sometimes only vaguely refers to the menu or ample courses
available, to the honorable guests, or to the delights that such esteemed diners experienced.
Nevertheless, in those chronicles and cookery manuals that do depict feasts or banquet menus,
the “[v]erbal descriptions of late medieval banqueting are remarkably consistent in their overall
structure, suggesting that they were understood to form a genre governed by a set of widely
recognized conventions.”

Many modern transcriptions and translations of Middle English cookery manuscripts from
the fourteenth century onward exist, some more accessible than others. Additionally, many

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42 Normore, A Feast, 8.

43 Medievalist Constance B. Hieatt, in particular, has published a number of editions that feature
collated, transcript, and sometimes translated cookery manuscripts, with suggestions for modern
cooks to recreate recipes and menus. See Curtey on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of
the Fourteenth Century (Including the Forme of Cury), edited by Constance B. Hieatt and
Sharon Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Pleyn Delit: Medieval Cookery for
Modern Cooks, edited by Constance B. Hieatt, Brenda Hosington, and Sharon Butler, second
edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), Cocatrice and Lampray Hay: Late
Fifteenth-Century Recipes from Corpus Christi College Oxford, edited and translated by
Constance B. Hieatt (London: Prospect Books, 2012), Culinary Recipes of Medieval England,
edited and translated by Constance B. Hieatt (London: Prospect Books, 2013). Hieatt has
additionally worked with European cooking manuscripts from beyond the English tradition, such
as the critical edition of recipes collected from four Danish, Icelandic, and Low German
manuscripts originating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Libellus de arte coquinaria:
An Early Northern Cookery Book, edited and translated Rudolf Grewe and Constance B. Hieatt
(Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001). D. Eleanor Scully
and Terence Scully have likewise offered modern cooks and medieval historians accessible and
well-researched insights into French cookery, D. Eleanor Scully and Terence Scully, Early
French Cookery: Sources, History, Original Recipes and Modern Adaptations (Ann Arbor:
University of Michigan Press, 1995). Numerous texts focus on foodstuffs and their preparation
from the larger European Middle Ages, such as Madeleine Pelner Cosman, Fabulous Feasts:
Medieval Cookery and Ceremony (New York: George Brazier, 1976), Odile Redon, Françoise
Sabban, and Silvano Serventi, The Medieval Kitchen: Recipes from France and Italy, translated
by Edward Schneider (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Hannele Klemetilä, The
and modern translations of medieval recipes from beyond the European tradition are also
manuscript fragments that document recipes and cookery manuals are available from the Early English Text Society, and these snapshots of medieval cookery practices and eating habits are indispensable to understanding depictions of medieval literary feasts. Nineteenth-century historian Thomas Austin’s *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*, for instance, collates a number of recipes primarily from Harley MS 279 and Harley MS 4016 as well as excerpts from Ashmole MS 1429, Laud MS 553, and Douce MS 55. From Harley 279, Thomas transcribes the menu\(^{44}\) for the coronation feast of Henry IV:\(^{45}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Le primer cours.</th>
<th>Le iij. cours.</th>
<th>Le iij. cours.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teste de sangler enameȝ.</td>
<td>Porcelle farce enforce.</td>
<td>Egretez.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capoun de haut grece.</td>
<td>Venyson Roste.</td>
<td>Pyionys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fesaunte.</td>
<td>Conyng.</td>
<td>Quaylys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Sotelte.</td>
<td>Leche lumbrada.</td>
<td>Pome dorreng.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Sotelte.</td>
<td>Braun blanke leche.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

becoming more common in public scholarship and academic monographs, such as Lilia Zaouali, *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World: A Concise History with 174 Recipes*, translated by M.B. DeBevoise (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).


Table 1.1 Menu for the coronation banquet of Henry IV, October 13, 1399.

Typically served at midday, dinner was main meal in both the medieval and early modern eras. Courses at a medieval feast were not like courses of modern menus—each course contained multiple dishes that two diners would share between them, eating from trenchers of bread cut especially for the occasion. Guests would be seated on benches at trestle tables set up especially for the occasion, with layers of tablecloths upon the boards to act as napkins and décor. Such tablecloths would be folded in very meticulous patterns, adding minute aesthetically pleasing detail even to so simple a device. It usually follows that there are one or two courses with a number of dishes in each, with particularly opulent feasts including up to three courses (as Figure 1.1 illustrates). First courses tend to feature heartier fare followed by more delicate


47 The history of bread making and the various types of breads used during the Middle Ages for nourishment and for feasting—as bread also served as a plate, as it were—is fascinating and far beyond the scope of this project. For the history of bread making and consumption in medieval England (and later), see Diane Purkiss, *English Food: A People’s History* (London: William Collins, 2022), especially 27-98. Also see Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times* as well as C.M. Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England, 1200-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

48 See Adamson, *Food*, 156-157. I treat the setup of the great hall in more detail in Chapter 4 as the decorum and the feast hall of Camelot in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is of particular importance to the narrative.

49 See Peter C.D. Brears, *Cooking and Dining in Medieval England* (Totnes: Prospect, 2008) for detailed explanation and menus of the process of medieval feasting.

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dishes—smaller fowl, tarts and custards, fruits—in the closing course.\textsuperscript{50}

Before moving into a discussion of the interludes of feasts, it is worth noting the undercurrent of anxiety surrounding the feast—medievalist Frederick James Furnivall’s collection of conduct verse in \textit{The babees book} contains no fewer than eleven discrete poems that each refer explicitly to good behavior in the hall and exhort readers to eschew certain poor habits (tossing scraps to dogs,\textsuperscript{51} eating with those not from one’s social station,\textsuperscript{52} eating too quickly,\textsuperscript{53} picking one’s nose at the table,\textsuperscript{54} or talking out of turn,\textsuperscript{55} to name but a few). \textit{Sir Gowther} (ca. 1400), an anonymous Middle English romance, illustrates a “demonic, rapaciously violent duke who is turned from his evil ways” by the Pope’s imposition of a “bizarre penance,” that Sir Gowther shall eat “no meyt bot þat þou revus of hounds moþe.”\textsuperscript{56} To learn appropriate behavior, Sir Gowther is first assigned the lowest of bad behavior—for he must rend food from the mouths of hounds in order


\textsuperscript{52} “Of the Manners to bring one to Honour and Welfare,” in \textit{The babees book}, edited by Frederick James Furnivall, EETS (London, N. Trübner & co., 1868), 34-35.


to eat—signaling the instructive, pedagogical potential of the feast and its greater sociocultural ramifications. Such rehabilitation is not guaranteed; moreover, to see noble hunger typically indicates a fallen state, as Normore explains: “in those unusual cases where court food is described, it can be used as a sign that a noble has fallen down on his or her luck,” for “to remember noble foods is to have become prey to a nonnoble hunger.”

Havelok the Dane is a prime illustration of such a fallen state, for the young displaced king can never fully be satisfied by peasant foodstuffs, only by royal fare:

That king or cayser wolde ete:
Kranes, swannes, veneysun,
Lax, lampreys, and god sturgun,
Pyment to drinke and god claré,
Win hwit and red, ful god plenté -
Was ther inne no page so lîte
That evere wolde ale bite.
Of the mete forto telle
Ne of the win bidde I nout dwelle;
That is the storie for to lenge -
It wolde anuye this fayre genge.

With mikel love and herte god,
And dide greythe a super riche
Al so he was no with chinche
To his bihove everil del,
That he mithe supe swithe wel.⁵⁸

Havelok heartily and happily consumes crane, swan, venison, salmon, sturgeon, pyment, claret, white and red wine in great quantity, and more than the poet can recount, for he would otherwise annoy his audience. It is noteworthy, however, that Havelok’s consumption of these foods

⁵⁷ Normore, A Feast, 12.

signals not his demise, but it marks his ascension. He has been laid low, but now he is moving towards his proper station and is being nourished appropriately. Food not only marks prestige, but it also nourishes it. Serving the wrong foods to the wrong people at the wrong times caused anxiety for medieval cooks, for such mismatched foods might cause an imbalance in a noble’s humoral balance.

Other possible failures of the feast involve not having enough food, having bad guests, or other disaster threatens that might derail a convivial event—not to mention the ever-present threat of poison, as evidenced by the omnipresence of the “unicorn” horn at the lord’s table at medieval feasts. Archaeologist Monica Smith emphasizes that in such cases, as summarized in Hayden’s study of feasting: “[e]tiquette can be offensive, food can be insufficient or of poor quality, gifts may be unwanted, disruptive violence is not uncommon, and there can be unpleasant digestive problems or even widespread food poisoning and deaths.” Many elements of the feast can go disastrously wrong and cause widespread problems for the immediate guests and beyond, yet certain aspects of the medieval feast allow for, if not require, a degree of chaos.

Medieval Interludes

The Middle English sotilte and its Middle French counterpart, the entremet, refer to the interludes during a feast that conjure emotions like wonder and even shock. These interludes have ties to Ancient Rome, where their function was initially as entertaining and utilitarian: they

59 Failing to serve the right foods at the right times for the right person also poses a problem for noble diners, as seen in Richard Coer de Lyon.

60 Melitta Weiss Adamson, Food in Medieval Times (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 163.

were to fill space between the serving of various courses and to allow diners a pause. Food historian C. Anne Wilson suggests that the practical aspects of the medieval European interlude arises from Middle Eastern recipes and medical treatises that use many coloring agents. Like “feast” and “banquet,” both terms have been used interchangeably, with the entremet coming to signify a sweet dessert at the end of a meal. The general confusion surrounding the entremet led to this cheeky entry in The Oxford Guide to Food describing modern usage of both entée and entremet as:

a couple of French terms which no doubt retain interest for persons attending hotel and restaurant courses conducted under the shadow of French classical traditions, but have ceased to have any real use, partly because most people cannot remember what they mean and partly because their meanings have changed over time and vary from one part of the world to another. Forget them.

While the modern entremet may have lost most of its specific meaning, to medieval diners, it was a revealing aspect of the culture of late medieval elites. From a theatrical perspective, the description of entremet emphases the performative nature or potential much more heavily:

Entremets (French) and entremés (Spanish), literally food served between main courses, or a side dish, came to indicate any diversion between courses, and in the late medieval period referred to elaborate entertainments, usually performed by professionals, during a formal banquet. In Spain, entremés could also designate biblical scenes in pageant processions.

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65 Normore, A Feast, 21.

Food historian D. Eleanor Scully and medieval French scholar Terence Scully see the entremet as a “genre of dish” that “was intended primarily to mark a pause between two much more earnest servings of really solid foods.” It is worth noting that etymologically, entremet simply translates to “between-meat” or “between-courses.”

Both the fanciful food and performative aspects of this interlude coexist within the late medieval categories of entremet and sotilte. Normore describes the entremet as “a complicated category, combining the performing, visual, and culinary arts.” In practice, the late medieval entremet is used to describe marvels variously: some chroniclers and cookery books relegate the entremet to a dish between courses, something like a jelly demarcating the final meat course and dessert service. Both the French and English practices are concerned with spectacle and marvel. Medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum emphasizes the role of wonder in the spectacular interludes that punctuate the medieval feast:

Rulers, both secular and ecclesiastical, competed in displays of power and splendor, which included tricks and automata, calculated to amaze and tantalize. From the later thirteenth century, for example, we have evidence of a count of Artois who built an elaborate funhouse with distorting mirrors, rooms that simulated thunderstorms, and hidden pipes for wetting unsuspecting visitors and covering them with flour. Banquets were elegant entertainments, which featured entire puppet shows in pastry (called “sotelties” in Middle English). Indeed, cookbooks make it clear that food was often planned as an illusion or trick for the eye: for example, imitation meat concocted from fish, roast fowl sewn back into its plumage in order to appear alive, pies (like the nursery rhyme) with living birds baked inside.

The simpler, edible entremet appears in Le Ménagier de Paris wherein the author describes a menu for “the wedding feast that Master Helye will give on a Tuesday in May. A dinner for just

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67 Scully and Scully, Early French, 26.

68 Normore A Feast 21.

twenty platters.”.\textsuperscript{70}

Starters: no butter, because it is a feast day. \textit{Item}, no cherries, because none were available. Because of this, no first course.
Pottages: capons with blancmanger, sprinkled with pomegranates and red comfits.
Roast: on each dish, a quartered kid (a section of kid is better than lamb), a gosling, two spring chickens and sauces for these: orange, cameline, verjuice. Fresh towels and napkins.
Entremets: aspic of crayfish, loach, young rabbits and pig.
Dessert: frumenty and venison.
Closing: hippocras and wafers.
Boutehors: wine and spices.\textsuperscript{71}

In the accompanying section of recipes, \textit{Le Ménagier de Paris} groups entremets, fried dishes, and glazed dishes together, with complex instructions for fried meats, sausages, and variously colored jellies, with no mention of the \textit{entremet} as a performance or other visual entertainment.

D. Eleanor Scully’s and Terence Scully’s practical, relaxed, and highly informative text on early French cookery approaches the \textit{entremet} similarly, describing it as a category of delicacy with more complicated preparation, particularly noting the great difficulty in preparing the notoriously delicate pipefarce of bone marrow.\textsuperscript{72}

As a quality, the \textit{Middle English Dictionary} denotation for “sotilte” refers to “Sagacity, perspicacity, cleverness, shrewdness; keeness of wit or understanding” as well as “Trickery, guile, craftiness, deceit” and “a trick, wily stratagem.”\textsuperscript{73} Specifically in reference to cookery, \textit{sotilte} is understood as “A culinary decoration for the table, a course of a meal, or a particular dish, freq. in the form of historical or religious tableau…a device to make a culinary dish seem


\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Le Ménagier de Paris}, 265.

\textsuperscript{72} Scully and Scully, \textit{Early French}, 26.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Middle English Dictionary}, s.v. “Sotilte.”
something it is not.”74 The denotation of sotilte within the sphere of food and feasting is limited to dishes, yet the quotations that determine this definition offer a wider sense. In Curye on Inglysch, Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler gloss “sotilteis” (the spelling they use) as “foods made to look like something else: e.g., birds covered with their feathers to look ‘alive’ and sugar sculptures of human figures etc.; often produced for each course of a great feast.”75 Melitta Weiss Adamson, a medievalist who specializes in German literature but has also published a number of monographs on medieval foodways, briefly discusses the sotilte in her essay that connects imitation foods of the Middle Ages to the modern day:

An integral part of the menu of banquets, these sotelties gave the cook an opportunity to show his creativity, and the diner to marvel at it…European cookery embraced the concept of food as entertainment and, depending on the cook’s sense of humour, sotelties could be intended to amaze or to disgust.76

The sotilte combines sensory elements to great effect, and Adamson’s succinct description of the sotilte emphasizes the intentional inspiration of affect that those staging the interlude intend to bring about in spectators. Adamson further touches upon the sotilte not simply being a tool of delightful feelings but potentially of less savory affective experiences like disgust. The sotilte is a tool of the Middle English merveille, or marvel, which carries two main denotations:

(a) A thing, act, or event that causes astonishment or surprise; a wonderful feat; an unnatural occurrence or circumstance; a wonder of nature or art; a monster or monstrosity; (b) don (maken, wirchen) merveille(s), to perform a wonderful feat or feats, work a wonder, do wonders; merveille(s fallen (bifallen), a wonder happens, wonders happen.77

74 Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “Sotilte.”


77 Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “Merveille.”
To instill sudden emotional change functions as an interruption of some sort, as I discuss below, and while the historical marvel of the *sotilte* or *entremet* is typically planned and expected, sudden wonder and surprise still carries an element of pleasant disruption. A disruption need not be inherently bad in practice, although its denotation in modern usage certainly implies destructive effects—between disruption, interruption, and interlude (three terms applicable to the *sotilte*), there is much overlap, though only the final term incorporates some connotation of respite, relief, and other seemingly positive situations.\(^{78}\) The marvel is a disruption of the usual, either as an object, experience, or act.

Normore tends to conflate the *entremet* and *sotilte*, which the praxis of medieval European feast interludes supports, in that she reads Continental and insular artworks as *entremets*. Her readings of interludes are broadly applicable to medieval practice, and she sees interludes as inherently blurry, for:

[they] complicate the separation between media and makers alike. Just as the term can refer equally to objects, performances, and foods, so too might any single entremet blur boundaries that have since come to see impossible. Visually complex objects such as *coqz heaumez* or fire-breathing boar were at once additive sculptures and delicious roasts. Similarly, the various uses of *ymage* and *personnage* indicate the interchangeability of human and sculpted actors.\(^{79}\)

Normore notes that “true cannibalism was never considered”\(^{80}\) in the historical feast, the literary record illustrates otherwise, such as with *Richard Coer de Lyon*’s deliberate use of cannibalism as a *sotilte* to horrify the Saracen guests and bend them to Richard’s will. While the historical


\(^{79}\) Normore, *A Feast*, 42.

\(^{80}\) Normore, *A Feast*, 42.
feast did not engage with the actual possibility of cannibalism or other very specific forms of bodily harm, such interludes relied on uncertainty and potential to achieve full affective potential for marvel:

[M]any entremets relied on the possibilities for transformation and play opened up by the mixed media of the genre as a whole. Movement, sound, smell, and taste enlivened crafted objects, calling forth awe and curiosity from their viewers. Even the potential anxiety aroused by these animated things could be used to provide excitement, whether in the form of guardian lions or brutal soldiers born from a serpent’s mouth.\textsuperscript{81}

Interludes are meant to be interactive—if not directly so, simply beholding such artifice is understood to have an interactive component. Normore describes this relationship in terms of the permeable boundary between spectator and spectacle at the banquet:

The permeability of the boundary between spectacle and spectator is highly visible in banqueting practice but extends beyond it as well, offering possibilities for both reflection and indoctrination in nearly every sphere of elite life. The court banquet and arts related to it create neither a firm division between spectator and spectacle nor a complete integration of the two.\textsuperscript{82}

The sotilte can act upon spectators in a number of ways, in that those who behold such material objects ingest them either visually, aurally, or for the edible sotiltes, by taste.

Harley MS 4016 documents a number of feasts and recipes, with the former accounting not only the dishes served but also the sotiltes present. The feast celebrating the installation of John Stafford, Archbishop of Canterbury in 1443, for instance, includes detailed descriptions of the sotiltes that follow each course. After the first course,

A sotelte. Seint Andrew, sitting on hie Auter of a-state, with bemes of gold; afore him knelyng, þe Bisshopp in pontoficalibus; his Croser kneling behinde him, coped.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 42-43.

\textsuperscript{82} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 46.

Following the second course,

A soteltie. De Trinite sitting in a son of gold, with a crucifix in his side, Seint Austin in that oþer, my lorde kneeling in pontificibus afor him. behinde him, his croser coped with the armes of Rouchestre. behinde him, in that o side, a blak Monke, prior of Cristes church; in that other side, the Abbot of Seint Austyns.84

Following the third and final course,

A soteltie. A godhede in a son of gold glorified aboue; in the son the holy giste voluptable. Seint Thomas kneling a-for him, with þe poyn of a sword in his here, & a Mitre ther-vppōn, crownyng S.T. in dextra parte, maria tenens mitram; in sinistra parte, Johannes Baptista; et in iiiij. partibus, iiiij. Angeli incensantes.85

Similar sotiltes by John Lydgate are recorded in the Coronation Banquet of Henry VI, wherein three sumptuous courses are interspersed with visually complex tableaux and one stanza of verse between each proclaiming the King’s connection to Saint George and other saintly figures as well as declaring his rightful reign. The first course includes richly ornamented dishes that would otherwise fall in the category of sotilte themselves, were this not for a royal coronation banquet:

This was the first cours at his coronacio, that is to say, first, furmentie, with venyson. Viande Royal plantid with losenges of golde. Borehedes in castelles of earmed with golde. Beef. Moton. Signet (swan). Capon stued Heron. Grete pike. A redde lech with lions corven theryn of white. Custade Roial (a pastry) with a leparde of golde sittyng theryn. Fritour like a sonne with a flour de lice therynne. A sotelté, Seint Edward and Seint Lowes armed in cote armours (coats of arms) bryngyng yn bitwene hem the Kyng in his cote armour with this scripture suyng,

Loo here twoo kynges righte perfit and right good,
Holy Seint Edwarde and Seint Lowes:
And see the braunch borne of here blessid blode;
Live, among Cristen, moost sovereigne of price,
Enheretour of the floure de lice!
God graunte he ma thurgh help of Crist Jhesu
This sixt Henry to reigne and be as wise.
And hem resemble in knyghthood and vertue.86

84 Cookery Book II. Harl. 4016, 68-69, fol. 1b-fol. 2b.

85 Cookery Book II. Harl. 4016, 68-69, fol. 1b-fol. 2b.

86 John Lydgate, “Soteltes at the Coronation Banquet of Henry VI,” in Mumings and
For example, from BL Arundel 334, the sotilte is described in terms of both the small treats and
the larger culinary artifice on display:

At the seconde course: jussett, pynenade to potage...and a sotelte: Seint-Jorge on horsebak
and sleynge the dragun...At the thridde cours, colde creme and gele to potage...and a sotelte:
a castel that the Kyng and the Qhene comen in for to see how Seint Jorge slogh, and payn
puffe, and pety-petty, and cuspis and doucettes.\textsuperscript{87}

Some of the other quotations, such as that from a chronicle during Henry V’s reign, suggest both
human movement and visual sotilte at the feast table:

\textit{[E]mperowre of Allmen.}
This yere the Empour of Almayne came in to Engelond and was at Seint Georges fest. And at
the procession the kyng went a bove him, and at the masse the kynge sate a bove him, and at
the mete the kyng sate on the right honde of the emperoure. And the Duke of Bedforde,
Chaunsler of Englonde, sate on the lifte side of the Emperour, and the Beshuppe of Dyvelyn
and dukys that came with the Emperour sate on the right honde of the Kyng. And the first
sotilte that came on the table was our Lady armyng Seint George and an angill doinge on his
sporys. The seconde sotilte was Seint George fightynge with the dragon, and the spere in his
honde. The therede sotilte was a castell, and Seint George and the kynges doughter ledyng
the lambe in to the castell gate.\textsuperscript{88}

Chronicler Jean de Wavrin, \textit{Recueil des chroniques d'Angleterre} (Volume III) records the feast
between King Richard II, the Dukes of York, Gloucester and Ireland, as well as other unnamed
courtiers. The menu of this feast is also recorded in Harley MS 4016—along with a staggering

\textit{Entertainments}, edited by Claire Sponsler (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010),
lines 1-5.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household Made
in Divers Reigns. From King Edward III to King William and Queen Mary. Also Receipts in
Ancient Cookery.} Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London (London, 1790); \textit{Privy
Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York, Wardrobe Accounts of Edward the Fourth}, ed. N. H.
Nicolas (London, 1830).

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{A Short English Chronicle: London under Henry V (1413-22)}," in \textit{Three Fifteenth-Century
Chronicles with Historical Memoranda by John Stowe}, ed. James Gairdner (London: Camden
history.ac.uk/camden-record-soc/vol28/pp54-58>.
inventory of foodstuffs procured for the staging thereof—and would have served hundreds. The menu simply mentions “a sotelte” at the close of each course. A lavish illuminated copy of Jean de Wavrin’s chronicle, however, includes an illustration of a sugar sculpture being carried before the feast table:  

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89 Some question remains as to whether this image depicts a sugar sculpture being presented to the table or if this is the King’s nef, an ornate saltcellar shaped like a ship. There are various matching forms of plate already on the feast table that match the plate on display behind the kind and guests on the buffet, which does not really clarify whether this sculpture is sugar or metal; however, the feast as illustrated in this illumination is already well underway, making it far more likely that this is, indeed, a fanciful sculpture to serve as visual interlude.

90 See Jean de Wavrin, *Recueil des chroniques d’Angleterre* (Volume III), British Library Royal MS 14 E IV, f.265v. For the sake of accessibility, I provide the URL to the BL digitization: <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_14_E_IV>.  

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Figure 1.2: Jean de Wavrin, *Recueil des chroniques d'Angleterre* featuring King Richard II and the Dukes of York, Gloucester and Ireland.
The *sotilte* is a key element in Middle English romance, frequently evoked explicitly by King Arthur demanding a marvel before his feast shall begin. Just as often, however, the Middle English romance harnesses the feeling of the *sotilte* to harness the “culinary logic” of strangeness and wonder that such “new and unusual experiences” might afford.\(^{91}\) To Hostetter, the design of the *sotilte* is “to shock the jaded appetite,” though he does not elaborate precisely what he means.\(^{92}\) Is the appetite dulled? Has the palate grown lackluster? Hostetter seems to allude to medievalist William Mead, who writes of more complicated *sotiltes* or fancy dishes as a way of resetting or refreshing an overstimulated elite palate: “If stewed apples appear to be too simple, one may stimulate a jaded appetite with rissoles of fruit,” and provides a recipe for the dish.\(^{93}\) Mead continues,

> Fortunately for the cooks who prided themselves upon the number of incongruous elements they could combine in one dish without making it uneatable, they catered for men and women who were coarse feeders, whose palates were dulled by mustard and ginger and cubebs and cardamom and cinnamon with which the most innocent meats and fruits were doctored and disguised until the cook himself could hardly determine from the taste what had entered into the composition.\(^{94}\)

Nevertheless, the intent of the *sotilte* is to elicit an emotional reaction: here, shock. Novelty is the primary aspiration of the medieval cook, particularly in aiming “to make something appear what it is not.”\(^{95}\) In fact, the entirety of the feast works to inspire emotion in feast goers.

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Feasts and Feeling: A Palatable Combination

As psychoanalyst and scholar of emotion Dylan Evans notes, “The party may well be the ultimate short cut to happiness,” and the medieval feast is no exception, at least for the ideal feast. Moving into the feast hall signifies a shift into an “emotionally heightened space”96 wherein not only elaborate social rituals like hand washing (effusively promoted in many conduct manuals) and hierarchy were assiduously adhered to, but also the hall was a space “designed to impress.”97 The feast hall was a wondrous space of great beauty, such an aesthetic, Bynum argues, “natural, human and artistic—was not merely referred to as wonderful, it was also described, in loving and lyrical language, as signaling a deeper pattern or purpose.”98

While the feast itself is a wondrous space, the sottile is a superlative wonder that enhances even further what the feast hall achieves in terms of its pleasant spectacle. Medievalist Tara Williams contends that the sottile is a marvelous spectacle that commands the attention of spectators and requires guests to reflect upon “immediate with the reflective, the affective with the cognitive.”99 Feeling arises in this reflective period (however brief if may be), and Williams identifies “a gap between the spectacle and reaction, in the uncertainty over whether, how, and to what degree that reaction will be moral. The reactions may involve emotions, actions, or both, and they may come from the readers as well as the characters.”100 Whereas Williams’s concern

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97 Tara Williams, Middle English Marvels: Magic, Spectacle, and Morality in the Fourteenth Century (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2018), 4.


99 Williams, Middle English, 1.

100 Williams, Middle English, 5.
here is with the morality ascribed to certain feelings, I argue that concerns of feast-goers beholding the *sotilte* tend to be much more interested in and fascinated by what the meaning and significance of such artifice might be.

**Reading Literature through the History of Emotions**

The history of emotions, or emotional history, is a branch of affect studies\(^{101}\) that seeks to find emotion in its contexts rather than approaching feeling with a set of passion parameters that dictate who can feel what, how they show it, and what it means for one to express such an affective experience. The history of emotions seeks to understand nuances of feeling with the historical record available to us, which is predominately textual. Trigg outlines the approach the historically-oriented studies of emotion tend to take:

> Where we cannot accurately map, chart, or measure somatic or cognitive affect, [we] must rely on textual and material traces and representations of feelings and passions: the emotions as they are processed, described, and performed by human subjects. Thus the emphasis falls less on the mechanics of feeling than the problematic role of human emotions in historical, social, and cultural change (the key figures here have been Peter Stearns, William Reddy, and Barbara Rosenwein). These studies have far-reaching implications for the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity between pre-modern, modern, and postmodern culture.\(^{102}\)

Doing emotional history, then, “suggests a complex and productively layered sense of inquiry


into historical change, historical emotions, and the history of the term and concept of ‘emotions’ themselves,’’ and approaching emotions from such a framework “allows fruitful and intriguing connections to be made between the present and past, as well as encouraging dialogue and interchange across the network of terms such as feelings, passions, emotions, and affects.”

The groundwork for emotional history lies in the idea of emotionology per Stearns and Stearns, though they still subscribe to a “basic emotions” concept, thereby limiting the broad applicability of emotionology. Emotionological contexts are more than just emotions or emotional experience; they encompass “behavior, such as courtship, that reflects and is meant to enforce social norms.” That is, any number of contextual details related to the individual and the greater community and culture can and will influence the person experiencing and expressing emotion. Feeling never exists without contexts, yet Stearns and Stearns do not argue that emotion is wholly determined by circumstance. Practicing emotionology thus involves the following:

- examining peoples’ efforts to mediate between emotional standards and emotional experience. This subject may be accessible even when changes in emotions cannot be charted, and it plays a role in family history, where anguish over the presence or absence of certain emotions may change more than the emotions themselves. . . . In some cases historians may be unable to investigate beyond emotionology; certainly most records of emotional expression, such as diaries, will be filtered by prevailing emotionology.

When talking about the ideal as presented in courtesy manuals and other conduct texts, there will obviously be disjuncture between that epitome of good behavior (in a vacuum) and the practical realities of human interaction. Whereas Stearns and Stearns contend that “Actual patterns of

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105 Stearns and Stearns, “Emotionology,” 825.
anger cannot be assumed from recommendations of control,"\textsuperscript{106} Brandsma, Larrington, and Saunders would counter that recommendation of control, as seen through conduct manuals \textit{or} through behavior modeled in literature, is indicative of typical patterns: "Literary texts draw attention to normative behaviours, often modelling appropriate reactions within the text to guide the audiences’ responses, and they comment on bizarre or inappropriate reactions."\textsuperscript{107} Literature exists in a liminal space between the ideal and the real, making consideration of conduct manuals and treatises on good behavior helpful for parsing the significance of “proper” and “improper” behavior.

Medievalist Sarah McNamer likewise speaks to the tensions between historical and literary texts as equally useful resources for emotional history, arguing that literature provides “scripts for the performance of historically specific emotion,” and she furthermore asks, “Literature, after all, is the chief archive of the emotions, isn’t it?”\textsuperscript{108} McNamer further explores this question:

Yes, many historians seem to acknowledge; but it is unfortunately of limited use. Why? Precisely because it is ‘literary’—for the literary is, by its very nature, thought to be untrustworthy: disorienting in its instability, disarming in its beauty, never meaning what it says—in short, a tease. If the goal is to discover the historical truth through the veils of compromised sources, the less opaque those veils, the better.\textsuperscript{109}

There does not seem to be a hard and fast rule against literary scholars and historians drawing from the same sources, and history and literature alike both aim to tell stories—albeit in different modes and genre, but they nonetheless provide narratives of people within the contexts of their

\begin{footnotes}
\item 106 Stearns and Stearns, “Emotionology,” 823.
\end{footnotes}
sociocultural milieu, and peeling back the layers of influence and expression is part of the work of doing emotional history.

What does practicing or applying the history of emotions look like for a medievalist? Historian Piroska Nagy asserts that historians of emotions “should not be fixed on the ‘psychology thing’, when defining what emotion is for our own work;”\(^{110}\) that we should instead focus on

…analyzing the historicity of a vocabulary, of concepts and metaphors, as well as of constellations of emotions in a given culture: it is in this way that we can encounter novelty, produce new knowledge and understanding—not only concerning remote periods, but also about our own time.\(^{111}\)

Rather than forcing connections that may or may not be present, Nagy contends that within “the framework of a comparative and heuristic approach, we can study what people of a given culture describe or live as an equivalent of sibling of our ‘emotion,’ described for instance as passio, or motus amini in the Middle Ages,”\(^{112}\) thereby illuminating the explicit and latent affective valances of a given text.\(^{113}\)


\(^{113}\) Nagy additionally provides a succinct overview of the changing attitudes towards the passions and understanding thereof, explaining that the Augustinian view, in that “one’s exposure to pathos, to being affected, that others call passibility (passibilitas), was considered as a consequence of original sin. Augustinian anthropology defined emotions in terms of a binary system between salvation and damnation, or virtues and vices, good and bad.” The twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought “a more neutral vision of emotions” by way of Aristotelianism, “which made affectus-passio a trait proper to the nature of man, without losing the question of their moral use.” The terminology that describes feelings, “perturbationes (amini), inclinationes (amini), motus amini, affectus, affectiones, and passiones,” all “describe movements, tensions of
Although “emotion” is anachronistic to the texts that medievalists study, it remains a helpful description of the broad set of affective experiences and performances that occur throughout texts from the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{114} McNamer suggests that “feeling” is a more apt term for the study of the Middle Ages “not only because it is an authentic Middle English term, or because it serves as a reminder of the interrogation of the somatic, affective, and cognitive in a pre-Cartesian universe,\textsuperscript{115} but because it embeds a grammatical doubleness.”\textsuperscript{116} By this McNamer means that the “gerundive form gestures towards process, as well as thing, or both at once.”\textsuperscript{117} McNamer continues,

> Adopting the rich verbal-nounness of ‘feeling’, then, can encourage us to search not only for the what of emotions (what were they feeling, back then?) and the why (what personal, social, or political functions did feeling serve?) but the how, especially as it is visible through literary texts: how did they feel?”\textsuperscript{118}

McNamer’s supposition that feeling words and actions reveal the rich texture of the affective tapestry in medieval literature makes sense, and in practice, it yields fruitful results. Considering soul between desire and aversion, pleasure and suffering; all are strongly related both to the body and to rational powers.” Thus, Nagy argues, “Medieval people speak about what we call emotions, without using the term. To be sure, the term ‘emotion’ is not known until the end of the period, and when it emerges in French in the fifteenth century, it means social unrest.” See Nagy, “The Power,” 22.

\textsuperscript{114} The earliest recorded usage of “emotion,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, was in 1562 and pertained to political unrest and civil upheaval. Contemporary sixteenth-century usage of “emotion” also referred to migration and movement, emphasizing its disruptive effects. See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “emotion.”

\textsuperscript{115} See the Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “Felen,” which can mean “to know.”

\textsuperscript{116} McNamer, “Feeling,” 247.

\textsuperscript{117} McNamer, “Feeling,” 247.

\textsuperscript{118} McNamer, “Feeling,” 247.
genre—both for historical and literary texts—is key to understanding the kinds of emotion scripts, scenarios, and performances that might occur therein.

The emphasis on action and process—as opposed to involuntary experience—opens the door to many fruitful questions for the study of emotional history, and medievalists Sarah McNamer and Louise D’Arcens (among others) articulate what it means to be inquisitive about feelings in the Middle Ages, with both urging those who study the history of emotions in fiction to question narrative form as a part of the uncovering process—what do aesthetic concerns do to the representation and expression of emotion? How does form determine emotion? Does it free or constrict? Contemporary readers often think about the ways that historical texts elicit emotion from us—readers out of the original context and original time in which a narrative was produced and transmitted, and we engage in transhistorical emotional transaction and experience. When works of fiction refer in themselves to histories and engage in historicity, it complicates the constellation of temporalities at work within a text and within readers.

One key example of contemporary medievalists doing the work of emotional history comes from medievalists Fredric L. Cheyette’s and Howell Chickering’s “Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of Yvain,” in which the authors deftly dance with modern assumptions of emotion as well as feeling in its contexts. Cheyette and Chickering explain,

> We attempt to put aside modern Western assumptions about emotions and motivations and instead read the final episode [of *Yvain*] in light of documents from the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries that describe the ways that people of lordly estate (i.e., those who would have been Chrétien’s primary audience) resolved conflicts and made agreements. . . . Throughout the romance Chrétien’s language is slippery and multiple in meanings, as well as pyrotechnic in its sonorities and rhetorical figures. He is as deceptive and evasive as he is playful.\(^{119}\)

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Cheyette and Chickering aspire to clarify and contextualize the romance by way of its readership, historical documents, and other aspects of its time. The deceptive, evasive, and playful nature of Chrétien’s romances makes literary interpretation challenging and enjoyable.

Cheyette and Chickering identify what D’Arcens explain as a key difficulty in the work of doing emotional history with literature:

The investigation of emotions in and through time is even more challenging methodologically when dealing with fictional texts. This is because we must also consider the extend to which expressions or depictions of emotion have been shaped by the text’s often self-conscious use of the aesthetic, technical and rhetorical resources offered by their creative form, and with a view to creating emotions that are part of the texts’ fictional world rather than the ‘real world’ in which it is produced. At the same time, it is vital to recognise how these ‘fictionally shaped’ emotions intersect with the social and institutional vocabularies of emotion that are particular to the context in which the fictional text is produced.¹²⁰

The authors more or less do the work that Sarah McNamer proposes as a methodology:

First, reconstruct the historical conditions of the performance of a text, through empirical research and informed speculation; next, examine how a text seeks to produce emotion, through careful attention to its affective stylistics; then see how it all adds up, kinetically. This general strategy of ‘actualizing absence’ by bringing external and internal features together has been used to very positive effect in various branches of historical performance studies.¹²¹

Cheyette and Chickering consider Yvain’s words and deeds in Chrétien, first by digging into the denotations and connotations of his diction, then by balancing such terminology and contexts with historical documents. The authors cast the conflict that arises between Yvain and Laudine throughout the romance and the aid that Lunete provides in terms of “the feud.” From here, Cheyette and Chickering delve into the historical record to understand how Yvain’s and Laudine’s conflict functions and revolves in terms of feuds as they are understood in twelfth and

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teenth century France. These historical documents and the meanings gleaned from them are ever used in service of literary interpretation.

**Communities, Regimes, Arenas: Some Approaches to the History of Emotions**

The history of emotions is a practice concerned with identifying and understanding emotions in their own contexts, and the approach explores “how people in the past conceived of, explained and experienced emotions within particular cultures and contexts, with particular attention to variation in experience and to historical change.” The history of emotions arises from the idea of “emotionlogical concepts” as proposed by Stearns and Stearns, as discussed above. Straightforward as such an endeavor might seem, scholars remain divided on what even constitutes an emotion, and the work of teasing out what is and is not an explicit emotion as well as what is an implied emotional detail or expression in a given text is tricky. The practice of the medieval history of emotions focuses on textual and other visually based media (unlike more modern works that might explore sound recordings). Stephanie Downes, Sally Halloway, and Sarah Randles point out how most scholars of emotional history emphasize “the verbal nature of emotions,” noting how a great deal of medieval emotional history work has sought to rehabilitate

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123 Stearns and Stearns, “Emotionology,” 825.

124 Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History*, 2. This disagreement is not new, but it that it plagues even a branch of affect studies is significant. Rosenwein and Cristiani offer a brief but insightful overview of this trouble in the introduction to their co-authored study of the history of emotions, particularly on pages 2-3. Moreover, as Barclay explains, how to identify emotions is likewise a contested endeavor: are emotions only those experiences explicitly named? Are emotions truly inchoate until they are named (as Rosenwein contends)? Or are emotions something “mixed” or “in between”—a complex blend of experiences and feelings? See Barclay, *The History of Emotions*, 9-15.
medieval emotion from the lasting effect of nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of “childlike, naïve, artificial, or conventional” emotion in the Middle Ages. My dissertation approaches the history of emotions in Middle English romance through the work of three scholars on the subject: Barbara Rosenwein, William M. Reddy, and Mark Seymour. Each historian presents a slightly different method of practicing the history of emotions, and their respective approaches offer complementary tools for reading emotions.

My work builds significantly on Barbara Rosenwein’s emotional communities to parse out the emotional values of gathered communities. To Rosenwein, the frameworks of emotions in a given group or community are of the greatest interest, and she deems these “emotional communities.” Rosenwein explains emotional communities as “groups—usually but not always social groups—that have their own particular values, modes of feeling, and ways to express those feelings.” Emotional communities need not be inherently emotional groups; rather, they “share important norms concerning the emotions that they value and deplore and the modes of expressing them.” Because textual representation of emotion is always a mediation, those researching emotions in texts will have to do a great deal of uncovering and assessing—such work is the backbone of literary analysis, and she argues that the researcher looking for emotional communities:

seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize;


126 Rosenwein, Generations of Feeling, 3.

127 Rosenwein, Generations of Feeling, 3.
the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore. I further propose that people move (and moved) continually from one such community to another—from taverns to law courts, say—adjusting their emotional displays and their judgments of weal and woe (with greater and lesser degrees of success) to these different environments…. Even within the same society contradictory values and models, not to mention deviant individuals, find their place.\textsuperscript{128}

Emotional communities are flexible enough to account for variation, and Rosenwein’s explanation of the emotional community leaves the determination open to the reader about where an individual’s deviance is such that they are wholly at odds with—and distanced from—a given community.

   Emotions are “always embedded in gestures and words, and they must always be expressed in some way—written out, uttered, marked by cries, demonstrated via bodily writhings or still upper lips, and so on.”\textsuperscript{129} Because emotions are sometimes nestled within actions, “[e]motions are often hidden in the texts that historians use.”\textsuperscript{130} Rosenwein additionally contends: “feelings can never be known out of context,”\textsuperscript{131} and the historical documents and material media that mediate the expression (or suggestion) of emotion that depict emotional communities are also informed by numerous contextual aspects, such as genre, socioeconomic concerns, theology, and gender, to name a few. Rosenwein envisions the exploration of emotional communities in historical texts as a heuristic, a tool for those seeking to uncover something about emotional history in a certain period for certain groups of people in certain circumstances.\textsuperscript{132} Emotional

\textsuperscript{128} Rosenwein, “Worrying,” 842-843.

\textsuperscript{129} “The History of Emotions: An Interview,” 258.

\textsuperscript{130} Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages, 250.

\textsuperscript{131} “The History of Emotions: An Interview,” 259.

communities are, in short, a way to make sense of how people interact with one another, and it provides a framework for understanding why.

Rosenwein notes that psychologists speak of emotion scripts. The idea of anger scripts can be understood as follows: a person is offended, scowls, feels something, desires retribution, and strikes out to harm the offender. Such scripts detail feeling and how that feeling leads to particular actions. Rosenwein’s use of emotional sequences refers to the usual patterns of feeling that unfold for people of particular emotional communities. Emotional sequences, in Rosenwein’s framework, are what unfold when a subset of people (the emotional community) experience a catalyst for emotional reaction. For example, Rosenwein offers, when Puritans experience feelings of sinfulness, shame follows, then despair, then judgment, and finally comfort at forgiveness. Both expressions of emotional sequences and emotives (the explicit expression of feeling) are revelatory.

William M. Reddy proposes two helpful concepts for the study of the history of emotions: “emotives” and “emotional regimes.” Emotives are:

a type of speech act different from both performative and constative utterances, which both describes (like constative utterances) and change (like performatives) the world, because emotional expression has an exploratory and a self-altering effect on the activated thought material of emotion.


\[134\] Rosenwein, *Generations*, 8. The sequence that an individual experiences is both a product of broad social conditioning (the constructivist notion of affect) and the narrower emotional communities in which one travels (a more focused version of constructivism). Moreover, emotion sequences are informed by the emotional arenas in which one finds oneself, and whether one can fully express or experience a particular sequence is wholly informed by the constraints or freedoms afforded by one’s present emotional arena.

By this explanation, Reddy means that emotives are the naming of emotion that is being experienced just as much as they are the making of an emotion in a performative manner. “Just as saying ‘I do’ at a wedding is to wed,” Reddy contends, so, too “to say ‘I am angry’ is, in the constructionist view, to be angry.”¹³⁶ Emotives are the presentation of emotion—much like Rosenwein’s assertion that emotions are inchoate until given name,¹³⁷ an emotive is the act of giving name to a feeling. In fact, Rosenwein herself make this connection explicit:

Unhappy with both the moral relativism of social constructionism, which argues that all societies are ‘created equal’ because there is no universal or essential truth, Reddy postulates that emotions ‘are the real world-anchor of signs.’ By that he means, first, that they exist; and second, that they take the form that we know them in the context of the signs—which depend on the cultures—that elicit them. For Reddy, emotions, have protean potential. But they are not expressed in protean ways because, already in their expression, they have been shaped, molded, and channeled rather thoroughly.¹³⁸

Like Rosenwein’s understanding of the emotional community as a heuristic tool for historians to bear in mind when researching emotion in historical texts, so, too does Reddy see the emotive as something to be deployed holistically to a text, not simply out of context in datasets. To Reddy, historians ought not apply “these terms mechanically to a given body of evidence, but to hold them ready in the background” as a tool to be used in the service of making sense of emotion in a historical text.¹³⁹

Additionally, Reddy highly values the psychosocial dimensions of emotions, and he contends


¹³⁷ Rosenwein explains: “Emotions are inchoate until given name. Emotional vocabularies are exceptionally important for the ways in which people understand, express, and indeed ‘feel’ their emotions.” See Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, 4.

¹³⁸ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 17.

that they “are as malleable as any other dimension of community life that involves symbols and propositions, such as religion, cosmology, kinship, moral principle, or political ideology.”\footnote{Reddy, \textit{The Navigation of Feeling}, 55.} If emotions aid the individual in the construction of the self and the successful navigation of social life, with all of its “conflicting tugs and contradictions that the pursuit of multiple goals must give rise to, then exercising mental control over emotion may be a high-priority task, whose accomplishment is always partial at best.”\footnote{Reddy, \textit{The Navigation of Feeling}, 55.} Because of this tricky balance, Reddy says we’d expect communities to make emotions a high priority.\footnote{Reddy, \textit{The Navigation of Feeling}, 55.} Here Reddy proposes the notion of “emotional regimes” as a means of enforcing such control and balance that operates on both an internal and external level. Emotional regimes are defined by “[t]he set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them,” and emotional stability is “a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime.”\footnote{Reddy, \textit{The Navigation of Feeling}, 129.} To find “unity of purpose or ethos in social life,” emotions are central in the maintenance thereof, and Reddy sees a “strict limit to the range of possible emotional ‘cultures’”—or perhaps one should say emotional ‘regimes’—that can be successfully elaborated.”\footnote{Reddy, \textit{The Navigation of Feeling}, 55.} In such regimes, Reddy argues that two factors would be universal: first, that groups value emotions as a “domain of effort,” and secondly, “that they provide individuals with prescriptions and counsel concerning both the best strategies for pursuing emotional learning and the proper end point or ideal of emotional

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\footnote{Reddy, \textit{The Navigation of Feeling}, 55.}
equilibrium.” It then follows that the emotional regime would be an essential element of any stable political regime. Reddy additionally describes the ability for smaller, more centralized emotional regimes to exist nested within those of the larger polity:

Some face-to-face communities within a larger polity may be able to sustain emotional styles that have little in common with the transregional norms of that polity. If they enforce these styles through penalties such as gossip, exclusion, or demotion, these styles count as ‘emotional regimes.’ Those styles that are more or less coordinated with the emotional norms enforced at the center of power or authority of a polity could be considered components of its ‘emotional regime.’

Emotional regimes are identifiable by their emphasis on control and the policing of emotives either in an explicit or implicit manner. Locating such methods of control in literature can take numerous approaches, one of which is to consider the commonplaces of the genre or mode in which a narrative is written, and to consider how characters comply or disobey such strictures. What follows disobedience? If, for instance, a boilerplate phrase is lacking—perhaps, if a feast is not explicitly noted to have the best people, great entertainment, and ample food—are guests still described as making great mirth? Are they described as quiet and joyless? What narrative commentary exists to explain this depiction as normative or unexpected?

As a blend of both Rosenwein’s emotional communities and Reddy’s emotional regimes, Mark Seymour’s more recent concept of “emotional arenas” offers a third compelling approach for understanding emotional history. Seymour considers how people temper their emotions in public versus private spaces—or those permeable spaces in between. Seymour’s early work with emotional arenas builds explicitly from emotional communities as a starting point, and his

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147 Seymour especially builds upon Rosenwein’s arguments about how “people move (and moved) continually from one such community to another—from taverns to law courts, say—
core historical narrative is of a late nineteenth-century trial in Rome where prevailing rules of emotion (emotional regimes) in public clashed between different circles of citizens (emotional communities):

Emotions lay at the heart of the relationships that led to the murder, whose motive was alleged to be love. It was an illicit love though, between the wife of a respectable national official and a provincial circus acrobat, who now stood accused of that official’s murder.148 Such a spicy, sensational story with unclear motives seem bespoke for a scholar of emotional history, and Seymour developed emotional arenas while exploring the archive regarding the murder.

Seymour developed the paradigm of emotional arenas further to encompass Rosenwein, Reddy, and Monique Scheer’s work with emotions-as-practice, which in turn builds from Bourdieu’s *habitus*.149 To Scheer, “physical human bodies are always ‘infused’ with social and cultural elements, and thus by history itself.”150 The *habitus*, understood almost as over-learned culture, becomes so ingrained in one’s body and psyche that it seems automatic and natural. What happens, though, when people move from one discrete space with distinct norms to another? Seymour notes that as people become more mobile, it grows ever more difficult to “pin

adjusting their emotional displays and their judgments of weal and woe” from “Worrying,” 842-843; quotation cited in full above.


150 Scheer, “Are Emotions,” 199.
down or even discern” various “emotional regimes, refuges, communities, and practices.”151 People follow different “body-infusing cues” as they enter various spaces, and the same emotional community can behave in different ways depending upon the context—space, place, or time.152 Shifting spaces likewise bring shifts in *habitus*, in sometimes overlapping emotional regimes and engagement with different emotional communities. Bodies, their movement, their internal feelings, external expressions, relationships between one another, and the rules that govern any constellation of these features make up the emotional arena.

Even the same groupings of people—perhaps emotional communities or perhaps simply people who happen to be in the same space at the same time—can enter different emotional arenas and are expected to be able to temper their emotional register to fit the scene. Seymour offers the contrasting spaces of the opera and church. The same people might attend both, understanding that the “opera was a distinctive emotional arena” where they “behaved, and probably experienced their feelings, in distinctive ways.”153 Perhaps the following morning, Seymour muses, they attend Mass, in a space of great emotion, and likely experienced very different feelings than those that moved them during the opera.154 Considering the emotional arena can help us to “understand the complex emotional requirements of a particular moment,” as well as provide “a focus for the shifting emotional patterns and cultures across time.”155

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One particularly alluring aspect of Seymour’s paradigm of emotional arenas is its flexibility—it can refer both to tangible, material spaces (feast halls, bedrooms, dangerous forests—to speak in the context of medieval romance) or to more figurative, immaterial spaces and places (be they spiritual, longing for a place, or otherworldly). Such an expansive paradigm for understanding the spatiality of emotions works in concert with both emotional communities and emotional regimes, and my dissertation harnesses these three approaches to emotional history in relation to the feast hall, its inhabitants, and the social practices within. The banquet is, to echo Albala’s assertion once more, “a form of theater.”\textsuperscript{156} It is a space for the highly cultivated patterns of behavior that a culture or community prizes to displayed in a structured, ceremonial manner.

**Reading Emotional History at the Medieval Feast**

To return to the Feast of the Pheasant, the Burgundian court over which Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy presided constituted simultaneously an emotional regime—in that rules and strictures for appropriate behavior guided groups therein such as the Order of the Golden Fleece—and an emotional community. The “dramatically expressive community”\textsuperscript{157} surely incorporated a number of smaller, overlapping, and interrelated emotional communities. Such “coexisting emotional communities must respond to the same or similar material, technological, and ideational conditions”\textsuperscript{158} sometimes make it difficult to parse out whether the primary mode at a given moment in a particular narrative is regime, community, or arena; sometimes all three

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\textsuperscript{156} Albala, *The Banquet*, 4.

\textsuperscript{157} Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, 3.

\textsuperscript{158} Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, 4.
coexist simultaneously.\textsuperscript{159} The interludes that precede the eponymous vow upon the live pheasant at this feast depict almost a predilection \textit{tristitia}, for “the Burgundians courtiers reinforced their expressions of sorrow by invoking pity at every turn.”\textsuperscript{160} Pity moves, and seeing pity staged in the banquet hall in an official manner—in that the Duke himself took part in the interlude (yoking the emotional regime and emotional arena)—moved others to feel in kind, and to be so inclined to adopting the Duke’s aspirations towards Crusade. Despite being “play-acted” or scripted, “these emotions are an important component of what Philip conveys to the other guests….Emotions pantomimed in the service of real convictions thus become real emotions that ignite convictions in the diners.”\textsuperscript{161} In other words, the combination of pity staged in so many forms of interludes along with the Duke’s seemingly spontaneous—though scripted—interaction deftly manipulated all through a kind of rhetorical appeal by way of food and entertainment.

\textsuperscript{159} All three frameworks can operate at once. The regime is the sanctioned, official, normative behaviors of emotional life, and regimes can effect many, and within regimes can exist emotional refuges (per Reddy) as means of escaping controlling, emotionally oppressive standards. Emotional communities are emotional regimes are not mutually exclusive, and emotional arenas can help illuminate nuances of both that might otherwise go unseen or unspoken. How do different spaces lead to differences in emotional expression? Each aspect of approaching the history of emotions highlights different facets of the affective experience.

\textsuperscript{160} Rosenwein, \textit{Generations of Feeling}, 193.

\textsuperscript{161} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 68.
CHAPTER 2

“THEREOF HAD THEY ALL GRAME!”: THE HORRIFIC SOTILTE IN RICHARD COER DE LYON

The fourteenth-century Middle English popular romance Richard Coer de Lyon presents a fantastical history of King Richard I and positions the sotilte as a powerful political tool. What constitutes “popular” romance has long been held in contention by many scholars, as literary scholars Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton describe in the introduction of their volume of essays about medieval popular romance.\(^{162}\) The subject matter of frequently taboo topics—disturbing images such as “rape, incest, racial discrimination and religious intolerance,” among others—and durability or transmission of a given narrative attest to its so-called “popular” status.\(^{163}\) The popular romance of the medieval period typically lives on into the modern era by way of parody, ballad, song, or theater, but popularity is not determined by number of extant copies and cross-references or allusions, alone, according to Radulescu and Rushton.\(^{164}\) Popular romance seems to stand in contrast courtly, chivalric, or elite romance, and there are stylistic determinants that do seem to distinguish these genres or modes of romance. Popular romance revels in upending idioms, techniques, or themes, as medievalists Thomas

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Hahn and Dana M. Symons argue of alliterative romance, especially.\textsuperscript{165} For this reason, popular romance has frequently been dismissed by scholars as something unworthy of serious study, for they are “at once deficient (leaving out the authentic bits) and excessive (including all sorts of material extraneous to the organic narrative).”\textsuperscript{166} Radulescu and Rushton offer the following succinct definition of the Middle English popular romance: “those texts in Middle English, sometimes with origins in Anglo-Norman versions, which show a predominant concern with narrative at the expense of symbolic meaning.”\textsuperscript{167} My assessment of the narrative rapidity and tendency towards excess or taboo of the popular romances I study in Chapters 2 and 3 is consistent with what both Radulescu and Rushton as well as Hahn and Symons identify as key markers of popular romance.

Medievalist Carolyn B. Anderson describes the setting of this romance as “the world of dubious marvels” and King Richard himself as one who “poses theatrically, seeking to see and to be seen.”\textsuperscript{168} Geraldine Heng, a medievalist whose work is deeply attentive to questions of empire, transmission, and cultural encounters in the medieval era, contends that this medieval romance transforms crisis into national celebration, building upon the recovery work that Geoffrey of Monmouth’s \textit{Historia Regum Britannie} first enacts, arguing that

...the \textit{Historia} performs a dazzling cultural rescue by successfully passing historical trauma through the stages of memorial transfiguration, so that historical event finally issues, and is

\textsuperscript{165} Thomas Hahn and Dana M. Symons, “Middle English Romance,” in \textit{A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c. 1350-1500}, edited by Peter Brown (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 341-357, 345.

\textsuperscript{166} Hahn and Symons, “Middle English Romance,” 349.

\textsuperscript{167} Radulescu and Rushton, “Introduction,” 7.

commemorated, as triumphant celebration in the form of a romance narrative in which the spoor of history and the track of fantasy creation become one, inextricably conjoined.\textsuperscript{169} Heng argues that \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon} takes this same thread of reinterpretation, casting the romance in terms of national celebration and silencing any would-be detractors to English superiority. While Heng’s argument rests on the treatment of historical events through literary fantasy, this transformative core is paradigmatic of the genre of romance itself, in that transformation quite often drives the narrative or medieval romance. That is, romance itself requires some sort of transformative movement: young men learn to be knights or kings, anonymity turns to recognition, ferocious anger becomes tender weeping, and loathly ladies are revealed to be beautiful maidens. Medieval romance is a space of becoming, and the \textit{sotilte} is one tool by which this transformation takes place.

Marcel Elias, scholar of medieval literature and history, sees the composite, transformed nature of \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon} as one reason for the conflicting appraisals that the narrative encourages: “Reading \textit{RCL} rouses mixed feelings toward the manner in which King Richard is portrayed, his belligerent disposition and violent actions at times seemingly present as praiseworthy and yet, at others, infused with disquieting ambivalence.”\textsuperscript{170} Medievalist Lesley A. Coote calls the Richard of this romance a “monstrous” figure and “an unstoppable force who commits acts of extreme violence.”\textsuperscript{171} Coote touches upon Richard’s use of the feast to play


“devilish host” to the Saracen ambassadors who visit their English camp, but she does not go so far as to call Richard’s horrific display a sotilte. Nicola McDonald, a medieval literary scholar who has worked extensively with popular romance, does not name Richard’s disruptive “alimentary logic” a sotilte or entremet, but she notes that the romance encourages readers to think about the Saracen head episode as an entremet. McDonald rightly notes that this scene looks like “a conventional entremets,” and I take this one step further, arguing not only that it is an entremet (though I use the Middle English counterpart, sotilte), and so, too, is Richard’s performative and literal consumption of the vanquished lion’s heart earlier in the romance. By depicting King Richard I deliberately deploying calculated alimentary habits to elicit shock, awe, and terror in feast-goers, Richard Coer de Lyon illustrates the destructive affect of the sotilte and the feast. Two key feasts of this romance illustrate powerful affective manipulation at work by way of the sotilte: first the interrupted feast at the Court of Almayn and second the cannibalistic feast staged for Saracen diplomats, and my argument addresses each feast scene as it appears in narrative order.

Richard Coer de Lyon is the non-Arthurian outlier of my dissertation; however, it shares many of the same elements as the other three texts I analyze. Like the Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, Richard Coer de Lyon is concerned with shifting something troubling (if not horrific) into something worth celebrating, even though such celebration remains troubled.


174 McDonald, “Eating,” 137.
Like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this text revels in spectacle and beguilement.

Throughout *Richard Coer de Lyon*, meals are manipulative and transformative. The romance does not solely rely on food and feasting for Richard’s powerful affective manipulation, for other instances of such emotion similarly rely on deceit, trickery, or an overwhelming sense of uncertainty. For instance, Richard’s many disguises during the English tournament to confound his knights, his wax-hardened bandages to cheat at fisticuffs, or his use of a mare in estrus to distract Saladin’s demonic stallion all point to Richard’s deft cunning. The scenes that capitalize on food and feasting as a means of instilling such uncertainty in others are especially compelling, for they build on elements of beguilement already inherent to the occasion. The *sotiltes* of *Richard Coer de Lyon* are horrific and inescapable. Richard’s cunning use of particular dishes to elicit fear from his adversaries constitutes a *sotilte*. The weaponized *sotilte* appears in two poignant feasts in this romance: first at the Court of Almayn with the lion’s heart and then during the macabre feast at which Richard serves Saracen diplomats their own kin. Richard harnesses occasions expected to be affectively overdetermined and still manages to turn the tables in unexpected ways. My interest lies with the effects that Richard’s deceit has upon the gathered communities, and the ways that they attempt to process their astonishment and horror.

In this chapter, I examine the *sotiltes* that Richard deploys against his foes and explore the collective emotion that these communities subsequently experience. In each feast, the narrator of this popular romance emphasizes the group’s feelings, depicting the experiences as shared reactions. I draw upon philosopher Gerhard Thonhauser’s recent taxonomy of “collective emotions” to make sense of each community’s reactions to Richard’s *sotilte*. Whereas some scholars see collective emotion as simply “group-based emotions being spread among several
individuals, i.e., several individuals simultaneously experiencing a group-based emotion,”¹⁷⁵ Thonhauser refines the concept of such affective experience as “a mereologically complex affective response” among individuals.¹⁷⁶ Thonhauser’s taxonomy of collective emotion is marked by four key features: that individuals “evaluate a situation from a collective perspective,” which leads them to “share the same (or sufficiently similar) cares and concerns (the background focus of an emotion) based on which they appraise an eliciting object of event.”¹⁷⁷ There is a sense that these emotions “are experienced with first-person plural awareness” and the rest of the group that experiences the emotion together.¹⁷⁸ On this final feature, Thonhauser provides what seems to be a tautological point, “a collective emotion is the emotion of the collective.”¹⁷⁹ I connect Thonhauser’s taxonomy of collective emotions to Rosenwein’s notion of emotional communities to consider two particular groups who fall victim to Richard’s sotiltes. The collective feeling experienced and expressed by the Court of Almayn differs from that of the Saracen diplomats. Collective emotions and emotional communities function as heuristic tools to make sense of those affective distinctions, allowing for greater attention to any diction related to feeling and its expression or repression, either through narration, Richard’s perspective, or the


¹⁷⁶ Thonhauser, “Towards a Taxonomy,” 35.


dialogue from each community. The symbolic and material medieval contexts of both lions and hearts provides a gauge for how uncouth Richard’s actions are in the feast hall. I take into consideration the kind of community that the Court of Almayn and King Modard represent, particularly that they are legibly European and adhere to the kinds of behavior and order that would expect at a typical feast, and Richard’s lion’s heart *sotilte* is all the more shocking because Richard is able to subvert expectations deftly.

I then turn to the macabre feast that Richard hosts for the Saracen envoy, considering the complex angles of affective manipulation, performance, and expression at work. Richard’s initial self-presentation aligns with what Saladin prepares his envoy to experience, which renders the cannibalism revelation and threat even more traumatic to the diplomats. The work of medieval historians C. Stephen Jaeger, Gerd Althoff, and Stephen D. White help to clarify expectations of behavior and ways in which sovereigns might utilize specific emotional expression to affect subjects and subordinates in particular ways, considering the roles and effects of charisma, love, and the uses of royal anger. Richard’s affectations of love and welcome are part of his *sotilte*, and I balance Richard’s behavior against the reactions and judgment of the Saracen envoy when the fuller ruse is revealed. The macabre feast presents the Saracen emotional community experiencing swift, deep collective emotions of grief, disgust, and horror, and I explore the features of this community based on the presentation of these emotional experiences and their expressions. Ultimately, as there is no substantial commentary from the narrator critiquing Richard’s behavior, the king’s actions appear accepted as antiquated, even quaint behavior of a past era. However, emotional expression and the narrator’s description thereof in the macabre feast scene affords a counter perspective to wholesale acceptance. The fullest amount of emotional expression appears through the trauma that the Saracen diplomats endure at the hands
of Richard. That the romance affords the so-called enemy deep emotional range is not a negative quality; rather, the narrator almost seems sympathetic to their plight. Through that lens, satire and critique come into focus, with Richard becoming a grotesque agent of Bakhtinian carnival and excess. Throughout the romance *sotilte* thus represents boundaries transgressed through inescapable trauma.

Before delving into analysis of feast scenes and the *sotiltes* therein, I first provide a brief synopsis of this popular romance. *Richard Coer de Lyon* is a Middle English popular romance that takes the historical figure of Richard I and adds magical, demonic, impossible dimensions to his life. The popular romance is hedonistic, complex, and sensual. The romance first depicts how Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine meet—here she is named Cassodorien, daughter of the King of Antioch—and the queen is cast initially as a lovely and fairy-like, but she is revealed to be a demonic figure who cannot bear to witness the Eucharist. When forced to view it, she flees by flying through the roof, absconding with her young daughter. She attempts to take the young prince John also and drops him, and she leaves teen-aged Richard behind as well. This fantastical, outlandish opening sets the stage for Richard’s exploits as a young prince and subsequently king, with his demonic parentage inflecting many aspects of his character throughout the romance. The narrative is a subversive hagiography that does not seek to depict Richard’s actions and qualities as simply positive, but it does not offer clear commentary about the problematic nature of his cruelty and harsh testing of his subjects. He establishes dominance over his knights by testing and tricking them, then determines who best to take with him on crusade to the Holy Land. Whereupon their return towards England, Richard and his knights are apprehended by the King of Almayn. After Richard kills the king’s son in a treacherous bout of fisticuffs, Princess Margery falls deeply in love with Richard, prompting the King of Almayn to
kill Richard by placing him in a dungeon with a starving lion. Because of Richard’s resourcefulness, and Margery’s assistance, he manages to kill the lion, rip out its heart, walk into the banquet hall, and feast upon the raw heart before the shocked court of Almayn.

The next exploit of the romance focuses on Richard’s struggles with other European kingdoms, primarily the French, on their way to the Holy Land, with the English ultimately prevailing over and taking Cyprus. Here they face extreme hunger—noble and commoner, alike—and Richard grows delirious, purportedly from a lack of pork. An old knight covertly serves him a roasted young Saracen, which revives the king, and Richard laughs manically at the revelation of his unwitting cannibalism. During a series of peace talks with Saladin’s diplomats, Richard invites the Saracens envoy to a feast, where he appalls him by serving up the roasted heads of their kinsmen, and the king threatens to eat every last Saracen. The messengers, appalled, flee home and share their horror with Saladin.

Following this atrocity, the popular romance depicts three main conflicts: first, King Phillip of France accepts a bribe from Saladin, thus betraying the alliance he had with Richard; second, Richard and Saladin engage in a tournament, where it is divinely revealed to Richard that Saladin’s horse is actually demonic. Richard prevails. Finally, Richard learns of his brother’s betrayal and self-appointment as King of England, prompting Richard to return to England and reclaim the throne. The narrative trails on following this encounter, with Richard defeating John but ultimately dying at the hands of the Duke of Austria. The popular romance plays fast and loose with historical fact, conflating events and adding great swaths of fantastical elements.

**Lionheart: A Most Uncouth Sotilte**

Imprisoned by King Modard of Almayn and left to die by a starving lion, Richard is
resourceful as ever. After planning “To sloo the lyoun with sum gyle,” Richard defeats the deranged, starving lion with his bare hands:

In at hys throte hys arme he gerte,  
Rente out the herte with hys hand,  
Lungges and lyvere, and al that he fand.  
The lyoun fel ded to the grounde.  

Richard’s cunning knows no bounds in this romance, and this ability to harness and then subvert convention to great effect makes him a formidable adversary to his foes and a tricky leader to his people. Lesley A. Coote points to Richard’s penchant for breaking, even mocking chivalric code, describing the king’s cunning a “tellingly devilish trait.” In this scene, Richard’s guile is not limited to the manner by which he defeats the crazed lion; he brings the same cunning to the banquet hall to defeat King Modard. Richard is not here to break bread with—to be a companion of—Modard. He is there to wreak havoc on his captor.

While the King and Queen of Almayn are not necessarily representative of the entirety of the emotional community, they do provide a baseline by which to consider the range of emotional expression that can be expected in this courtly setting. Some of the depictions of emotional experience are boilerplate: swooning, weeping, and rending at clothing, for example, are all commonplace to medieval romance. That does not mean, however, that they are without significance, and Barbara Rosenwein contends that boilerplate descriptions of emotional experience and expression are not to be dismissed. They can still be “real feeling,” as can

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180 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, edited by Peter Larkin, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), lines 1105-1109; line 1070. All subsequent quotations of this romance are from this edition.

181 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 1092-1095.

“words, emphases, sequences, [and] rhetoric” all operate as “emotional inheritances” and
commonplaces that communities draw upon to describe their affects. Modard’s emotional
reactions to the loss of his son and of his daughter’s seduction are somatic—they register on and
in his body. For the first, he falls into a swoon, “As man that was in wo Ibourne,” and his
knight scoops him up quickly and urges him to action. The queen likewise registers her
emotional state on her body, weeping, rending her clothing, and tearing at the skin of her face. Philosophers and theologians have spoken at length about the troubling and beneficial roles of
the passions, and a particular passage from Alcuin’s On the Virtues and Vices is helpful for
understanding the sort of action that Modard’s knight urges him to take. Both the king and
queen experience the kind of sorrow that Alcuin labels destructive, sadness brought about by the
world, which in turn “brings about the death of the soul,” destroying hope and darkening the
mind. The nameless knight who brings King Modard back to his feet seems to push Modard
toward a more action-oriented, emotionally-aware state of mind, but such awareness lies beyond
the king, as is the case for the emotional community of rulership and counsel that Modard relies
upon to make decisions. Some three weeks later, when Modard learns that Princess Margery has
been secretly sleeping with Richard, he “in herte sykyd sore,” this time wordlessly expressing his

183 Rosenwein, Generations of Feeling, 9.
184 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 803-8.
185 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 826-33.
186 Rosenwein describes this text as “therapeutic,” a work that “assumed that human beings were
responsible for their feelings and actions and, by understanding the sources of these things, could
change them.” See Generations, 83.
187 Alcuin, De virtutibus et vitiis liber ad Widonem comitem, PL 101, cols. 613-38, c. 33 col. 635; Rosenwein, Generations, 83.
feelings and refusing to speak. In both instances, Modard attempts to act swiftly but only delays action. Following his son’s death, the king declares that Richard “schal dye be ryght lawe,” but is passive on any judgment until learning of Princess Margery’s and Richard’s dalliance, after which he similarly proposes action and then delays: he sends for his earls, barons, and wise clerks who take fourteen days to arrive and another “thre dayes and sumdel mare” to deliberate. The emotional sequence that Modard follows after experiencing grievance is to register sudden, heavy feelings in his body and then to defer action. With Modard as the baseline by which the rest of the emotional community of councilors, deliberation, deferral, and delay are the key effects of their collective emotion. What’s more, the passivity that Modard and his councilors embrace is hardly laudable typical chivalric behavior in romance. Modard’s disengaged treatment and attempted execution of Richard instead draws upon the Roman tradition of damnatio ad bestias, not a trial or tournament wherein one might prove oneself through deed—that being said, Richard manages to prove his mettle.

Even before Richard’s theatrics are fully on display, the narrator reveals another key detail about the kind of emotional community gathered in this hall for the occasion. King Modard is at his meat with the dukes and earls from whom he received counsel, all “prowde in pres” around him. This construction is a stock phrase, with the Middle English Dictionary describing it to mean, “splendid in the throng.” Other senses of “proud” follow modern connotations—at once

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188 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 933-34.
189 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 876.
190 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 974.
191 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 1103.
192 Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “Proud.”
arrogant or haughty but also bold and stalwart. To be proud is not necessarily bad, yet the diving line between the connotations is in Middle English as unclear as it is in modern English. The stock phrase “splendid in the throng” carries a number of senses: firstly, a crowd or mass; secondly, soldiers thick in battle, melee; and finally, distress, anxiety, trouble, even oppression, bondage, and danger.\textsuperscript{193} The \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} offers largely the same denotations, with the emphasis on many people crowded together and a sense of business throughout said people.\textsuperscript{194} “Throng” carries a benign interpretation, but just as with “proud,” some of the instances of the word carry decidedly less innocuous connotations. For this reason, the phrase “prowde in pres,” stock as it may be, is revealing about the gathered community under the leadership of King Modard. Built into this brief description is the implication that the court (and potentially kingdom) is in disarray. At the same time, Modard’s deep concern for law and order when dealing with Richard—whom he immediately accuses of guile, even before meeting him—gives Richard the opportunity to escape the fate of \textit{damnatio ad bestias}. Modard’s excessive caution and concern with acting appropriately in this delicate situation is the opposite of Richard’s rashness. Almayn is led by those who are overly concerned with the order and philosophy of law, not of the praxis of executing such justice.

To their dismay, Richard interrupts the order of the feast and performs an impromptu \textit{sotilte} for the gathered guests. Richard has a penchant for display and knows how to move his audience. That combination of showmanship and affective manipulation are what Richard seeks to accomplish when he takes his visceral trophy to the banquet hall where King Modard presides:

\begin{center}
He took the herte, al so warme,
And broughte it into the halle
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Middle English Dictionary}, s.v. “Throng.”

Before the kyng and hys men alle.
The kyng at meete sat on des
With dukes and erles, prowde in pres.195

In the midst of celebration, with the King surrounded by his retinue, Richard arrives and shocks all. His victory over the vanquished lion is more poignant by his wordless consumption of the heart before the astonished court. Richard’s visceral, bloody trophy is an unquestionable symbol of his success:

The saler on the table stood.
Rychard prest out al the blood,
And wette the herte in the salt;
The kyng and alle hys men behalt,
Wythouten bred the herte he eet.196

Scholar of medieval literature Jonathan Nicholls explains that “criteria for being accepted at the feast are cleanness and adherence to the rules of society,” neither of which Richard follows in this instance.197 Dipping meat directly into the salt is a decidedly discourteous, unclean act, as medievalist Edith Rickert describes in the introduction to her edited volume of The Babees’ Book: “A young nobleman had to be instructed not only how to hold his carving-knife with a thumb and two fingers, but also not to dip his meat into the salt-cellar, or lick the dust out of dish with his tongue, or wipe his nose on the table-cloth; and other instructions were added too primitive for translation.”198 The “Babees’ Book” similarly instructs against placing morsels

195 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 1100-1104.

196 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 1105-1109.


directly into the salt-cellar:

The salte also touche nat in his salere
Withe nokyns mete, but lay it honestly
On youre Trenchoure, for that is curtesy.\textsuperscript{199}

Richard has learned all of these lessons, and he acts with calculated discourtesy to punctuate this official space with the carnivalesque and the grotesque—this is not a space of Bakhtinian carnival, where festive laughter “is the laughter of all people;” rather, this is a space of silence and fear.\textsuperscript{200} It is darkly carnivalesque in that Richard aims to upend the established order and to thumb his nose mockingly at his captor. But the upending of expectation or certainty is precisely what the \textit{sotilte} aims to do, though never unplanned, and not in a threatening manner. This scene illustrates a feast meant to celebrate the reinstatement of order, an attempt to proclaim “the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions” to be stable, unchanging, perennial.\textsuperscript{201} Yet Richard denies such stability for this community. They are left with wonder and marvel. Williams describes a framework of wonder as something which “can be an emotion, a way of seeing, or a mode of engagement; it can be a reaction to objects or events that are aesthetic, natural, or supernatural,”\textsuperscript{202} and I argue that Richard’s unnatural \textit{sotilte} damages any sense of justice that the king and community might have enjoyed.

The very substance that Richard consumes furthermore adds to the elements of the grotesque


\textsuperscript{201} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 9.

\textsuperscript{202} Williams, \textit{Middle English Marvels}, 12.
at play in this romance, for “the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world.” with the stress “laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world.”\textsuperscript{203} The feast-goers who watch Richard’s mouth, what he puts into it, how he goes about consuming it, and then ascertain manner by which he acquired such a morsel face the grotesque. Beyond this, the medieval contexts for consuming organs and the greater symbolic import compounds the grotesque figure that Richard comes to signify.

The king is agog then “summarizes” what has happened for the rest of the court, first calling Richard “a devyl, and no man”:

\begin{quote}
That has my stronge lyoun slawe,
The herte out of hys body drawe,
And has it eeten with good wylle.
He may be callyed, by ryght skylle,
Kynge icrystenyd of most renoun,
Stronge Rychard, Coer de Lyoun!\textsuperscript{204}
\end{quote}

The literal “lionhearted” sobriquet that this romance ascribes to Richard diminishes the role of metaphor and symbol in this display, characterizing Richard only for that which he literally does. And this declaration is far less flattering and further adds to the carnivalesque elements of this banquet hall. Even so, this insertion of the carnivalesque into an official space may leave Modard grasping for some way to reclaim power and control, and simply naming what has happened and unimaginatively granting Richard a new appellation, Coer de Lyon, he can begin to make some sense of what has befallen the court.

In medieval cookery books, precious little is said of the heart, though recipes for

\textsuperscript{203} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 26.

\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, lines 1112-18.
“nombles”\textsuperscript{205} of venison are present in Thomas Austin’s transcription of Harleian MS 279:

Nomblys of þe venyson.—Take þe Nombles of Venysoun, an cutte hem smal whyle þey ben raw; þan take Freysshe broþe, Watere, an Wyne, of eche a quantyte, an powder Pepir an Canel, and let hem…boyle to-gederys tyl it be almost y-now; An þenne caste powder Gyngere, an a lytil venegre an Salt, an sesyn it vp, an þanne serue it forth in þe maner of a gode potage.\textsuperscript{206}

The organ is not typically explicitly associated with feast-dishes of literature, but that’s no surprise: typically literary feasts focus on the quantity of food and quality of experience, or they only generally reference the types of dishes served.

Drawing from studies of primary sources, historian J. Birrell notes that venison is a choice meat at noble tables, and that throughout medieval recipes, a “preference for certain parts of the animal…emerges clearly, the same joints recurring in the aristocratic contexts of recipe books and household accounts, that is, the hindquarters, sides, and ribs.”\textsuperscript{207} Boar, elk, and other large game animals fill out the banquet menu, along with a lengthy catalog of fowl. Lion does not share the same symbolic value as boar, venison, or elk might; though as a predator, lion shares a slight affinity with boar, yet they still don’t carry the same import.\textsuperscript{208}

Gaston Phoebus’s fourteenth-century French \textit{Livre de la chasse} dedicates a beautifully

\textsuperscript{205} Nombles being the heart, lungs, liver, and similar organ meats—the offal—of a livestock animal.


\textsuperscript{208} Gaston Phoebus (and Edward, Second Duke of York) asserts that the boar is actually more dangerous than a lion—arguing that lions or leopards could only slay the boar if they leapt upon the boar’s back, and the boar is the only animal that can kill with a single stroke, as with a knife.
illuminated section to the hunting of wild cats, noting that they are typically chased by horse, treed by hounds, and slayed by hunters with crossbows. Neither Gaston Phoebus’s Middle French work nor Edward, Second Duke of York’s Middle English translation thereof, *Master of Game*, note what use value wild cats have. There is no mention of food, hide, nor the joy of the hunt—in fact, Edward, Second Duke of York, in particular, seems to write off big cat hunting as not much fun. The 1909 modern English translation of *Master of Game* includes an appendix with detailed information of various terminology and practices of the medieval hunt. One term in particular, quarry, makes reference to the heart, noting that “vein of the heart and the small fillets attached to the loins” of deer were considered delicacies by nobility. Most organ meat was reserved for the hounds to reward them for a hunt well done. Medieval hunting treatises outline field dressing practices, providing a sense of how raw flesh would be handled before being transformed by cookery into something recognizable for the table. Nevertheless, the lion is Richard’s kill, and he does eviscerate the creature prior to consuming its flesh in a manner vaguely reminiscent of field dressing practices, however strange his method may be. As with most of Richard’s methods, the lack of finesse and disregard for “normal” practices subverts the expected.

Since heart is an atypical dish on noble tables, bestiaries can provide a fuller account of the

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alimentary value that the vanquished lion provides Richard in this scene. The characterization of
the lion in Richard Coer de Lyon reflects the depiction of lions in Classical and medieval
bestiaries, wherein “Their courage is in their breast, their strength in their head,” and being a
creature “proud by nature,” the lion “will not live with other kinds of beasts in the wild, but like
a king disdains the company of the masses.” 213 The boldness of the lion and its singular cunning
come to characterize Richard through the entire of the romance. Symbolically, the heart is the
seat of life, and even still, the heart is colloquially considered the seat of emotion. Historian
Milad Doueithi asserts that the Aristotelian concept of the “heart provides the support and
foundling analogy for life in general, both biological and political,” and Doueih calls Aristotle’s
conceptualization a foundational “version of the extension of the figurative powers of the
heart.” 214 In her commentary of Aristotle’s De Motu Animalium, Nussbaum describes the
Aristotelian heart as holding “the origins of the senses.” 215 This idea is not far from modern


214 Milad Doueihi, A Perverse History of the Human Heart (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

University Press, 1986), 54. Nussbaum further substantiates this point with an excerpt from The
Iliad: Nussbaum points to the Iliad to explicate Aristotelian thought regarding the driving force
of the heart, particular in relation to the lion’s heart:

He charged like a hill-bred lion, ravenous
For meat, whose proud heart urges him to dare
An attack on the flocks in a close-kept sheepfold.
And even should he find herdsmen there
Watching over the sheep with spears and dogs,
He will not think of turning back, empty,
Without attacking. Now he must spring down
On a sheep and kill it—otherwise be pierced,
Unyielding, by a shaft from a swift hand. (Iliad XII.299-306)
connotations of the heart, wherein “feeling” sits. The heart is not simply life-force, “the mechanical engine that animates the body and makes all movements possible,” but it also “circulates, thanks to its centrality, between a number of orders and domains, between the biological and the mythological, the political and the physiological.” The heart is changed with symbolism, and it:

fulfills the functions of centering and structuring theoretical discourses devoted to the analysis of a variety of manifestations of life in general. As such, the heart provides the basic conceptual tools in terms of which certain conceptions of life are articulated and organized. The heart is thus the guarantor or forms of exchange that make such discourses possible and intelligible.

With the heart divorced from its source—the lion—it is left to the witnesses to inscribe meaning to the bloody substance that Richard consumes. A fleshy heart alone might immediately bring to mind the idea of all the things that are ascribed to the human body, furthering his performance of the grotesque. And this scene foreshadows Richard’s anthropophagy to come—now he consumes a heart of known origins but without its immediate context; later he will further fracture connections between substance and origin with his macabre feast for the Saracen diplomats.

Normore does point out a use of “lion” at the banquet table to highlight its “figural aspect,” as such fantastical dishes would aim to emphasize, rather than the “odor, taste, or ingredients.”

Normore translates and cites Georges Chastellain, one of the main chroniclers of Valois Burgundian court feasting, where Chastellain includes “lion” along with a number of other impossible beasts:

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I will not speak of the dishes, nor the meats….But in the middle of the meal various entremets were made and presented to the king and the princes at his table, which were very beautiful and sumptuous and made with beautiful imagination. The king was presented a flying deer, the Duke of Orléans a white swan, the Duke of Burgundy a lion, the Count of Charolais a pelican, the Duke of Bourbon a peacock, the Count of Eu a phoenix, the Count of Étampes a unicorn…and each entreat was emblazoned with the arms of the one who was served.219

In such displays, it would not be uncommon for a wild beast, such as a lion, to appear out of its normal context (that is, a wild creature within the highly cultivated confines of the banquet hall) to awe guests. Just as an actual dish of lion would be atypical at the table, so, too, would an actual lion padding around an enclosed space. Instead, stylized artifice meant to bring to mind the idea of a lion would suffice. For example, Normore’s discussion of Margaret of York’s wedding notes the inclusion of a singing lion “the size of a warhorse” ridden by Madame de Beaugrand, and led by two men who lead the beast in circles about the feast hall while it praises Margaret’s virtues.220 There are many layers to this sottile: the lion that looks like a horse (rendering it partially familiar), the lady rider escorted by two gentlemen (though the lady is a dwarf, thereby playing with the novelty of scale and upended expectation. Normore does not comment on the oddity or strangeness of a (metaphorical) lion singing the praises of a (metaphorical) shepherdess. Though perhaps it even more compelling for a predator to artfully

“Je ne parle des mets, ne des viands…Mais au milieu du souper furent faits et présentés divers entremets au roy et aux princes de sa table, qui moult estoient beaux et somptueux, et de belle invention composés. Au roy fut présente un cerf-volant, au duc d’Orléans un blanc digne, au duc de Bourgogne un lyon, au comte de Charolois un pélican, au duc de Bourbon un paon, ac comte d’Eu en fénsix, au comte d’Estampes une licorne…et chacun entremet armoyé des armes à qui il servoit.”

proclaim such a message—the flock is so safe under Margaret’s care that even it must adopt a domestic role in awe of her virtue. She renders the creature docile.

Richard, too, renders the dangerous lion harmless, but he does so through brutality, and that viciousness spills over into the feast with Richard himself embodying the lion’s predatory nature. That brutality, however, his filtered through Richard’s training and upbringing. Richard knows how and when to adhere to the rules of chivalry and when to eschew them to the fullest advantage. The feast is a poignant space to eschew courtly mannerisms, and Richard’s power play is quite effective. To refuse courtesy might cost one all future invitations to a noble’s table. In the literary fantasy of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, however, Richard’s bad behavior is wielded as a powerful tool.

This display is not a static, detached show for the court of Almayne; rather, it is an interactive experience, recognizable to contemporary medieval audiences as a play on the *entremet* or *sotilte*. Christina Normore stresses the importance of the dynamic relationship between spectator and spectacle at the feast, with the *entremet* or *sotilte* being the central spectacle. Normore argues that the guests’ reactions to the spectacle, be they scripted or spontaneous, “were integral to forming the feast’s final meaning.”²²¹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Albala sees meaning at the feast in terms of the state in miniature, like “a mummery or ‘dumb show’ for the real power relations that took place outside the banquet hall.”²²² While Albala’s analysis of historical banquets focuses on Early Modern stately events, the effects of disrupted theatricality in *Richard Coer de Lyon* align closely with his assessment of how such events

²²¹ Normore, *A Feast*, 44.

unravel. When the performance grows too real, such as “when insubordination threatened to disrupt social harmony,” Albala argues that the theatrical “suspension of disbelief is destroyed,” and “ceremonial insult turns into the real,” thereby shattering the façade of stability and peace that the feast aims to maintain.\textsuperscript{223}

This power dynamic plays out in the thirteenth-century historical record as well. Medieval historian Lars Kjær’s analysis of Eleanor de Montfort’s household and political clout, for example, shows that social ritual carries great political power.\textsuperscript{224} Eleanor de Montfort strategically hosted dinners for particular guests, reserved her better foodstuffs for their entertainment and refreshment, and was savvy about the effects of a good communal meal.\textsuperscript{225} What’s more, Kjær contends, Eleanor maintained “an increasingly grand table” in an attempt to renew her husband’s power and to rouse support for him.\textsuperscript{226} Despite Earl Simon de Montfort’s eventual death in the Battle of Evesham, Eleanor seems to have established social security for herself through her careful curation of a social network by way of largesse and hospitality. In other words, Eleanor de Montfort’s carefully managed household, largesse, and comportment manifested into social capital. Ultimately, the significance of who dines and what they eat carries out into the greater world. Both Albala and Kjær point to the seemingly “soft” but salient power that an event like the feast carries. Part of Eleanor’s careful planning depends on the obligation

\textsuperscript{223} Albala, \textit{The Banquet}, 7.

\textsuperscript{224} See Lars Kjær, “Food, drink and ritualised communication in the household of Eleanor de Montfort, February to August 1265,” \textit{Journal of Medieval History} 37.1 (2011): 75-89, particularly pages 77-82.

\textsuperscript{225} Kjær, “Food,” 79-81.

\textsuperscript{226} Kjær, “Food,” 81.
that a feast establishes between host and guest:

Whether or not actual friendship sprung from a shared meal, it did impose a moral obligation on the guests, however vaguely defined, to reciprocate with other good deeds, or at least to abstain from harming their host…Having eaten at another’s table opened one to accusations of ingratitude and treachery if the relationship later turned sour.\textsuperscript{227}

The connections between host and guest at the feast generally, and those created through the \textit{sotilte} underscore the interactive nature of the feast. Interactivity, Normore further contends, is a “banqueting practice” that renders clearly “[t]he permeability of the boundary between spectacle and spectator.”\textsuperscript{228} What’s more, the interactivity that occurs within the feast hall “extends beyond it as well, offering possibilities for both reflection and indoctrination in nearly every sphere of elite life.”\textsuperscript{229} When the \textit{sotilte} turns dangerous, the easy permeability of the boundaries between spectacle and spectator only increase the potential for lasting trouble, and Richard’s violent, bloody spectacle in the banquet hall at Almayn wreaks lasting havoc at the court.

\textbf{Unwitting Cannibalism and Alimentary Transformation}

Before the most troubling feast of \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, there is an interlude of unwitting cannibalism that inspires his macabre \textit{sotilte}.\textsuperscript{230} While crusading, Richard finds himself in crisis:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{227} Kjær, “Food,” 84-85.
\textsuperscript{228} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 46.
\textsuperscript{229} Normore \textit{Feast}, 46.
\textsuperscript{230} Aaron Hostetter makes excellent points about the anachronism of applying “cannibalism” to medieval texts: “The word ‘cannibal’ is technically anachronistic to medieval texts, as it originates in English in 1553, derived from a slanderous appellation of the Carib Indians encountered by Columbus (\textit{OED}). A more correct term would be ‘anthropophagite.’ Though the two words are used more or less synonymously throughout this book, there is a distinction usually understood between them: ‘anthropophagism’ is the act of eating human flesh, while ‘cannibalism’ often implies a moral judgment or a political condemnation of a people so labelled.” Like Hostetter, I use the terms synonymously in this chapter. See Hostetter, \textit{Political Appetites}, 32.
\end{flushright}
he wastes away for lack of pork, so his knights scheme to serve him Saracen flesh as if it were pork. Most texts that depict anthropophagy present the act as something inhuman and Othering, like *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* or the Old English *Wonders of the East,* and, as Hostetter describes, a “continuing practice elsewhere” but neither here nor now. Hostetter adds that typical depictions of cannibalism treat it as a mythology that “represses history” as a practice “impossibly distant, fantastically barbaric” that starkly contrasts “a culture’s sanitized self-image of progress and enlightenment.” Anthropologist William Arens similarly situates anthropophagy as a distant, mythological practice: “Cannibalism becomes a feature of the faraway or foregone, which is much the same thing. In the way the the dimensions of time and space are interpreted, ‘they,’ in the form of distant cannibals, are reflections of us as we once were.” Yet *Richard Coer de Lyon* makes eating people—specifically eating Saracens—a decidedly English activity very much in the near-past of just a few centuries or so prior to the Middle English version of this popular romance. It would be laughable for its absurdity were it not for how ambivalently the narrator treats this anthropophagic solution.

McDonald suggests that modern readers ought not to be affronted “by the narrative’s endorsement of Richard’s barbarity,” and that his plan for “anthropophagic annihilation (the total

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consumption of a people)’ is not wholly illogical: “All eaten up, the threat of the infidel is eradicated...neither the narrator nor Richard’s fellow crusaders ever doubt the efficacy or appropriateness of the anthrophagic solution. Eating people makes an awful lot of pragmatic sense.”

Because of its restorative properties, cannibalism is cast as entirely normal in this romance, though it remains shocking and despicable to the enemy. McDonald insists “on the logical centrality of Richard’s repeated anthropophagy,” not so much as a political tool (as Geraldine Heng argues) but as a form of “narrative logic” or “the poetic mechanism” that not only restores the king but ultimately demands repeated cannibalism.

Food, “or in its absence, hunger,” is peppered throughout Richard Coer de Lyon. What’s more, the foundational event of the composite romance is based in a form of sacral anthropophagy: the theophany of the Eucharist. Cassiodorien, Richard’s mother, cannot bear the sight of the Eucharist and does everything in her power to avoid the consecrated host, such that she even flees from a window, never to be seen again. McDonald points out that at the time of Richard Coer de Lyon’s popularity, “Catholic doctrine, confirmed in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, teaches that the eucharist is truly the flesh and blood of Christ (corpus verum).” Cassiodorien wrongly flees the accepted—theologically required—anthropophagy and is never heard of again. Her son Richard, however, wrongly embraces a typically unacceptable form of cannibalism and situates it under the guise of crusader necessity. He aims to rehabilitate literal cannibalism into a Christian

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236 McDonald, “Eating,” 129.


rite. Geraldine Heng similarly explores the relationship between food, the known and unknown, and power:

In medieval culture, eating has political as well as religious valence, as amply demonstrated in the feasts hosted by the great lords of medieval history and literature, in which the display and conspicuous consumption of food function to mark the social status, economic position, and political or military power of he who provisions and he who eats. That eating is an exercise in power is visible even in sacramental communion—a cannibalism that guarantees the acquisition of divine power and status through union with godhead.\(^{239}\)

There is power in what one chooses to—and not to—eat. There is truth in what the oft-quoted Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin writes, “Tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are.”\(^{240}\) Albala makes a similar observation: “You become what you eat. Just as you can acquire a taste for something, and aliment can be so thoroughly absorbed into the system that it alters the human fabric.”\(^{241}\) Albala speaks of the medicinal concept of the humors, yet the connection to Brillat-Savarin’s broader aphorism is clear: food and alimentary habits function as denotations of class and socioeconomic status—in the sense of Bourdieu’s habitus—culture, theological concerns, pragmatic need, and a host of other factors relating to the formation and presentation of identity. Food undoubtedly functions with such logic in Richard Coer de Lyon.

McDonald’s essay underscores the “alimentary logic” that drives Richard Coer de Lyon, asserting that it is a “poetic mechanism that initiates and sustains Richard” in ways that are anything but absurd.\(^{242}\) While most of McDonald’s essay is a refreshing textual analysis of the

\(^{239}\) Heng, Empire, 30-31.

\(^{240}\) Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, The Physiology of Taste, translated Anne Drayton (New York: Penguin, 1970), 13. The aphorism also often appears in English as “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”

\(^{241}\) Albala, Eating Right, 51.

\(^{242}\) McDonald, “Eating,” 129.
Middle English romance and not an attempt to recover the historical Richard I, McDonald’s reading is short-sighted. She asserts, many times, that Richard’s cannibalism is not absurd; however, the notion that a single man or but a few knights could consume every last practitioner of Islam is absurd. The romance only depicts King Richard I eating Saracens, and it is Richard himself who delivers the threat to not stop consuming Saracens, “Til they be eeten, everylkon.”\textsuperscript{243} Granted, the king switches between first person singular and plural pronouns in this address, implicating his subjects in the act of consumption, but we never see them partake. I stress this point because \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon} is absurd—the “alimentary logic” of consuming an entire people out of existence is unreasonable and excessive, especially when one mouth is doing the work. The romance neither needs to align with historical fact, as McDonald does rightly show, nor does it need to be logically sound. I do agree that the romance is driven by an “alimentary logic,” as illogical as it may be if taken to its extremes. The romance’s absurdity is what makes Richard’s confident, successful use of the \textit{sotilte} so profoundly unsettling.

Most of this romance takes Richard’s perspective, yet while the king is incapacitated, the narrator shifts focus to a clever old knight who suggests that they serve up “a Sarezyn, yonge and fat”\textsuperscript{244} cooked in the manner of pork to their ailing monarch. The remedy is successful, and the king is so delighted by the discovery that “Sarezynys flesch [is] thus good” that he is inspired to recreate this \textit{sotilte} in earnest at an actual feast.\textsuperscript{245} This scene is important for two key reasons: not only do we glimpse the English knightly community acting upon their own volition—with

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[243] \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, line 3562.
\item[244] \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, line 2088.
\item[245] \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, line 3217.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the particular intent of tricking their cunning king, but we also are afforded the chance to see the
creation of a sotilte behind the scenes. Such information is usually relegated to cookery manuals
and is largely separate from the serving forth of the artifice.

This group of crusader knights fears that their king will die in a foreign land not from battle
but from hunger: in this unkind, faraway land, the “mete and drynk that is nought sete / To hys
body that he there fonde, / As he dede here in Yngelonde,” leaving Richard ailing.246 For him
food “hadde…no savour;” only “after pork he was alongyd.”247 His men search for any purveyor
of swine, only to come up empty-handed and endangered: they “scholde be hongyd” if caught
trying to procure such meat.248 This community is driven not by the love of their lord or a mutual
respect and care that more typically characterizes Arthurian romance; rather, they have been so
frequently terrorized by Richard earlier in his reign that they seem to function by conformity and
shared hatred of the enemy more than anything else.249 Marcel Elias notes Richard’s “disturbing
temperament” and “disturbing brutality” as character traits that bring about the joint emotions of
fear and distress in his subjects and adversaries.250 This scene shows less fear but does express
their distress in their prayers to restore Richard’s health. The narrator describes the somber

246 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3046-48.

247 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3069, 3071.

248 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 3072.

249 Althoff notes that terror functioned as a means of establishing good rule: “It was undoubtedly
both known and understood in the Middle Ages that rulership had to be respected and feared in
order to be effective. Rulership, according to this view, also required terror, that is compulsion
and fear, in order to enforce orders and instructions.” See Gerd Althoff, “Ira Regis: Prolegomena
to a History of Royal Anger,” in Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle

knights while Richard is indisposed: “Sory were the folk Englysch / For here lorde laye in grete anguysch,” and they pray for his recovery “Be nyght and day with good entent.”251 They feel bad for him, on account of his own physical anguish, and supplicate in prayer. The romance tends to vary wildly from excessive violence to overt piety, and this rapid shift from martial deeds to spiritual practice is fairly typical for Richard Coer de Lyon. The crusading knightly community, then, is one versed in practicing very different forms of behavior, and medieval historian Celia M. Lewis situates fourteenth-century literary illustrations of crusader knights alongside contemporary personal accounts from retired crusaders, coming to the conclusion that violence hangs in delicate balance with other issues of faith. Lewis notes that for crusaders, “a commitment to their faith…justifies—and perhaps even necessitates—violence and murder,” and that such action “might be necessary for a greater good, or at the very least necessary for preservation of the faith.”252 Through this framework, “the use of force in spiritual (or earthly) conquest became tolerable.”253 This is a community steeped in violence and devoted to their unpredictability violent king and the crusader ethos. Their solution to make Richard “fresch and hayl” is likewise violent, though it juxtaposes this violence with medicinal and courtly elements, as well, further indicating their resourcefulness and ability to draw upon restoring social practices to revive the king.254

251 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3057, 3063.


254 Food as a restorative tool dependent on one’s station appears elsewhere in medieval literature, such as in Chrétien de Troyes’s Yvain, ou le Chevalier au Lion when Yvain begins to emerge from madness and remember himself upon consuming not the coarse bread to which the hermit is accustomed, but fine white bread in accordance with his station. Havelock the Dane also
An old knight offers a remedy for Richard’s ailment, and he privately offers the steward a cannibalism recipe in the midst of a romance, a sly human substitute for pork:

Takes a Sarezyn, yonge and fat;  
In haste that the thef be slayn,  
Openyd, and hys hyde of flayn,  
And soden fun hastyly,  
With powdyr and with spysonry,  
And with saffron of good colour.\(^{255}\)

Not only does the old knight offer very specific butchering instructions to the steward, he also indicates that the steward is to apply spice and powder as he sees fit, only specifying the addition of good saffron. In the recipes collected in *Le Menagier de Paris*, saffron is treated as a coloring agent, not an ingredient prized for its delicate, floral flavor. For example, variations of the phrase “et saffran pour donner couleur” appears in the recipes frequently.\(^{256}\) The spices that the romance lists are likewise medicinal: “the word *spice* itself refers not to condiments, but to ‘a medicine, a remedy; a concoction or potion,’” as well as a food.\(^{257}\) Especially because diet played an enormous role in medieval concepts of health, a deliberately spiced dish “metaphorizes divine healing in a particularly material, embodied fashion.”\(^{258}\) The appropriately spiced meat sustains the king.

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illustrates the restorative power of foods in accordance to one’s station, wherein the eponymous hero can only be sated by foods worthy of a royal feast.

\(^{255}\) *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3088-3093.


\(^{258}\) Bishop, *Words*, 3.
The restorative aspects of this culinary marvel have historical precedent, as medieval literary scholar Louise M. Bishop illustrates in her exploration of the “intersections between medieval reading and healing evident in Middle English textual culture.” Bishop’s connections explain why calling the Saracen flesh “pork” heals Richard: calling it pork makes it so. The semiotic relationship between word and material is nearly magical in this romance, and in this first instance of anthropophagy, the word heals. Materiality, word, and deed coalesce as markers of power for Richard in this romance, but the romance disallows the full range of potential effects that these categories might (and perhaps should) have on the characters. Even though the “pork” heals, it is still human flesh. The narrative offers little space to explore what may come of these acts. There is likewise precious little attention to the knights’ feelings about Richard’s cannibalism, with the focus instead falling on their desperation to save their king. Any adverse feelings they might have are completely obscured by this desperation.

Medieval European recipes follow typical formulae: “each one sets out...a method of producing, through the transformation of animal- or vegetable-based ingredients, an edible article defined by its ‘goodness’ in general as well as by its shape, color, and flavor (or flavors).” The old knight’s orders are similar: after explaining how Saracen flesh will act as a cure-all, he tells the steward to prepare the body to make this taboo dish appear expected and even mundane to the king. It is perhaps no surprise that Galen notes that pork is most like human flesh: “One can observe the similarity of the flesh of pigs to that of man from the fact that, as

259 Bishop, Words, xi.

regards both taste and smell, some people who have eaten it had no suspicion that human flesh had been eaten as pork. From time to time this has been found to have occurred with rascally innkeepers and others.”

Unfortunately the knight does not specify how the steward is to cook this young Saracen, though he does mention that Richard will be whole once more after “soupyd of the broweys a sope,” and the narrator later describes that a carver attends Richard at this repast as the king rapidly “eet the flesch and gnew the bones.”

When desperate to bring Richard back to health, the knights act rapidly and fearlessly. As Richard comes “Out of agu,” the anxieties of his subordinates begin to mount further, but not before they are able to step aside and quietly laugh at Richard’s unwitting cannibalism: as the king eats voraciously, the knights “turnyd away and lowgh.” This laughter is a rare illustration of the orchestrators and artificers of a sotilte (or in this case, as it is not a feast, a sotilte-adjacent dish) being spectator to another consuming their ruse. They dare not break the spell and laugh openly, for the thought of pork has rendered Richard “hool and sounde,” and they fear Richard’s wrath were he to discover the truth. Upon being ordered to serve up the roasted head that brought Richard sustenance and health, the cook throws himself to his knees and cries, “Loo, here be the head, my lord, mercy!” The cook fears that he will bear the brunt of Richard’s anger, but the king is astounded and delighted: he “gan to lawghe as he were wood” because he

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262 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3099, 3111.

263 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 3114.

264 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 3118.

265 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 3210.
is shocked that “Sarezynys flesch [is] thus good, / And never erst I noghte wyste?” Following this revelation, the narrator does not describe how the knights react to Richard’s delight.

Richard’s wonder and excitement only solidifies their power. Rather than recoil in disgust, Richard revels in the newfound deeply pragmatic form of psychological warfare and survival: cannibalism. He is nourished bodily and emotionally. His immediate delight stems from the realization that hunger is no longer an issue: “Schole we nevere dye for defawte,” for they might “Slee Sarezynys, … / Sethen and roste hem and doo hem baken.”

Beyond the pragmatic, however, Richard is gleeful at having discovered a means of evoking terror in his enemy by way of his new taste for cannibalism. As I show in the next section, a simple dish, Richard proves, carries great power.

**Unyielding Horrors and Unsavory Feelings of the Macabre Sotilte**

In the final feast of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Richard carefully and rapidly subverts expectation at the diplomatic feast, illustrating the most powerfully manipulative and destructive *sotilte* of the popular romance. Drawing from his newfound taste for Saracen flesh and his almost uncanny, masterful abilities at affectation, Richard’s banquet becomes nightmarish for his guests. Richard’s feigned feelings and manic disposition situated alongside established expectations of kingly behavior and affective performance, as this feast scene most clearly reveals Richard’s manipulative strategy. His “unstable signification” towards the Saracen diplomats as one facet of his unnerving display, and these well-planned violent schemes involving the juxtaposition of

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266 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3216-3217.

267 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3219-3222.

pleasure and pain at the feast reveal another valance of Richard’s habitual disparity between word and deed. Richard invites the Saracen diplomats to a feast to negotiate the exchange of prisoners, only to serve them their imprisoned kinsmen as a macabre *sotilte*, and this dissemblance appears in Richard’s behavior prior to and during the cannibalism *sotilte*, and this disjuncture manipulates the collective emotion of the Saracen envoy, a process wherein a group collectively evaluates an event and appraises it similarly, recognizing their relational emotional experience in the event. Ultimately I argue that both Richard and the Saracen envoy experience disgust, though directed and experienced in vastly different manners, and that the macabre *sotilte* that Richard serves to his guests causes traumatic disgust and horror that they are unable to escape, even after fleeing the banquet.

Upon greeting the Saracen messengers and cheerfully, if not haughtily, deflecting their offer of treasure in exchange for prisoners, Richard tells them,

> To hys treasure have I no nede;  
> But, for my love, I yow bede  
> To mete with me that ye dwelle,  
> And afterward I schal yow telle,  
> Thorwgh counsayl, I schal yow answere  
> What bode ye schal youre lord bere.\(^{270}\)

Richard’s words of love and welcome are, at this point in the narrative, suspect. Love, particularly the kind of sublime love that Jaeger contends imbued courtly spaces and would be directed towards kings is a “sensibility” of medieval courtly conduct.\(^{271}\) To express love and to

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\(^{269}\) Thonhauser, “Towards a Taxonomy,” 31.

\(^{270}\) *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3403-3408.

\(^{271}\) Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 1. Oddly enough, the love between historical Richard I and Philip August of France was, in part, the inspiration for C. Stephen Jaeger to pen *Ennobling Love*, although that Richard is not the figure of this popular romance.
be loved are commonplace of the court, particularly directed towards a sovereign. Jaeger further explains that such display is “not just self-serving flattery or empty good manners,” but “a recognition of royal charisma, or virtue, or divinity.” Jaeger adds that the performance of love “is public behavior, practiced equally by greats and by hypocrites,” and that

…in order to have weight and meaning, the gesture must be grounded in experienced emotion…If you ‘perform’ love without feeling it, if you claim courage without possessing it, it reverses the prestige-giving effect, shows the act as hollow, the actor as hypocritical. Conversely, if you perform the gestures and speak the words of love badly, crudely, awkwardly, the force of the gesture evaporates.

At the same time, Jaeger elsewhere acknowledges the dangers of affectation:

It is a truism of court life that all public acts and words are a mask; to reveal one’s true sentiments and intentions is the act of a naive fool. Life is divided at two levels, and the man who cannot maintain this double life has no place at court. Cunning under these circumstances could be almost a positive quality, at any rate an ambivalent one.

The love that Richard claims to bear for the Saracen envoy is a lie, though so, too, might be the promise of everlasting friendship that Saladin extends to Richard through the diplomats: he “wole be thy frend ever more” if only Richard releases their kinsmen. But the “love” that Richard purports to feel as he invites them to dinner worse than an empty phrase: he loves them for what they represent to him—a newfound source of sustenance, and he loves that he can terrorize them and instill inescapable trauma. Masking his true intent as love only further eases uncertainties that the Saracen envoy might harbor upon coming into this space, and the deliberate use of love furthermore softens the blow of Richard’s refusal of their initial offer, suggesting that

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272 Jaeger, Ennobling, 3.

273 Jaeger, Ennobling, 19.

274 Jaeger, Origins of Courtliness, 62.

275 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 3384.
some sort of normal negotiation framework will follow. They are, of course, wrong in this assumption.

As William Ian Miller explains, “it is normal appearances that can be the most untrustworthy, the most threatening, for it is they that prompt the complacency that makes you ripe for betrayal,” and “[g]uerrilla warfare, booby traps, the big con, are all meant to make you pay for trusting appearances…It is as if so much of life is waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

Normore likewise describes the anxieties regarding affectation and dissemblance, as well as the power that such actions might confer onto actors:

Feigning and dissimilation were sometimes lauded if they helped achieve positive ends. Yet falsity was also believed to undermine governance, love, and devotion alike. In using their outward appearance to mislead, bad-faith actors raised the specter of a breakdown in the trust required to unite people toward common goals.

Richard is adept at this kind of cunning his “wurdys mylde” mask the horror that awaits, though he has little regard for the social instability that such “bad-faith actors” might foment.

Richard, an “emphatically fierce king” who seems “unequivocally committed to the chivalric ideals of prowess, courage, and honor” acts ever to improve his status in these areas, and throughout the romance gives thanks to God for inspiring his deeds and strengthening his resolve. Yet Coote argues that in committing this atrocity (even towards the enemy), Richard “is breaking, even mocking, the chivalric code of hospitality, especially when applied to the

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277 Normore, A Feast, 91.

278 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 3397.

sanctity of communal meals,” and his actions moreover pervert “the rules of war concerning the protection and conduct of ambassadorial exchanges.”280 At the same time, Elias contends that Richard’s commitment to these ideals “generates an intense preoccupation over his fame and reputation, since honor could be rapidly lost through cowardice and unavenged injury.”281 What’s more, medievalist Leo D. Lefebure points towards the enduring, legitimized violence of the crusades: “The sacralization of religious violence at the medieval court has its roots in the complex and conflicting relationships that have connected and divided the three Abrahamic traditions from the beginning.”282 Despite officially rejecting excessive attacks, all three Abrahamic traditions have violated “best moral principles and invoked God’s will as support for indiscriminate violence.”283

Anxieties about preeminence drives Richard’s behavior throughout this popular romance. Any time Richard worries that his prowess might be questioned or threatened, he reacts with rage and frequently retaliates with performative, subversive consumption. This performance of anger illustrates the political dimensions and power of anger that White explores. White contends that medieval leaders are consistently adept at deploying certain kinds of affective displays in order to maintain and manipulate control.284 When deployed by a ruler, “a display of anger” is more


political act than emotional response, and it is a calculated, reactive affective expression. What is different about Richard’s “anger” is that it is more a whole cloth disgust at the existence of the Saracens. Literature offers a freer depiction of the uses of royal emotional expression, and Richard Coer de Lyon is particularly suited for such exploration because of its tendency to operate in a fantasy space, even while it purports to be historical. Althoff distinguishes between illustrations of royal anger in the historical record and literature. In the case of the former, he contends that depictions of a ruthless and merciless king are rare; however, in the case of the latter, the “broader spectrum of the possible expressions of anger” are more freely illustrated. Unlike the assumption that anger or any strong feeling is “a physiologically generated response to external stimuli that medieval culture did not adequately repress,” calculated anger is “distinguishable from…battle rage.”

White casts political anger as a correlative event: “To display anger about an action publicly is to construe the action as an injury, as a wrongful act causing harm, damage, or loss, as an offense against a person’s honor. So one has a right to get angry and to do what angry people can and should do.” Richard consistently casts himself as the wronged party, thereby providing calls them—are used deliberately and are not uncontrolled expressions. Like many scholars of affect and emotional history, White pushes back against Norbert Elias’s and John Huizinga’s figuration of the hydraulic model of emotional expression.

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285 White, “Politics,” 140.


287 White, “Politics,” 146.

288 White, “Politics,” 140.
justification for his excessive actions, but the short narrative sequence of the macabre feast illustrates the final stage of what White outlines as the typical development of emotional reaction:

Anger and other emotions are thus located routinely in similar narrative sequences. These scripts proceed from perceived injury to shame/anger/grief to enmity/loathing/hostility and finally to angry revenge; meanwhile, the emotions of people on the other side of the dispute follow a different but related trajectory.²⁸⁹

Richard seeks revenge for a perceived wrong and does so by deliberately stages what appears to be an “unrestrained, unrepressed force” suggesting his “political irrationality,”²⁹⁰ all of which actually serve to cement his power over the Saracen diplomats and his own English subjects.

Althoff builds upon the rulership ideology put forth by the Mirrors of Princes, arguing that “rulership had to be respected and feared in order to be effective.”²⁹¹ From this vantage, strong rulership “also required terror, that is, compulsion and fear, in order to enforce orders and instructions.”²⁹² The depiction of Richard and his retinue in Richard Coer de Lyon follow this terror-inflected rulership. His carver ensures that he cuts Richard’s food just so and that he makes no mistake for fear of incurring his king’s wrath: “The styward took ryght good yeme / To serve Kyng Richard to queme, / Les after mete hym tydde harm.”²⁹³ It is not the joy of serving one’s lord; rather, it is the fear of earning punishment from one’s lord that drives Richard’s retinue to behave as he wishes. Much like the knowing, covert, anxious laughter that Richard’s

²⁸⁹ White, “Politics,” 142.
²⁹⁰ White, “Politics,” 145.
²⁹³ Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3455-3457.
men share at his expense, his carver is driven by anxiety and the fear of making a deadly mistake. Jaeger discusses this sort of connection between terror and love: “There is an order of experience in which human charisma produces a powerful, obsessive, shattering, transforming emotional response. One aspect of this experience, one among many, is the element of terror transmuted. The person with your life in his hands spares you; this transforms terror into love.”

Richard’s deep concern with his honor and preeminence dictates the ways that Richard interacts with his subjects, particularly how he expects their love and allegiance. To Richard, love is dangerous, and it flips easily into terror. The romance illustrates this ease repeatedly, and Richard’s many disguises at the joust preceding his foray into the Crusades exemplifies this volatile affect. Richard tests his knights “As a knyght aventurous” on the jousting field, fierce and crafty, and afterwards asks them,

Tel me the sothe, I yow prey,  
Of these joustes, paramours,  
What knyght was he that rod best cours?

Richard makes the joust and his three disguises seem like an elaborate test to discern his doughtiest knights—and this is true, but there is more—yet Richard’s final question also reveals his deep preoccupation with his honor. Richard knows he dominated the field, and he knows which of his knights performed well, for met them in combat. However, Richard wants to hear them speak of his prowess, his might, and their awe at his performance. Richard delights in the knights’ lengthy descriptions of their encounters, finally laughing while he “sat fol style.”

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295 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 271.

296 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 452-454.

297 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 584.
Because Richard wins, he is happy—and the opposite would prove true, as he exhibits shortly thereafter at Almayn.

Richard terrorizes then showers his knights with rewards—the chance to accompany him, his love, and their lives spared. Jaeger makes the connection between the razor-thin margin of love and terror and Rainer Maria Rilke’s first Duino Elegy explicit, noting that “we admire him [the king] so because of his nonchalant refusal to destroy us.”

> For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror which we are barely able to endure and are awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us.

Rilke writes,

Though written centuries after Richard Coer de Lyon and in a completely different context, Rilke’s elegy captures the sentiment that Richard’s kingship style inspires in the emotional communities of this Middle English Romance. The feast—ideally a beautiful, resplendent space that even in the midst of war should recall such luxury—becomes a space of terror for the Saracen diplomats. As I outline above, Saladin’s emphasis on the perceived English penchant for riches prepares his men for a sumptuous, materialistic English king, and any expectations of beauty that they brought to the table are swiftly overturned.

Elements of Richard’s feast follow the typical order of operations, in that diners are signaled to join the feast by a trumpet calling “a laver,” and are brought into the space Richard sits at a high dais, and they are “set at a syde-table.” The narrator notes “To hem he was cumpanyable,” which can be interpreted in one of two ways: either Richard is companionable to

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298 Jaeger, Ennobling, 21.


300 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3441, 3446.
his guests, or he seems so to them.\footnote{Richard Coer de Lyon, line 3445.} In light of my prior discussion about dissembling affectation, only the latter is surely true, yet the goodwill that Richard feigns to his “frendes” feels true to those who don’t quite know to expect otherwise. Regardless of whatever friendliness Richard displays, the guests immediately realize something is amiss:

Salt was set on, but no bred,
Ne watyr, ne wyn, whyt ne red.
The Sarazynes eaten and gynne to stare,
And thoughten, “Allas, hou schal we fare?”\footnote{Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3446-50.}

The disparity between appearing companionable and actually providing his guests with the accoutrements of the feast is a warning to the guests, and the narrative provides a rare glimpse of interiority of this community as they wonder to themselves about their safety. Whatever feast elements initially seemed normal are almost immediately derailed.

Aspects of Richard’s sotilte fall within the bounds of the typical, in that it is a deliberately confounding experience. Such surprise is built into the fabric of the feast, and both spectator and spectacle become imbricated in the sotilte or entremet. Normore explains this overlap further, noting that both categorically and in individual practice,

entremets complicate the separation between media and makers alike. Just as the term can refer equally to objects, performances, and foods, so too might any single entremet blur boundaries that have since come to see impossible. Visually complex objects such as coqz heaumez or fire-breathing boar were at once additive sculptures and delicious roasts. Similarly, the various uses of ymage and personnage indicate the interchangeability of human and sculpted actors.\footnote{Normore, A Feast, 42.}

By wondering, “Allas, hou schal we fare?”\footnote{Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3446-3450.} the Saracen envoy begins to sense the porosity
between spectator and spectator in a European feasting context, but unlike Normore’s rich tapestry of *entremet* options that might soon appear before guests, the Saracen envoy does not enjoy such delight and wonder, nor does this romance depiction of the feast follow historical convention. Normore continues, insisting that:

> While true cannibalism was never considered, the frequent use of human forms as vessels created a tension between human servers and serving vessels, as well as between the object of desire and eroticized object. Indeed, many entremets relied on the possibilities for transformation and play opened up by the mixed media of the genre as a whole.  

Even the anxieties aroused by such devices, Normore argues, would be sources of excitement. In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the cannibalism is real, and the tension rests not between human servers and serving vessels; rather, the tension lies between human guests and human dishes, with a host who hungers for more.

Beyond Normore’s connection between the servers and the vessels bearing human forms as being cannibalism-adjacency, the manuscript record includes long history of a *sotilte* not dissimilar to Richard’s—though the historical Turk’s Head *sotilte* is much more whimsical and much less anthropophagic. The *Diuersa Cibaria* (ca. 1300) includes a dish called “Test de Turt,” which consists of sheet pastry filled with rabbit, fowl, and honeyed dates, accompanied by new cheese, spiced liberally with cloves, and served up with hair in the women’s style (likely a description of a head wrap such as a turban) and the visage of a man:

> Test de Turt. Foille de paste bon sarrays & iplaunted þrin conynges & volatils, dates

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305 Normore, *A Feast*, 42.


307 “Test de Turt” appears in in three known MS, two English and one Anglo-Norman (125):

1. English: BL, MS Additional 46919, fol. 20v (before 1333)
2. English: BL, Cotton Julius D. viii, fol. 105v (c. 1450)
3. Anglo-Norman, BL, MS Royal 12 C. xii, folk. 12v (c. 1320-40)
ywaschen & isouced in hony, chese neowe icoruen þryn; clouwes, qiubebes, sucre about. Solþen on legge of fassyng of fustigare gret plente, þe colouru of þe farsure red, ʒolou, & grene. Þat hed schal beon blake addressed oþe manere of hier of wymmon on an blake dische, & a monnes visage abouen.\textsuperscript{308}

Hieatt later presented at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, describing this \textit{sotilte} that calls for a pastry case filled with rabbits, poultry, dates, honey, cheese, and spices, topped with sugar, and—the crowning touch: a generous layer of ground pistachio nuts; the color of the ground nuts red, yellow, and green. The head (of hair) should be black, arranged to resemble the hair of a woman, in a black bowl, with the face of a man set on top.\textsuperscript{309}

Hieatt describes “Teste de Turke” or “Turk’s Head” as “one of the most startling subtleties to be found in any early collection,”\textsuperscript{310} and notes the different versions that appear for creating this masterpiece, with one meat-day recipe (there is a fish-day option) containing:

- pork and chicken, ground with spices, saffron, eggs, bread, and almonds, cooked in a pig’s stomach; when this case is removed, the meat is to be basted with an egg yolk mixture, and presumably further roasted until the glaze has set. This ‘gilded’ giant sausage might indeed resemble a head.\textsuperscript{311}

Hieatt mentions Charles Perry’s translation of a hispano-Arabic recipe called “Ras maimun” or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{308}\textit{Diuersa Cibaria in Curye on Inglyshe}, edited by Constance Hieatt and S. Butler, EETS s.s. 8 (London, 1985), 48.
\item \textsuperscript{309}Constance Hieatt, “How Arabic Traditions Travelled to England.” \textit{Food on the Move: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery}, 1996. Edited by Harlan Walker. Devon: Prospect Books, 1997. 120-126, 122. There are many recipes in early English and Italian cookery books that correlate directly to recipes in cookbooks from Baghdad. Hieatt explains, “some of the most distinctively ‘English’ medieval culinary recipes have their strongest affinities which come from the Arabic areas to the east—usually, apparently, through Italy” (123). In particular, there’s a recipe for boiled, then fried, spinach that has a similar version in French, but the English and Italian versions are almost identical to that which appears in the twelfth-century \textit{Baghdad Cookery Book}. There’s also a recipe for meatballs masquerading as orange (and there’s a French version that’s meatballs as little apples) that is very close to the Arabic versions (more so than any extant French version). Food and artifice go hand in hand in many cultures.
\item \textsuperscript{310}Hieatt, “How Arabic,” 122.
\item \textsuperscript{311}Hieatt, “How Arabic,” 122.
\end{itemize}
“monkey’s head.” It’s much like the Turk’s head recipes in English, and it seems like this recipe first appeared as “Monk’s head,” with monk’s cowls folding and flowing similarly to a turban.\(^{312}\) The “Test de Turt” would be recognizable to an English audience encountering Richard’s cannibalism. McDonald connects Richard’s macabre \textit{sotilte} to “Test de Turt,” as well, arguing that it illustrates a way of bringing “exotic levity” to the table, “evidence of the medieval penchant for illusion, or counterfeit, food: dishes that surprise or entertain by the way in which they counter, either in composition or appearance, culinary and/or gustatory expectations.”\(^{313}\) The point, per McDonald, is not for diners to recall “Turks I have eaten.”\(^{314}\) Yet for Richard, I argue, that is precisely the case.

As before, the readers are in on the cannibalism ruse, but this time Richard’s glee in describing the preparation of the main course adds another affective layer to the mix. Richard says he’ll eat a head “As it were a tendyr chyke, / To se hou the othere wyl lyke,”\(^{315}\) illustrating his care and concern with the ways he is able to manipulate his guests. Richard privately instructs a knight to go to the prison and choose the Saracens of greatest renown,

\begin{verbatim}
Pryvely slee hem therynne;  
And ar the hedes off thou smyte,  
Looke every mannys name thou wryte,  
Upon a scrowe of parchemyn.    
And bere the hedes to the kechyn,  
And in a cawdroun thou hem caste,  
And bydde the cook sethe hem faste.  
And loke that he the her off stryppe  
Of hed, of berd, and eke of lyppe.
\end{verbatim}

\(^{312}\) Hieatt, “How Arabic,” 123.

\(^{313}\) McDonald, “Eating,” 125.

\(^{314}\) McDonald, “Eating,” 125.

\(^{315}\) \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, lines 3537-3558.
Whenne we scholde sytte and eete,  
Loke that ye nought forgete  
To serve hem herewith in this manere:  
Lay every hed on a platere;  
Bryng it hoot forth al in thyn hand,  
Upward hys vys, the teeth grennand  
And loke that they be nought rowe.  
Hys name taste above hys browe,  
What he hyghte and of what kyn born.\textsuperscript{316}

Richard expresses anxiety about th is dish being kept secret from his guests, pulling the knights away privately, stressing “pryvely” twice while telling him to go to the prison and execute the choice prisoners. Unlike the prior cannibalism scene when the nameless “old knight” creates a remedy for Richard’s ailment, we do not see specific spices and powders to be used in the preparation of the Saracen heads, nor do we see any particular concern for cooking method beyond cast them in a cauldron and see to it that they’re not raw. Richard is far less concerned with quality and flavor for this \textit{sotilte}; instead, spectacle is the primary purpose. He insists that the steward serve him properly and provides very specific details about how the heads shall be placed on the platters, along with the added spectacle of a scroll bearing the names and kinship of the deceased.

The \textit{sotilte} is served forth accompanied by the expected pomp of “pypes and trumpes and tabours,” with Richard receiving one head himself and each pair of the Saracen diplomats being served a head on a platter, and Richard watches them intently, calculating their response and his next move before speaking to them “With wrathful semblaunt and eye sterne”:

“For my love bes alle glad,  
And looks ye be weel at eese!  
Why kerve ye nought off youre mese,  
And eetes faste as I doo?

\textsuperscript{316} \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, lines 3413-3433.
Tell me why ye louren soo?”317

The Saracens quake in fear, refuse to look at Richard, and would rather “In the erthe they wolde have crope” than speak to Richard.318 He then serves forth a spectacular feast for the envoy, “Men broughten bred, withouten bost, / Venysoun, cranes, and good rost, / Pyment, clarré, and drynkes lythe,” though their appetite is nonexistent.319

The Saracen emotional community is not a flat emotional community, despite Richard’s best efforts to reduce them to such by placing them apart, in one group: “set a syde-table / Salt was set on, but no bred, / Ne watyr, ne wyn, whyt ne red,”320 at the feast, interacting with them only as a collective unit until the very end of the scene. They are illustrated as a vibrant community attuned to one another’s affective states, and they value community and family and are poised to experience and emote freely. Prior to sending the envoy, Saladin expresses care and concern for the diplomats to successfully negotiate with Richard to “delyvere oure chyldren oute” from captivity so “That oure chyldren may come hom hayl.”321 There’s a tenderness to Saladin’s worry, and the envoy’s later plea with Richard to let them return home focuses on their familial and social ties. Throughout this feast scene, the narrator emphasizes their shared discomfort, and their wonder, “Allas, hou schal we fare?” attests to their shared values and concerns.322

317 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3488-3494.
318 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 3497.
319 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3503-3505.
320 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3446-3448.
321 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3368, 3371.
322 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 3450.
Unlike the English emotional community, dominated and driven by Richard, the Saracen emotional community is one that expresses collective emotion. The narrator shows speaking, thinking, and reacting in a collective manner with a “first person plural awareness” that this is their shared emotion.\(^{323}\) The older diplomat singled out by King Richard becomes the spokesman for the group, and his phrasing to Saladin further underscores the shared affect between the whole group: “Us thoughte oure herte barst ryght insundyr!”\(^{324}\) Even upon recounting the grisly events to the Saracen court, Saladin takes part in their “grame,” feeling sorrow and pain with all. The Saracen diplomats cry and quake with fear as one,\(^{325}\) they “had all grame,”\(^{326}\) and they collectively sigh heavily with grief as their hues change color (presumably in the same manner).\(^{327}\)

Richard’s primary point of view further asserts his narrative dominance in the romance. The English king watches the Saracen diplomats watch him, and the narrative focalizes through him:

The Sarezynes wended he hadde be wood.
Every man sat stylle and pokyd the othir;
They sayden, “This is the develys brothir
That sles oure men and thus hem eetes!”\(^{328}\)

Initially, the narrator sees through Richard’s eyes and hear through Richard’s ears. And the

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\(^{323}\) Thonhauser, “Towards a Taxonomy,” 31.

\(^{324}\) *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 3605.

\(^{325}\) *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3466-3468.

\(^{326}\) *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 3464.

\(^{327}\) *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3470-3471. This final observation comes from Richard’s perspective, where he watches the diplomats closely as he gnaws heartily on the boiled head. He sees them as all reacting in the same manner.

\(^{328}\) *Richard Coer de Lyon*, lines 3482-3485.
Saracen envoy is at once a group of spectators beholding the spectacle of their deceased kinsmen, and at the same time, they are equally the spectacle that Richard takes in heartily. This porosity is not surprising, particularly in instances of the feast. For instance, of spectacle, Normore says that “in becoming visible a spectator loses her or his status as a viewing subject and becomes the passive object of others’ judgments.” In the context of this romance, the Saracens were never meant to be the spectator, yet the broader organizational patterns of feasting would place them in this position initially.

While the initial encounter privileges the English perspective, the secondary telling of the Saracen horror is told within the confines and safety of a Saracen space, and the recounting of this trauma adds additional details that were not shared in the English space. The fuller account, even secondarily presented, unites the emotional community through the experience of collective trauma. The envoy weeps to Saladin, describing the appearance of a boiled Saracen head without hair resting on a broad platter with his name written on his forehead, telling Saladin that it was the sultan of Damascus’s son, then they were served the king’s son of Nineveh, of Persia, of Samaria, and of Egypt. The speaker mentions that “ylkon of us hys eyen wypte” before telling Saladin of the fifth son to be served forth, the king’s son of Africa. The community “had all grame” as they took this in, but only upon entering the safety of the sultan’s protection will they name those who Richard butchered.

This sense of collective feeling—the experience and expression thereof—characterizes the Saracen community in this popular romance. All together worry that their heart would burst: “Us

329 Normore, A Feast, 46.

330 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3585-3603.
thoughte oure herte barst ryght insundyr!" Only after Richard singles out an older diplomat does the romance offer some semblance of individuation of the community, but it is fleeting, and the diplomat’s expression shifts ever into the first-person plural perspective. Their sameness arises from the sorrow of loss and the horrific conditions in which such grief is endured. They are an emotional community that so values their brethren that grief is a powerful, immediate, all-encompassing experience. Theirs is a shared trauma.

Even having returned home, the fear and disgust that Richard’s sotilte affects in them does not leave. His threat is pervasive, and he has proven to them that he will make heartily make good on his claims. He assures the envoy that he will

\[\text{nought late on lyve} \\
\text{In al thy land, chyld, ne wyve,} \\
\text{But slee alle that he may fynde,} \\
\text{And sethe the flesch and with teeth grynde:} \\
\text{Hungyr schal hem nevere eyle!}\]

Upon recounting this threat to the rest of the Saracen community, all weep and bemoan that they still live, fearing how Richard will “ete oure children and us!” These unwelcome, difficult feelings prove impossible for the Saracen community to process, which is expected for the kind of disgust and abject horror to which they are subjected.

Miller explains the shared qualities of disgust and hatred, noting that “Disgust and hatred overlap through some of their ranges. The chief connection is marked by the notion of loathing, which carries a sense not only of the mixing of hate and digest” but also in that they amplify one

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331 Richard Coer de Lyon, line 3605.
332 Richard Coer de Lyon, lines 3649-3653.
333 Richard Coer de Lyon, 3669.
another.\textsuperscript{334} Disgust is moreover a friend of contempt: “a particular subset of contempt” can be “indistinguishable from disgust.\textsuperscript{335} Disgust, per Miller, is affective:

Disgust is an emotion. Some may resist this claim because disgust looks too much like a purely instinctual drive, too much of the body and not enough of the soul, more like thirst, lust, or even pain than like envy, jealousy, love, anger, fear, regret, guilt, sorrow, grief, or shame. Such resistance either confuses nausea with disgust or is better seen to evince a claim about disgust’s more embodied “feel” than other emotions.\textsuperscript{336}

Because disgust is rooted in “moral and social sentiment,” the feeling “plays a motivating and confirming role in moral judgment” ranking “people and things in a kind of cosmic ordering.”\textsuperscript{337} Disgust is always reactionary; it is never “raw” or “unattached” feeling.\textsuperscript{338} Cultural theorist and literary scholar Sianne Ngai orients the feeling similarly, arguing that disgust is always directed towards something else, primarily “toward the negation” of the disgust-inducing object, “either by denying them or by subjecting them to epistemological skepticism.”\textsuperscript{339} Medieval historian Alexandra Cuffel draws from Miller’s figuration of disgust, noting that during the medieval era, “excrement, menstrual blood, and other bodily fluids did elicit intense disgust.”\textsuperscript{340} Disgust, an early seventeenth-century term etymologically stemming from the notion of disordered taste or appetite, pertains to more than just matters of eating. In the case of Richard Coer de Lyon,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{334} Miller, \textit{Anatomy}, 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{335} Miller, \textit{Anatomy}, 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{336} Miller, \textit{Anatomy}, 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{337} Miller, \textit{Anatomy}, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{338} Miller, \textit{Anatomy}, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{340} Alexandra Cuffel, \textit{Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 6.
\end{itemize}
however, questions of what one eats, how one eats, where one eats, why one eats what one eats, and with whom one eats starkly illustrate the foundational denotation of disgust.

Those who register and express disgust seek to distance themselves morally—and sometimes physically—from that which elicits such feelings. Though not exclusively a social feeling, disgust is very much a part of the affective fabric of emotional communities. Judgment of disgust need not result in sweeping, decisive consequences, however. For some emotional communities, silent judgment may be the preferred approach, whereas with other communities, vocal condemnation might always follow such offenses. These approaches are not always determined by who holds the greater social capital; however, it is more often than not the case. Typically, when the power dynamic is tipped such that the offended, yet judgmental, emotional community has no real recourse, horror and paralysis set in, and the disgust and horror are difficult to shake off. *Richard Coer de Lyon* operates in this sticky space.

Feminist literary critic Sara Ahmed argues that emotions can be “sticky” and make us therefore “stuck” with particular feelings, and scholar of women’s studies Jasbir K. Puar connects Ahmed’s figuration of sticky feelings to terror and trauma:

Passing, or passing by, raises the possibility that the difference is imperceptible: the injury is endlessly deferred to the future. The object that once appeared to contain the fear, and was thus containable, instead contaminates and multiplies into my bodies through a sliding that works metonymically to ooze and seep these bodies into one another, ‘construct[ing] a relation of resemblance between the figures: what makes them alike may be their “unlikeness” from “us.”’ Stickiness implies that the temporary reprieve granted through passing by is muted by residual remnants and echoes of older bodies that rub off, leaving traces of nearly getting off clean.

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Both emotions and trauma circulate between bodies and can therefore stick, as bodies move about near that which instills trauma. Ahmed further speaks of the sociality of emotion and the ways in which emotion is always about something—feelings are always experienced in reaction to some sort of interaction.\textsuperscript{343}

Interactions between warring communities—especially those with as complex a history as the Christian English and Muslim Saracen—is always fraught, and disgust has long been a component of such encounters. In light of Richard’s professed Christianity\textsuperscript{344} and the deeply problematic, deeply inaccurate portrayal of Islam in \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon}, it is all but impossible to ignore the intertwined sociopolitical and theological contexts in which this romance is situated. Richard’s derogatory equation of Muslim-as-swine is not unprecedented, many examples of antisemitic, anti-Christian, or Islamophobic texts from Late Antiquity throughout the medieval era draw upon the pig as a dehumanizing rhetorical device. Yet these texts tend to Other the Muslim body fully and to treat it as an imaginary construct. Richard’s literal anthropophagy, then, is deeply troubling. As Alexandra Cuffel notes,

Muhammed was so closely tied to the dogs or pigs that, in Christian lore and iconography, devoured his dead or drunken body. In these tales the Prophet Muhammed became the very dirt that these creatures ate, making him doubly filthy—unclean because these creatures ate unclean things, and impure because the animals themselves were contaminating.\textsuperscript{345}

Cuffel underscores the “powerful barrier of disgust between religious communities,” and such divisions are present even within groups: “Portraying the other as a consumer of impurity was a

\textsuperscript{343} Ahmed, \textit{Cultural}, 7-9.

\textsuperscript{344} Despite his parentage, the portrayal of which itself bears the hallmarks of xenophobia and fear of religious difference.

\textsuperscript{345} Cuffel, \textit{Gendering}, 226.
common theme in Muslim polemic as well. Bad Muslims and non-Muslims were defined by their willingness to eat all manner of unclean, forbidden food such as pigs, cats, dogs, and people. This diet was defined by excess.”Richard assumes this position to his advantage in the romance.

There’s something deeply devious about Richard’s equation or reduction of the Muslim body to swine—he reduces them to that which they consider unclean and unfit for consumption. Cuffel notes that “to be forced to eat or associate with pigs” was a frequent anxiety in Islamic writing. The worry of “Being required to eat pork not only signified a profound loss of status: Muslims were placed in a position servile to Christians, and Muslims themselves became associated with the most vile creatures. Richard further implies that because the Muslim body is fit for Christian consumption, their faith is one to be incorporated within and broken down by a Christian mold. What is unfit for Christianity will be cast aside as excrement.

Richard’s macabre sotilte is primarily visual: the Saracens see their compatriots decapitated, cooked, labeled with a scrap of parchment, served forth on platters, and eaten with gusto by the king. There are, however, other sensory aspects of the display that amplify the effect of the cruel trick. While the romance does not explicitly mention the scent of cooked Saracen flesh, the text implies that it is something familiar and appealing, given how thoroughly Richard is fooled. It is tantalizing and familiar to the king, so the second round of this dish is likely similarly spiced and prepared. It should be appealing, until the awful reveal turns that expectation on its head. Smell,

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as Miller notes, is not typically associated with the horror genre, for it is difficult to portray—it is much more an experiential sensory experience. Yet smell amplifies the horrific in this scenario, for it is another example of the juxtaposition of what ought not to be. The status and texture of a thing informs its degree of disgust—in the context of Richard Coer de Lyon, that which should be raw is cooked. One’s kinsmen ought not to be cooked and served forth on platters; likewise, one’s kinsmen also very much ought not to smell appetizing. Miller additionally argues that vision in the sense by which our “sympathetic sensing” or “sympathetic imaginative powers” activate, and although the Saracen diplomats do not eat their brethren, watching King Richard do so further compounds the atrocity unfolding before them. While the reader of this romance (fortunately) cannot harness the sympathetic sensing of anthropophagy, those present at the feast of their friends experience most other senses directly: they see, they hear, they smell, and for those who so wish, they could touch.

For the Saracen emotional community, Richard’s anthropophagy is terrorizing, and they are paralyzed with fear. Miller describes “fear-imbued disgust” as “horror,” a feeling that frequently “denies flight as an option.” While disgust is very much steeped in power, one does not need the upper hand to experience the feeling and express associated judgment. Not all disgust is the same, however. Through the Saracen diplomats, Richard Coer de Lyon illustrates horror-inflected disgust that is less about a pious moral judgment and more about the flight. They must

349 Miller, Anatomy, 81.

350 Drawing from Miller, Anatomy, 83.

351 Miller, Anatomy, 81.

352 Miller, Anatomy, 26.
escape the situation but cannot and are subsequently frozen because of their subordinate position
in this power struggle, and the romance deftly illustrates their subsequent anxieties about their
inability to escape danger. Philosopher Julia Kristeva’s figuration of the abject as an ambiguous
“composite of judgment and affect” applies well here.\textsuperscript{353} To Kristeva, the abject “simultaneously
beseeches and pulverizes the subject,” causing that subject to find “the impossible within,”
realizing “that it is none other than abject.”\textsuperscript{354} The abject arises in the juxtaposition of one’s
“failure to recognize its kin” and the absolute recognition of oneself in that very off-putting
experience.\textsuperscript{355} The juxtaposition of recognition and realization, of horror and repulsion
commingled with grief becomes Richard’s personal \textit{sotilte}. Speaking of the artistic
representations that beheadings have inspired for millennia, Kristeva describes the “economy of
transfiguration” inherent to decapitation.\textsuperscript{356} She contends that through decapitation, there is
“something beyond death, the artistic experience says, there is resurrection.”\textsuperscript{357} The context of
Richard’s \textit{sotilte} makes the Saracen decapitation not a resurrection but further devaluation. To
Richard, the effect is affective artistry; to the envoy, the abject plated before them threatens to
become their own future. Richard has rendered their kin and family another category of Other,
though an uncanny Other in which they recognize themselves.


\textsuperscript{354} Kristeva, \textit{Powers}, 5.

\textsuperscript{355} Kristeva, \textit{Powers}, 5.

\textsuperscript{356} Julia Kristeva, \textit{The Severed Head: Capital Visions}, trans. Jody Gladding (New York:

\textsuperscript{357} Kristeva, \textit{Severed Head}, 74-75.
The narrator emphasizes the Saracen horror not once but twice. By doubling the presentation of this violent *sotile* with slight difference in terms of detail and emotional register, the narrator encourages rumination on the affective interplay between each community and space. As a framework for this evaluation, the poet presents emotions as a key rubric. They serve as an evaluative framework even for the “enemy”—when the boundaries are tested and violated, the audience sympathizes or empathizes with the Saracen emotional community, a sort of feeling-with that is facilitated by Richard’s prior unsettling behavior.

Cowed by Richard, the Saracen diplomats are in no position to display righteous anger at Richard’s actions, nor do they adopt a position of righteous indignation at being dehumanized and threatened. The larger community likewise reacts with sorrow and fear, but Saladin begins to quake with rage. Here the collective emotions cease and emotion scripts for how kingly rage might be deployed effectively take over. Consider White’s figuration of the anger trajectory in medieval textual history:

Anger, in other words, has a well-defined place in political scripts in which other emotions figure as well. In these scripts, which have many variants and are merely sketched out here, displays of anger and other emotions are correlated with the stage that a conflict has reached; they are often signs of a disputant’s honor or shame and thus have a normative dimension.\(^{358}\)

White notes that these scripts vary and change over time, and that their application appears in earnest, ironic, humorous, tragic, or dramatic circumstances. Despite this variance, however, White contends that commonalities emerge:

1) A noble who is successful in some sort of competition should show joy.\(^{359}\)
2) Nobles should be ashamed to lose honor through the lost of land, friends, battle, or other

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\(^{358}\) White, “Politics,” 142.

\(^{359}\) Richard does before and after horrifying the Saracen diplomats; he tells his men that he will gleefully eat the Saracen head as if it were a tender chick. And he excitedly trains his gaze on his horrified guests as they comprehend what is happening.
damage and loss; they should display this shame as grief or anger
3) When asking for assistance from a superior, the shamed party ought to adopt a doleful
demeanor
4) The shamed should “release” their anger at the enemies who wronged them
5) Anger should abate when the shamed party wins or makes peace with their enemies

Ultimately, the emotion scripts that govern royal behavior cause the collective feeling that the
Saracen previously community experiences to fragment, but for the duration of the macabre
*sotilte* that Richard enacts, the affective manipulation to shared feelings of intense sorrow and
despair—of “grame”—is whole.

*Richard Coer de Lyon* is a wonder of a popular romance, compiling and revising history,
incorporating fantasy, harnessing epic, and trading in the usual exploits of medieval romance:
aventure and social interaction—especially through feasting. There is much to explore in this
narrative, and I approach the affect at work in the romance by way of two key feasts, particularly
the affective function of *sotilte* in each. Bynum writes of wonder as “the web of actual horror and
delight we can decipher in medieval texts,” and I argue that the troubling *sotiltes* that Richard
performs are strong threads in this larger web. This romance revels in the carnivalesque
upending of expectation and order while also threatening to undo social ties altogether. Like the
astonished Saracens still processing Richard’s behavior and threats, we, too, “Herde we nevere
swylke mervayle!”

What makes this Middle English popular romance so compelling is not that it is a good or
well-wrought narrative; rather, it is full of tensions and anxieties that play out in a fantasy world

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360 White, “Politics,” 142.


362 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, line 3663.
that is also recognizable as the near-past. Heng describes the powers of romance and affect,

Romance thus fashions a safe space, and a supple vocabulary that induces pleasure, not pain, to enable the consideration of historical crises and traumas—especially such crises and traumas as might otherwise be unutterably horrific, or nigh-impossible to express—so as to surface rather than deny the exigencies of history, and perform a cultural rescue in the face of historical intractability. Performing the fantastical as the real, and the real as the fantastical, without the requisite necessity of explanation or apology, romance is a narrational modality that offers safe harbor from the horrors of historical event, the discussion of which becomes rewarded with pleasure, not pain. Romance supplies a space of freedom for the discussion of the difficult and the undiscussable.\footnote{Geraldine Heng, “An Arthurian Empire of Magic, and Its Discontents: An Afterword,” \textit{Arthuriana} 31.2 (2021): 124-138, 125-6.}

\textit{Richard Coer de Lyon} exists in this kind of space, and it uses many modes of affective manipulation to explore questions of chivalric behavior, anxieties related to crusading and evolving notions of national identity, and the troubled relationship that the present has with its past. One such vehicle for affective manipulation in the romance is the use of the \textit{sotilte}, for these are not the kinds of interactive, consensual feast elements that one would experience at a marriage or coronation feast. Those are expected and planned beforehand. Richard’s performances, on the other hand, are traumatic intrusions enacted upon unsuspecting guests.
CHAPTER 3

“THAT MERVAYLYD MANY A MAN”: THE LONG SOTILTE IN THE WEDDING OF SIR GAWAIN AND DAME RAGNELLE

This chapter focuses on the affective use of the sotilte in the Arthurian Middle English popular romance, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, wherein the gathered community faces great confusion and conflicting feelings as it grapples with an emotionally challenging situation, and the feast ultimately facilitates later clarification. This popular romance presents what I read as a long sotilte. What I mean by “long sotilte” is that the narrative develops and illustrates complex emotional reactions to the behavior of particular characters that coalesce around the feast, with the denouement providing pleasant explanation to the broader community while simultaneously prohibiting full resolution. As with *Richard Coer de Lyon*, where Richard himself is the chief performer and spectacle of the sotiltes he inflicts upon his adversaries, so, too, does the sotilte of this Arthurian popular romance present a character herself as the source of the confounding sotilte.

*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, a popular romance that trades in the loathly lady trope, wherein an unattractive woman offers to save an important figure by her wits in exchange for a man’s hand in marriage (her choice of partner and his acceptance), survives in a late sixteenth-century manuscript, but the narrative itself traces to early medieval works.\(^{364}\) This

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\(^{364}\) Susan Carter and Lorraine Kochanske Stock both point to the Irish analogues for the loathly lady figures, emphasizing the powerful shapeshifting goddess figures from whom the later medieval figures derive. See Susan Carter, “A Hymenation of Hags,” in *The English “Loathly Lady” Tradition*.
popular romance begins with a single stanza situating the narrative before the poet immediately moves to Arthur’s actions. Arthur is hunting with his men and decides to stalk the hart on his own and finds himself cornered by Sir Gromer Somer Joure, a disgruntled knight whose land Arthur has recently given away to Sir Gawain. Recalling the chivalric ethos, Arthur convinces Gromer to spare his life for the time being, and Gromer presents Arthur with a year-long challenge: he must learn the correct answer to the question “What is it that women most want?” Arthur accepts this challenge and immediately sets to questing for the answer, growing increasingly inconsolable as he recognizes the impossibility of the task. Gawain joins him in this work, and the two toil away tirelessly for nearly the year’s time. Arthur dejectedly attempts one final time to determine the answer and comes across a hideous woman astride a gaily outfitted palfrey in the woods: Dame Ragnelle. She tells Arthur she knows what he seeks, and that she knows the answer, but she demands Gawain’s hand in marriage in return for her wisdom. Arthur consults with Gawain who readily agrees to the terms. Arthur returns to Dame Ragnelle, and she reveals to him that women want sovereignty. Arthur then makes his way to Sir Gromer, who is furious at Arthur’s correct answer and declares that only his sister could have told him as much. Ragnelle then makes ready to travel to Camelot, where a distraught court receives her. She and Gawain are wed, and the wedding feast is a debacle: Ragnelle’s eating habits are as loathly as her appearance. She devours everything around her in the most appalling manner, and she alienates herself at the table—here there is a lacuna in the narrative, and the manuscript begins once more with Ragnelle and Gawain in their bedchamber. She reveals to him that she is a beautiful woman,

and she offers him the choice: she can be beautiful by day and loathly by night, or loathly by day and beautiful by night. Gawain ultimately cedes the choice to his wife, and her curse is broken. The court is delighted, and the romance tells us that Gawain doted on his wife for the few years they were married, and that Arthur was puzzled at his dedication, but that all ultimately were joyful.

There are key differences between this romance and *Richard Coer de Lyon*; namely, the character from whom the *sotilte* originates is gaining entry into the gathered community—unlike *Richard Coer de Lyon*, where the spectators are foreign to the core community or individual staging the encounter. In other words, in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, Ragnelle is related to the core community in which the *sotilte* unfolds. The relational and emotional proximity between the characters of the Arthurian popular romance presents a different affective register through which the narrator illustrates or describes feeling. Additionally, whereas the feast scenes of *Richard Coer de Lyon* contain individual episodes of emotional manipulation that stand among many examples of Richard’s ruthless cunning, the long *sotilte* and festal elements of the comparatively compact popular romance are central to overall narrative development. Despite the succinct narrative and fairytale-like conclusion, this Middle English popular romance offers unsatisfactory explanations. The Arthurian community broadly, and quite specifically Arthur, does not fully understand the seeming clarity. Something more always confounds. I argue that such lingering, persistent wondering is the long *sotilte*.

The loathly lady trope appears throughout European genres, with its oldest forms appearing in Old French and Old Irish sources. Chaucer, Gower, and other anonymous poets play with the trope of the wise loathly lady, with *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* falling somewhere in the middle of the clunky, utilitarian versions and the more elegant narratives, such
as Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale* or Gower’s *Tale of Florent*. Much like the loathly ladies who figure prominently in Chaucer’s, Gower’s, and other anonymous poet’s works, the wise but altogether undesirable Dame Ragnelle offers an answer to the perennial question, “What do women most want?”

The trope also made its way into the court of Edward I’s Round Table in 1299 as an *entremet*, as paraphrased by Thomas Hahn:

The story also served for the plot of an interlude performed at one of Edward I's Round Tables in 1299: a loathly lady, with foot-long nose, donkey ears, neck sores, a gaping mouth, and blackened teeth, rode into the hall and demanded of Sir Perceval and Sir Gawain (Edward's knights had assumed Arthurian identities for the occasion) that they recover lost territory and end the strife between commons and lords.365

At Edward’s table, the loathly lady is an *entremet*—she is delightfully ugly entertainment who interacts with guests and assigns tasks that are to be completed at a future date. The immediate combination of disgust and delight along with future-reaching work and vows mirror the manner in which Ragnelle’s effects unfold in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. Roger Sherman Loomis explores numerous accounts of the “cult of Arthur” that Edward I appears to have enthusiastically supported at his court, although Loomis admits the problematic, error-prone accounts that include the fullest loathly-lady *entremet*. Summarizing Lodewijk van Velthem’s account of the 1284 Round Table,366 Loomis notes:


366 All accounts suggest that this year is inaccurate, and Thomas Hahn applies the interlude to 1299, whereas Loomis believes that it may have been the Great Pentecostal feast of 1306, “the
The king, declaring that everything had taken place as in Arthur’s time, turned from the field to the banquet hall and caused the knights who had assumed Arthurian names to sit at the table with him…. After the third course and the customary pause the Loathly Damsel entered, her nose a foot long and a palm in width, her ears like those of an ass, coarse braids hanging down to her girdle, a goitre on her long red neck, two teeth projecting a finger’s length from her wry mouth. She rode on a thin limping horse and of course she addressed her first remarks to “Perchevael” and told him to ride to Licester and win the castle from its lord, who was assailing his neighbors. She bade “Walewein” ride to Cornuaelge and put an end to the strife between commons and lords. The two knights undertook these adventures, and the Loathly Damsel, who, we are informed, was a squire thus disguised at the king’s command, slipped away and removed his makeup.367

That the trope appears in literature and was staged for a historical feast as an *entremet* only underscores the significance that the symbol of the loathly lady holds for courtly emotional and political communities. This symbolic figure long held power over the imaginations of those who beheld her, just as she does in the Middle English popular romance, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*.

**Carnivalesque and Courtly Spaces**

Bakhtin’s carnivalesque is at play in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*.

Bakhtin’s carnival mocks hierarchy and reveals its arbitrary nature, and it insists on grotesque realism—a recognition of and ambivalent laughter about the body.368 In Bakhtin’s figuration, carnivalesque events—those typically held outside the official state and courtly spaces wherein hierarchy was rigidly enforced—were folksy, civic, public affairs.369 Enacting unchecked carnivalesque in a courtly space can lead to tragedy, as the historical record reveals. The


“charivari” at the wedding feast to celebrate the third marriage of a favorite lady-in-waiting, Catherine de Fastaverin, held on January 28, 1393 in Paris ended in fiery tragedy. Variously called the *Bal des Ardents* and *Bal des Sauvages*, both Jean Froissart and the Monk of St. Denis chronicle the events, with the former stressing the celebratory nature of the occasion and the latter expressing disapproval at the licentious events of the court. The Monk’s account “expresses his disapproval of the medieval folk custom, charivari, a noisy masked demonstration enacted to mortify a wrongdoer in the community,” and medievalist Lorraine Kochanske Stock notes that “widows or widowers who remarried” were frequently “victims of charivaris,” even more so “if there was a disparity in the age of the bride and groom.” Participants in this “humiliation ritual” would typically wear “animal masks or skins or otherwise disguised themselves as animals, emitted bestial noises, and made artificial racket by banging pots or other household implements.”

Burlesque and a lack of decorum have no place in the court, Froissart and the Monk of St. Albans both seem to imply, effectively presaging the framework of the carnival and carnivalesque as posited by Bakhtin centuries later. In this chronicle, Froissart notes that a young squire from Normandy, Huguet de Guisay, sets about to organize “amusement to entertain the King and the ladies of the court” by creating six linen suits covered with fine, flaxen

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371 Stock, “Froissart’s,” 133-134.

hair that covers the wearer head to toe, creating the appearance of a wild man.\footnote{Stock, “Froissart’s,” 134; Jean Froissart, \textit{Froissart’s Chronicles}, edited and translated by John Jolliffe (New York: Penguin, 2001), 343.} No torches were to come near the dancing men, for the costumes were incredibly flammable, yet the Duke of Orleans, purportedly unaware of this prohibition, leaned close with a torch to discern the identities of the men, and almost all of the costumed men are engulfed in flames.\footnote{Froissart, \textit{Chronicles}, 344.} The hall was filled with “tel meschief, tel douleur, et tel crierie.”\footnote{Stock, “Froissart’s” 134; draws from \textit{Oeuvres de Froissart: Publiées avec les variantes des Divers Manuscrits par Chroniques}, edited Kervyn de Lettenhove, 25 volumes (Brussels: Victor Devaus, 1867-1877).} Charles hid beneath his young aunt’s skirts as the fire broke out, apparently saved by his flirtatiousness—his actions drew a great deal of criticism from the chroniclers, and Stock’s essay on the illustrators who drew from Froissart’s account explains the compounding problems of questionable behavior at this celebration.

Literary exploration of the carnival and carnivalesque is less prone to horrific tragedy—although my analysis of the horrific and grotesque \textit{sotiltes} of \textit{Richard Coer de Lyon} illustrates that the carnivalesque in literature still carries the element of danger. In \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, the carnivalesque and grotesque are prominent in Ragnelle’s form and behavior, and the wedding feast itself is imbued with grotesque elements. What’s more, Bakhtin argues that there is great pleasure in “degrading high literature,” and “[t]he more powerful and prolonged the domination of the high, the greater the pleasure caused by its uncrowning.”\footnote{Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais}, 305.} Stephanie Hollis argues that \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}
revels in “the author’s enjoyment of his own transgressions against courtliness,” marking the carnivalesque as an inherent aspect of this popular romance.\footnote{Stephanie Hollis, “‘The Marriage of Sir Gawain’: Piecing Together the Fragments,” in \textit{The English “Loathly Lady” Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs}, edited S. Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 163-185, 178.}

Ragnelle is her own woman—at least, both her appearance and assertiveness make her seem so. This freedom and agency is aligned with the typical treatment of the loathly lady tales. Like Lyonet, Lunete, and Laudine—three Arthurian women whom Melanie McGarrahgan Gibson argues embody Bakhtinian carnivalesque through their speech\footnote{Melanie McGarrahgan Gibson, “Lyonet, Lunete, and Laudine: Carnivalesque Arthurian Women,” in \textit{On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries}, edited Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2001), 213-227, 213-14. Gibson contends that the perversity of language that these Arthurian women deploy enacts elements of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque in the tales, wherein the manipulation at work lends agency and power.}—Ragnelle is a mediator of her world through her appearance and innate wisdom. She acts, speaks, and appears in a manner subversive to feminine expectations and still manages to ascend the ranks of a social ladder meant for a woman very different than herself. She swims in the courtly waters naturally, yet she seems to be a perverse woman. Scholars have long identified the unique status that Ragnelle asserts in late medieval loathly lady narratives—she asserts agency. Ragnelle, more than any loathly lady, “materialize[s] the Bakhtinian threat.”\footnote{Mary Leech, “Why Dame Ragnell Had to Die: Feminine Usurpation of Masculine Authority in ‘The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell,’” in \textit{The English “Loathly Lady” Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs}, edited S. Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter, Studies in Medieval Culture XLVIII (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 213-234, 215.} She is in control, and despite efforts to render her pleasing, Ragnelle remains a grotesque figure who will not fade away.

As if intent to consume the entire court, Ragnelle’s excessive appetite is as uncontained and unrefined as her appearance. Though not a fiery disaster, Ragnelle is a more contained,
grotesque figure at the wedding banquet, and her presence as such in this sort of courtly space—a space where Bakhtin argues the carnival cannot be sustained—threatens to loosen bonds of proper behavior. Banquet images are prone to “gross exaggeration and hyperbole,” and the grotesque is most clear through the illustration of “the body and food.” Ragnelle’s wedding banquet is the quintessential depiction of “[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, and excessiveness” as well as “exaggeration of the inappropriate to incredible and monstrous dimensions” that characterize the “grotesque style.” Edward Vasta similarly argues that the anonymous poet of The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle illustrates Bakhtinian carnivalesque and grotesque quite clearly, in a manner much more aligned with Bakhtin’s original vision than that seen in Gower or Chaucer. Vasta argues compellingly that the popular romance does not tell a tale “in an elitist poetic style for an elitist audience, but a tale for the people, the official and the unofficial, both men and women, in the people’s own tail-rhyme verse, and for [the poet’s] own as well as the people’s liberation” from constriction “official culture establishment.”

Ragnelle’s body is grotesque, “defiantly revealed, and revealing,” challenging “the society that creates it.” The narrator’s repeated visual wandering back to Ragnelle’s loathly status is indicative of the degree to which the grotesque is at work in the romance: “excessiveness, superabundance, the tendency to transgress all limits, endless enumerations, and accumulations

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380 Bakhtin, Rabelais, 303.

381 Bakhtin, Rabelais, 303.


of synonyms” largely describe how the narrative treats both Ragnelle’s body and her behavior.\textsuperscript{384} Mary Leech describes the power and agency of the grotesque body, one that “becomes its own entity, one that is both inward and outward, life-giving and life-taking, cosmic and earthbound. It eliminates the differentiation between what is acceptable to a particular culture and what is not.”\textsuperscript{385} What’s more, Ragnelle threatens to “swallow[] the world” and is “never finished, never completed” in her desires for more—more social aspiration, more spectacle, more consumption, and more of Gawain’s time and presence.\textsuperscript{386}

**Ragnelle’s Grotesque Body and Presumed Character Defects**

Because of Ragnelle’s grotesque form, the popular romance implies parallel character defects alongside the perceivable faults. When Arthur first happens upon Ragnelle in Inglewood Forest, the narrator describes her “as ungoodly a creature / As evere man sawe, withoute mesure.”\textsuperscript{387} Ragnelle’s disheveled state suggests a host of both character and physical defects, as either a fallen woman or one grasping above her station, with the “ungoodly” pertaining to more than just physical deformation or ugliness, yet in this first encounter, the narrator and Arthur are transfixed by Ragnelle’s form. The denotation of “ungoodly” first suggests “wicked, evil” person or one “ignoble, rude,” then the adjective refers to one’s character as “ugly, loathsome” and even carries connotations of discourtesy, unkindness, and mismanagement.\textsuperscript{388} All of these possibilities

\textsuperscript{384} Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 306.


\textsuperscript{386} Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 317.

\textsuperscript{387} The *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, lines 228-229.

\textsuperscript{388} Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “Ungoodly.”
exist at once in Arthur’s initial assessment of Ragnelle, which catalogs her foulness in great
detail:

Her face was red, her nose snouty with alle,
Her mouth the wyde, her teeth yellow over alle,
With bleryd eyen greeter then a balle.
Her mouth was not to lak:
Her teeth hang over her lappes,
Her cheeks side as women’s hippes.
A lute she bare upon her bak;
Her neck long and therto great;
Her hair cloted on an here;
In the shoulders she was a yard brode.
Hangyn pappys to be an horse lode,
And lyke a barel she was made.
And to rehearse the foulnesse of that Lady,
Ther is no tong may telle, securly;
Of lothynesse inowghe she had.  

The redundancy of details (her mouth and teeth described twice) and the rough syllabic form
might well be indicative of an inept hand. But these moments of redundancy and the
inconsistency of form also speak to Ragnelle’s visual excess. Her body is so loathly, indeed, that
the narrator cannot move from one detail to the next—he is distracted by what he has already
seen and returns to recount more about prior body parts. The inconsistent syllabic pattern
additionally mirrors the visual excess and uncontrollable nature of Ragnelle’s physicality. This
burlesque of the blazon does not follow typical movement: ideally, the viewer would document
physical details of the beloved from head to toe, but here the narrator and Arthur move in erratic
fashion, bouncing back to take in more detail about physical aspects which have already been
addressed. Ragnelle’s palfrey, on the other hand, is well-adorned, which adds further jarring
incongruence to her appearance:

She satt on a palfray was gay begon,

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389 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, lines 231-245.
With gold besett and many a precious stone.
Ther was an unsemely syghte:
So fowlle a creature withoute mesure
To ryde so gayly, I you ensure,
Yet was no reason ne ryghte.390

Ragnelle’s fine horse signals something in her that is or has been noble—or that she’s simply
stolen the palfrey. The narrator does not describe her clothing in this first encounter, but
Stephanie Hollis sees the horse’s finery as an extension of Ragnelle herself, and a link to the
youthful state to which Ragnelle will return:

This literary inversion prefigures the lady’s subsequent ability to regain her original form, further underlined by the lack of congruity between her bodily appearance and the resplendently caparisoned palfrey she rides, which betokens her association with faery enchantment (since palfreys adorned with gold and gems are the chief identifying attribute of faery women in “Sir Launfal” and “Thomas of Ercedoun”).391

Ragnelle retains noble connections that at once assure Arthur (for he addresses her as Lady) and unsettle him (her assertiveness and confidence incense him). These unseemly juxtapositions—of foul woman and fine horse, of poor appearance and suggestions of good bearing—foreshadow the same sort of dissonance that will characterize her bridal trousseau as she officially enters the court.

Through the long history of the Loathly Lady trope, many tales present a lowborn woman aspiring to reach beyond her station, and Ragnelle is set apart from these other narratives.392 Consider the Wife of Bath’s Tale, for example, wherein a loathly lady offers an errant knight lifesaving wisdom—she is introduced simply as a woman sitting along, “A fouler wight ther may

390 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 246-252.
391 Hollis, “‘The Marriage,’” 169.
no man devyse.”393 Ragnelle, by contrast, is both acknowledged as lady and described in excessive, though odious, detail. The narrator’s cheeky juxtaposition is likely meant to elicit laughter and to present the gulf between what one perceives as a lady and Ragnelle’s appearance. She knows what to demand and how to make it happen. Despite her detractions, Arthur immediately sees her as a “Lady,” setting the stage for a courtly encounter before juxtaposing this expectation with jarring, contradictory visual detail. Leech contends that these demands and expectations are indicative of nobility, while not necessarily confirming it.394 “From the first appearance of Dame Ragnell,” Leech argues, “she posits herself as noble and insists on the treatment and public display befitting a noblewoman.”395 That Ragnelle’s first effect on Arthur is to cause him to marvel alludes to Arthur’s custom that he must experience a marvel before his meal, and it foreshadows the incongruent nature of Ragnelle’s rapacious sotilte that will play out at the wedding feast.

As Arthur stands before this woman in the woods, attempting to ascertain who or what she is, he “mervaylyd securly.”396 Williams notes that “marvels make it hard for us to believe what we see,”397 and Arthur’s astonishment in this moment points to the heuristic framework of the sotilte guiding his thought processes—is this real? Can this be? Not only is Arthur in disbelief of the foul woman before him, he is also astonished that she should know of his quest, have the life-

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396 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* line 230.

397 Williams, *Middle English Marvels*, 102.
saving answer, and be willing to provide him with that information in a timely manner. “What
mean you, Lady? Telle me tyghte, / For of they wordes I have great dispyte; / To you I have no
nede,” Arthur tells Ragnelle, with indignation. As intriguing and transfixing as her physical
form is to him, her words are anxiety-inducing. Then Arthur, comically, asks the life-saving
question without seeming to realize what he asks her: “What is your desyre, fayre Lady?”
Or, perhaps more accurately, because she neither looks nor speaks like a fair lady, Arthur is hurling
impertinence directly back at her. Arthur’s quick succession of questions in this stanza, four
questions in nine lines of text, followed by the imperative to tell him what he asks indicate
Arthur’s disquiet mind and his worry as he struggles to ascertain Ragnelle’s unexpected
appearing and meaning. Through the act of marveling, Arthur registers Ragnelle as a marvel, and
therefore something potentially otherworldly and magical. This is the awe-inspiring and frightful
capacity of the marvelous, Williams explains:

Because marvels were so often visual, the unreliability of our sight was another significant
anxiety in the discourse of the marvelous…The problem was one of access (we cannot
always see who or what is responsible for the marvelous effects, or how they are produced)
as well as manipulation (marvels may create illusions or involve other kinds of visual
deception)…Magical marvels were especially unsettling in this regard: the ability to create
illusions or transform appearances is one of the greatest powers—and greatest dangers—that
magic holds.

Discerning what kind of marvel one encounters is dangerous business, and Arthur’s life is
already at stake. Whether he faces “the miraculous, the natural, or the merely unfamiliar,” he

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398 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 270-272.

399 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, line 273.

400 Williams, Middle, 102.

401 Williams, Middle, 102.
seeks to regain the upper hand even while rapidly realizing that it is Ragnelle who holds the power in this situation.

“Forsothe…I am no qued,” Ragnelle insists to Arthur after he sees her off-putting body; however, Ragnelle’s poor appearance implies that she is an inherently flawed human being. The *Middle English Dictionary* describes “qued” as a villain, an evil person, or a sickness or evil. She does acknowledge her off-putting manners and appearance without implying that she can change anything of them. She insists that there is a disparity between her inner and outer selves, which raises questions about medieval notions of goodness. Yet Ragnelle appears shameless—her awareness of how off-putting she is does not affect her behavior, and it is only when Ragnelle is alone with Gawain in their bedchamber that she expresses some form of shame (wishing that she were beautiful to meet Gawain’s goodness). While the narrative ultimately explains Ragnelle’s incompatibility between her external “badness” and internal “goodness” as something magically imposed upon her, the questions that such incompatibility raises remain hanging in the air. With the denotation of “qued” in mind, that Ragnelle might spread as an evil or a sickness amongst the court is certainly part of the anxiety and concern that Arthur and the other members of the court express, although Gawain does not appear to actively entertain the possible consequences of such a person.

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402 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, line 279.

403 *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “Qued.”

404 This goodness or virtue is only presumed, but since the romance closes with the happily ever after trope, it is quite likely that Ragnelle’s innate and internal virtues are wholly compatible with the Arthurian court.
Prevailing medieval theories of goodness and morality arise from Platonist and Neo-platonist influences. One of the strongest influences is Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, wherein Aristotle discusses the concept of excellence at length, explaining that “the excellence of human beings also will be the state which makes human beings good and which them do their own work well.” The examples that Aristotle cites for this assertion rests upon the utility of a particular being or thing: eyes are “good” because they do their job well; a horse is excellent because it is well-trained and performs its training in a fine manner. By Aristotelian logic, Ragnelle is bad because she does her job as a lady poorly, but she is good because she keeps her word and protests the king. In short, she’s a bad lady but a good subject. Aristotle argues that virtue is doing the right thing, with the right feeling, at the right time, in the right way. Ragnelle, even adorned with finery, upends this balance, causing disorder. Her presence at court is not, in the eyes of those around her, the “right” thing, nor is it done at the right time with the right way. And, perhaps most egregiously of all to Guinevere and the emotional community of ladies that she speaks for, Ragnelle’s actions and presence are not done with the right feeling.

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405 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with introduction, notes, and glossary by Terence Irwin, second edition, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999, Book II, ch. 6, sec. 2. Thomas Aquinas likewise attests that virtues relates to choice and will, asserting that the most human (and potentially virtuous) decisions are those made voluntarily. Ragnelle’s case falls into a gray area in this regard, and the popular romance is deeply ambivalent about her interiority—there is no insight into her decision-making processes. See Thomas Aquinas, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, translated and edited by Ralph McInerny, New York: Penguin, 1998, especially Part Two.


Augustine similarly contends that sinfulness or an evil state of being arises from one’s wrongly configured desires.\textsuperscript{408} Something in Ragnelle is unnaturally imbalanced, and there are competing forces at work in her—forces that are beyond her control and that are foreign to her natural state. The goodwill she bestows upon Arthur reveals her esteem of the Arthurian court, in that she deems Arthur’s life worth saving and Gawain a likely candidate to choose wisely and reverse her curse. Her intemperance at the feast, however, illustrates the destructive aspect of her enchanted character. Augustine calls temperance “the virtue that restrains inordinate desires,”\textsuperscript{409} and Ragnelle’s virtue has been altered in such a way that she cannot practice temperance; moreover, she appears to have no desire to even try. Her stepmother’s enchantment has warped her will and behavior as much as it has distorted her bodily appearance.

It is worth noting that the romance provides no example of immoral behavior as the catalyst for Ragnelle’s transformation, unlike other women who are transformed on account of ill deeds in medieval literature, like Robert Henryson’s \textit{The Testament of Cresseid}, wherein Henryson continues Chaucer’s \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} following Criseyde’s departure. Cresseid is divinely afflicted by leprosy (in an Ovidian fashion) after she speaks out against Venus and Cupid for not maintaining her in a state of perpetual desirability. Cresseid’s physical degradation follows directly from her voluntary criticism of the deities.\textsuperscript{410}


\textsuperscript{409} Augustine, \textit{On Free Choice of the Will}, 21.

As such, Ragnelle seems unable to control fully or to describe explicitly the magical malady that she suffers, but she does manage to work around some of the constraints that the charm has placed upon her—by the end of the romance, it is clear that she has known how to break the spell all along, but it seemingly must occur by the relinquishment of mastery from another. To bring this opportunity about, Ragnelle must assume mastery over the entirety of the situation—she holds the power to save Arthur’s life, she brokers a marriage to Gawain in exchange for this information, their union must be legitimate, and in private Gawain must agree to allow her choice in the matter of her appearance. She needs the court just as much as Arthur and the community need her:

Despite the public horror at her, she is needed within the closed structure of the court to preserve the ideals of the society that are represented in the endangered knight. Again there is a contradiction presented within the goals of the society: to preserve the ideals of the culture, it must open itself up to something that it fears as contaminative of its central values. Even before Ragnelle is known to the court, her unsettling presence will cause ripples of discontent that begin with Arthur, continue to Gawain, to Gaynour, and the rest of the courtly community until they grow into large waves of disquietude at the wedding banquet.

**Ragnelle as Disruptive Courtly Interlude**

Ragnelle unsettles the Arthurian court long before her performance at the wedding feast. Although her wisdom promises to end the dispute between Arthur and Gromer, her assistance is contingent upon marriage with Gawain, opening new potential avenues of strife for the court. As I argue below, Ragnelle’s nonnegotiable terms reflect engagement and marriage concerns that late medieval Europeans navigated as they secured ties between eligible parties.

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Through her desire to marry Gawain, Ragnelle necessarily desires to join the court, and her demands for a public celebration only compound her aims to become a very present part of the courtly circle. Leech argues that Ragnelle begins “to transform herself into something socially acceptable” even before she turns into her beautiful form: “Once she enters the court she has adopted all the outer trappings of a noble…and the other nobles are forced to accept her in this role, no matter how repulsed they are by her.”\textsuperscript{412} I take slight issue with Leech’s reading of Ragnelle grand entry into the court—her palfrey, at the very least—is richly-adorned before Arthur happens upon her in the forest. She already has an air of nobility to her, even if it is obscured by foulness. Likewise, the audience is not afforded a glimpse of Ragnelle’s thought processes as she nears the court; it is not clear that Ragnelle consciously or intentionally alters herself to be more (or less) presentable.

Although the audience later learns that the reversal of Ragnelle’s curse necessitates marriage to the finest knight (and that knight’s subsequent relinquishment of sovereignty over her), in this moment, Ragnelle’s aspirations seem as insatiable as her appetite. By marrying Gawain, Ragnelle gains entry into the inner courtly circle. She will become a part of this community. Ragnelle clearly understands the social import of this union, and she refuses to have a private ceremony. Despite Gaynour’s (Guinevere’s) pleas that Ragnelle and Gawain be wed privately in the early morning hours, the queen’s anxieties do not move Ragnelle:

\begin{verbatim}
She wold not be weddyd in no maner
Butt there were made a krye in all the shyre,
Bothe in town and in borowe.
Alle the ladyes note of the lond,
She lett kry to com to hand
To keep that brydalle thorowe.\textsuperscript{413}
\end{verbatim}


\textsuperscript{413} The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 557-562.
Ragnelle wants her nuptials proclaimed loudly, and she intends to be brought into society through public ceremony. All of the ladies must know that she has claimed Gawain and an enviable position of social power. Ragnelle wants word to spread far and wide that she will marry Gawain, not just as an announcement but as an invitation, “to com to hand” to participate in celebration.\footnote{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, line 561.}

While Ragnelle’s entry into this aesthetically cultivated and beautiful courtly space throws things out of balance, Gawain’s dedication to Arthur and the love he bears for his king initially acts as counterbalance to Ragnelle. As Jaeger explains,

For public acts, outward gestures are the guarantors of commitment or engagement or fervor; they have quasi-legal force; they are policy made visible. This places a high value on good performance, makes it into an art that must be learned, be it the art of political rhetoric or the art of love. Good intentions are never an excuse for bad performances.\footnote{Jaeger, Ennobling Love, 19.}

Gawain’s full support of Arthur is naive but sincere, and he fulfills his vow without question.

Arthur’s heart is fill with woe after telling Gawain of Ragnelle’s offer, and Gawain simply asks, “Ys this alle?”\footnote{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, line 342.} Gawain, undeterred, tells Arthur:

I shalle wed her and wed her agayn,  
Thowghe she were as foulle as Belsabub,  
Her I wed, by the Rood,  
Or elles were nott I your frende.  
For ye ar my Kyng with honour  
And have worshypt me in many a stowre;  
Therfor shalle I nott lett.  
To save your lyfe, Lorde, itt were my parte,  
Or were I false and a greatt coward;  
And my worshypp is the bett.\footnote{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 343-354.}
Gawain is wholly committed to the cause of saving Arthur’s life, not simply to going through the motions. Even before his honor of Arthur as King, Gawain is first Arthur’s friend. Although it is unclear how public the conversation between Arthur and Gawain is, the narrator does not specify that they move somewhere private, either. For that reason, Gawain’s love and devotion is the proclamation of future performance, and as the romance illustrates, Gawain follows through with his intentions. Even amidst the crude humor and vulgarity of this romance, the love that the narrator describes between Arthur and Gawain—stemming first from friendship then from Arthur’s sovereignty—is a succinct illustration of the idyllic sort of ennobling love that Jaeger describes. And, as a performance of a binding agreement, Gawain knows that he will need to uphold his end of the agreement. He assures Arthur once more:

…it shalle nott lett:
   I wolde wed her att whate tyme ye wolde sett.
   I pray you, make no care.
   For and she were the moste fowlyst wyghte
      That evere men myghte se with syghte,
   For your love I wolde nott spare.

As it is in keeping with many depictions of the bond between Arthur and Gawain, I read this as a genuine display of affection. In contrast to the kind of going through the motions that characterizes the greater part of the court during the wedding scene, this deep bond rings true.

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418 Future study of the history of emotions that builds from this project about Middle English romance should consider the ties of friendship in light of trauma or potential community fracture, paying attention to matters of gender, allegiance and service, and genre to formulate the best framework for studying the modes of emotional expression and emotives at work in the emotionological contexts in which these networks of friendship appear.

419 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 366-371.

420 The narrator does not describe Gawain during the wedding, but one would assume that he acts entirely as expected: with great propriety.
Jaeger describes the difficulty teasing out sincere act from affection, and it sheds some light on the contrast between this scene of friendship and kinship and the later scene of martial union:

This creates the dreary necessity, for the witness to public performances, of distinguishing between genuine acts and affectation. Performances of courage or compassion or love become a locus for the most high-minded behavior and the worst hypocrisy; heroism and empty boasting alike claim courage as their emotional grounding.  

There is no hypocrisy or cynical laughter in this scene. One reason for including this tender moment between the men is that it underscores Arthur’s real fear for Gawain and how the agreement will alter the knight’s life and their relationship. Ultimately, with great irony, these fears come true, though not because of Ragnelle’s foulness. As I will show, Ragnelle’s beauty and desirability become the cause for a fundamental shift in the relationship between Arthur and Gawain.

After her end of the bargain is fulfilled and Sir Gromer begrudgingly accepts the answer that Arthur provides, Arthur clearly forgets the very message she shared with him:

No, Lady; that I you hyghte I shalle nott faylle.  
So ye wol be rulyd by my counsell,  
Your wille then shalle ye have.  

In other words, Arthur tells Ragnelle to be ruled by his council, then she might have her desire. That is not how this works, according to Ragnelle, who assumes that Arthur intends for her wedding to be a quiet affair out of the public eye:

Nay, Sir Kyng, nowe wolle I nott soo;  
Openly I wol be weddyd, or I parte the froo  
Elles shame wolle ye have.  

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422 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, lines 503-505.

423 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, lines 506-508.
Ragnelle asserts herself and demands that Arthur concede to her will. He leads her to Carlisle, yet she is the one dictating how events will unfold henceforth. This reversal—along with Arthur’s woe about Gawain’s betrothal—causes him “great shame” and is why he is “grevyd.”

The reversals of expected order begin to overtake the narrative: a woman saves the king, a woman brokers her own seemingly mismatched marriage, a woman tells the king what to do, and the king acquiesces. She furthermore demands a public betrothal upon arriving at Carlisle, so that she might have surety of the promise: “In welle and wo trowithe plyghte us togeder / Before alle thy chivalry.”

Ragnelle is “fayn” (glad) that Gawain pledges to fulfill his promise, and she wishes she were a fair woman to match his “good wylle.” Her gladness results in the court’s sadness, and I turn to the significance of the collective “Alas” that follows this official betrothal after first describing the anxieties around the upcoming wedding and late medieval marital practices.

While Ragnelle’s sotelte is underway well before the wedding ceremony takes place, when she is adorned in her bridal trousseau, the more recognizable aspects of the festal interlude begin to unfold. As before, when Arthur first beholds her, the redundant language (via different forms of foul) may be indicative of the less literary, popular nature of the romance; however, the redundancy iterates how distracting and disarming Ragnelle is. The narrator repeatedly points to Ragnelle’s “foul” appearance, emphasizing the shocking juxtaposition of the finery adorning her body:

She was arayd in the richest maner,

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424 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 515-516.

425 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle lines 528-529.

426 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle lines 536-538.
More fressher than Dame Gaynour;
Her arayment was worthe thre thowsand mark
Of good red nobles, styff and stark,
So rychely she was begon.
For alle her rayment, she bare the belle
Of fowlnesse, that evere I hard telle—
So fowlle a sowe sawe nevere man.\textsuperscript{427}

Though dressed glamorously—even more so than the Queen herself—the narrator calls her a pig (perhaps alluding to Matthew 7:6, “Give not that which is holy unto dogs; neither caste ye your pearls before swine”\textsuperscript{428}). Ragnelle does not fit, yet she feels no shame for it. Ragnelle seems to delight in being herself, and for having those of the courtly community around her be forced to make space for her. The critical eye of the court zeroes in on what is unfit, primarily focusing on her physicality, and there’s no mention of Ragnelle’s redeeming qualities. Ragnelle, to the narrator, is the bellwether of foulness, and any redeeming qualities that she might have do nothing to improve this character portrait.

Clothing has no ameliorating effect on Ragnelle’s ugliness, despite how expensive these adornments are. Ragnelle’s finery supersedes that of Gaynour’s herself, but it is no matter. Nicole Smith’s analysis of dress in medieval France emphasizes the civilizing work that appropriate dress brings to the nobility, and she points to Marie de France’s \textit{lais} as an example of this acculturation:

\begin{quote}
While these instances reinforce the notion that self-presentation is important to nobility in romance, other examples include commentary on chivalric manners and customs. Clothing serves as a method of civilizing is \textit{Bisclavret}, a \textit{lai} in which the eponymous hero changes from a werewolf to a nobleman by dressing himself.\textsuperscript{429}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{427} \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, lines 590-597.

\textsuperscript{428} Matt. 7:6 KJV.

\textsuperscript{429} Nicole Smith, \textit{Sartorial Strategies: Outfitting Aristocrats and Fashioning Conduct in Late Medieval Literature} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 36.
The magical transformation of dress restores Bisclavret to himself. Dressing the part carries no such curative effect for the enchanted Ragnelle, however. Yet, expectations for one of her station are that she dress in finery, and one’s clothing choices are thought to reflect one’s interiority—that apparent disjuncture in Ragnelle becomes a point of friction. Smith points to *Roman de la Rose* to illustrate how one’s fashion is understood to exemplify one’s character and bearing:

> Outfit yourself beautifully, according to your income, in both dress and footwear. Beautiful garments and adornments improve a man a great deal. Therefore you should give your clothes to someone who knows how to do a good tailoring, who will set the seams well and make the sleeves fit properly….Deck yourself out with gloves, a belt, and a silk purse; if you are not rich enough to do so, then restrain yourself. You should, however, maintain yourself as beautifully as you can without ruining yourself.\(^{430}\)

Money likewise is no aid for Ragnelle, and no amount of beautiful garments or adornments seem capable of improving her figure. In fact, such finery on so foul a form only highlights how grotesque she is—the bride Ragnelle is a mockery of what Carlisle expects for a match befitting Gawain.


> Moine toi bel, selone ta rente  
Et de robe et de chaucemente.  
Bel robe et bel garnement  
Amandent home durement,  
Et si doiz ta robe baillier  
A tel qui la sache taillier,  
Qui face bien seanz les pointes  
Et les manches vestanz et cointes.  
…  
De ganz, d’aumoniere de soie  
Et de ceinture te cointoie,  
Et su tu n’ies de la richece,  
Que faire nel puisses, si t’estrece,  
Mes au plus te doiz deduire  
Que tu porras sanz toi destruire.
Gaynour’s “Alas” and Ragnelle’s Spectacle

Ragnelle aspires to be a spectacle—and she succeeds. As a grotesque figure, neither her form nor her social grasping can be contained, and it is this combination of reversal and excess that causes the ladies of the court to experience great disquietude. When discussing martial plans with the queen, Ragnelle specifically directs her attention towards the ladies of the land, desiring that “Alle the ladys note of the lond,” to be informed of the wedding announcement. This broad invitation carries affective significance as well, as it implicates the entire social group in the subsequent emotional reaction. Gaynour’s emotional expression functions as metonymy for the entirety of the emotional community (subgroup) that the courtly ladies comprise, for Gaynour is filled with dismay at Gawain’s steely resolve in the face of this seemingly unavoidable, unfit match. “Alas” cries out Gaynour, then her ladies; followed by an echo of that same “Alas” from Arthur and the knights:

“Alas!” then sayd Dame Gaynour;  
So sayd alle the ladys in her bower,  
And wept for Sir Gawen.  
“Alas!” then sayd bothe Kyng and knyght,  
That ever he should wed suche a wyghte,  
She was so fowlle and horryble.⁴³³

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⁴³¹ The “ladys note” could refer to ladies of note, that is, noblewomen, or the phrase might refer to ladies taking note. Either way, Ragnelle either wants all women to know about and attend her wedding or for all noblewomen to be aware of and in attendance. Three stanzas later, the narrator notes that all of noble rank attend the wedding ceremony, suggesting that the phrase “ladys note” refers more to the ladies of rank; however, that Ragnelle aims to bring women to the “brydale thorowe” suggests a wider audience. Either way, Ragnelle wants to have as many eyewitnesses to her wedding banquet as possible, and she aims to bring as many women together as she can.

⁴³² *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, line 560.

⁴³³ *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, lines 542-547.
Gaynour is the mouthpiece for how the ladies should (and as far as we are concerned, *do*) feel, and this is a commonplace of emotional communities in Middle English romance, particularly popular romance. Firstly, there is not a lot of character depth and individuation in these tales, so one person’s affect tends to express that of the coterie; secondly, the simple, sometimes truncated or abridged (in the case of popular adaptations of courtlier works) narratives rely on the use of collective emotion. Andrew Lynch’s work with Arthuriana suggests a similar framework of feeling coming out of the chronicle tradition of Laȝamon and Geoffrey of Monmouth:

At the bottom line, Arthurian emotions, especially in the chronicle tradition stemming from Geoffrey of Monmouth, are similarly enjoined on the king’s subjects; the extent to which others share them with him is a sign of his strength, the ‘love’ which his subjects bear: if Arthur is your lord, or has made himself so, then you should have the same grounds as him for joy or sorrow, fear what he fears and hope as he hopes, unless you are a traitor who has something radically wrong with you.⁴³⁴

Similarly, Lynch contends, “[u]nity of feeling, rather than sheer possession of land, is what keeps a monarchy operative in Laȝamon,” furthermore arguing that “counter-active and counter-communal emotion in the Arthurian world accompanies and registers an extraordinary personal and political strain, a threat to normal functions of identity and a breaking of fellowship.”⁴³⁵ Such frameworks of shared, unified feeling imbues a great deal of Arthurian literature, particularly as expressed in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. I posit that Gaynour’s emotional expression is representative of those that the entire Arthurian community in this popular romance experiences.


Although popular romance is not known for its exploration of interiority, there are glimpses of the affective underpinnings that drive characters to act and react as they do in this narrative. One such site is Gaynour’s “alas” in reaction to Ragnelle’s insistence for public nuptials. I argue that Gaynour’s simple “alas” is indicative of a deeply rooted anxiety that the entire Arthurian community experiences as they come to terms with Ragnelle’s impending entry into their inner courtly circle. What is more, Gaynour’s feelings are not just her own, though she is the singular voice expressing such emotional experience. Gaynour’s “Alas” is an emotional value judgment, a complex reaction mediated through a simple word that is in turn colored by social codes and customs. The mediating factors of emotion are multifaceted, as Rosenwein describes:

While emotions may be expressed more or less dramatically, they are never pure and unmediated drives or energies. They are always mediated because they are “upheavals of thoughts”—as Nussbaum has put it—that involve judgments about whether something is good or bad for us. These assessments depend, in turn, upon our values, goals, and presuppositions—products of our society, community, and individual experience, mediators all.436

The verbal and somatic representations of an emotional reaction—with that emotional reaction itself being a representation of the sociocultural filters and commonplaces in which and through which emotional norms are created and sustained—comprise the emotional community. In the literary representation thereof, a spokesperson takes on the role of collective emotional assessment and judgment.

The collective anxiety of the Arthurian court in this popular romance as expressed through Gaynour’s voice, moreover, echoes Arthur’s words to Ragnelle before he returns to Carlisle with Ragnelle’s bargain for Gawain:

“Alas!” he sayd; “Nowe woo is me
That I shold cause Gawen to wed the,

Though an affective commonplace, Gaynour’s expression is neither empty nor insincere. Barbara Rosenwein insists that boilerplate can have significance. In other words, Rosenwein contends that commonplace emotion words or affective gestures carry meaning. Rosenwein further explains that just because we come across turns of phrases in genres that seem boilerplate, we mustn’t dismiss them as devoid of “real” feeling. They are not empty symbols. I do not suggest that either Gaynour’s or Arthur’s “Alas” lacks sincerity; rather, I contend that these stock phrases carry myriad emotional possibilities. Taking a cue from Rosenwein, we ought not to gloss over emotional commonplaces.

In the previous chapter I apply the notion of collective emotion to explore the emotives and nonverbal emotional expression of the Saracen emotional community who recoils in abject horror at the sight of Richard’s macabre feast. That their terror and horror runs through all of the diplomats seated at the table is the primary instance of collective emotion, then their retelling (and re-feeling) of their encounter to Saladin and the court is the secondary instance of emotional experience. The audience experiences a kind of tertiary or ancillary emotional spread through the compounded narrative and problematic displays of cunning and treachery from Richard.

Gaynour’s emotives do not function in the manner of spreading from character to audience; rather, her emotions seem much more contained within the narrative. Yet the court’s collective reaction to Ragnelle does function similarly to Thonhauser’s basis of collective appraisal as one

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437 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, lines 303-305.

438 Rosenwein, *Generations*, 9, 42-43; see also Chapter 1 above, especially 47-49.

tenet of collective emotional expression. All who appraise the threat that Ragnelle poses to Carlisle culture come to the same conclusion: “alas.” This collective expression through Gaynour follows the emotion sequence of the court that traces marvel (in terms of shock and awe), lament and woe, engagement (wherein they attempt to dissuade that which threatens), despair (for they are unable to coerce the threat towards different action), sorrow (related to their despair, for they cannot dissuade Ragnelle from public spectacle, nor can they render her appropriate), disgust (her table manners are atrocious), and finally ambivalence (they ignore her).

The emotion sequence develops rapidly from this point, quickly turning to lament and woe, then immediately to the experiences of engagement and acquiescence, to disgust until she finally overwhelms the court with her impropriety, and they turn to ambivalence as if to forget about her. The women first lament Gawain’s plight. They are sad and distraught that he will marry a woman who appears and acts to be his inferior, and Gaynour attempts to convince Ragnelle to marry “pryvaly,” to no avail. Though they resign themselves to Ragnelle’s desires,

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441 Other instances of medieval lament or grief, however, tend to narrate the aggrieved party as overcome with this emotion, and they tend towards wasting away. Consider other texts where this happens: Yvain loses his mind and turns feral in Chretien’s Yvain, ladies waste away to nothing when rebuffed by their would-be beloved (looking at Lancelot), Lancelot loses himself when rejected by Guinevere in countless Arthurian narratives, and Troilus frequently succumbs to numbing, paralyzing grief when navigating his relationship with Criseyde in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer likewise addresses the self-destructive nature of grief in the Book of the Duchess. The Gawain-poet’s treatment of grief in the dream vision Pearl furthermore points to this loss of self, with the grieving father experiencing his own lost child chiding him for falling prey to such self-destructive feelings. In many instances, grief leads to wasting away and a loss of self. This is not the case for those in The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle who experience an emotion sequence similar to that which typically leads to a grief cycle and despair.

442 For Rosenwein’s emotion scripts, see Chapter 1, 48–49 above.

443 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, line 571. Gaynour and the ladies marvel primarily at the betrothal scene, for Gaynour’s “Alas!” follows Gawain’s pledge to Ragnelle, not
once more all grow upset and disgusted yet again that she will be brought into their circle by the
union, but the court bizarrely forgets about Ragnelle, leaving her to her own devices at the feast.

Gaynour’s plaintive interjection begins the court wide expression, but what is this “alas” in
such a context, from such people, at such a time? The Middle English Dictionary provides two
senses of the word, both of which include a sense grief. The first sense is an expression of grief,
pity, shame or apprehension, and the second carries very similar qualities, but it also
encompasses instances in which one’s grief is cause to cry out, “Alas!” Chaucer, for example,
takes the Latin heu from Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy and connects the interjection to
the act of crying. In the Latin, Boethius writes, Carmina qui quondam studio florence peregi, /

Ragnelle’s foul form, to which Arthur and the knights then collectively respond. After the men
cry out “Alas!” the narrator yet again seems to get distracted by Ragnelle’s body, offering a
reminder that Ragnelle is unattractive:

She was so fowlle and horyble.
She had two tethe on every syde
As borys tuskes, I wolde nott hyde,
Of length a large handfulle.
The one tusk went up and the other doun.
A mowthe fulle wyde and fowlle igrown,
With grey herys many on.
Her lyppes laye lumpyd on her chyn;
Nek forsothe on her was none iseen—
She was a lothly on! (Lines 546-556)
The men of Carlisle bemoan Ragnelle’s appearance, whereas the women’s reaction is to the
overall situation. The narrator presents two communities reacting to the same scenario but
expressing emotion from different aspects. This is not to say that both the knights and ladies do
not overlap, with some likely reacting as much to Gawain’s plight as to Ragnelle’s appearance.
Yet the popular romance sets up gendered reactions to the betrothal in this first point of the
emotion sequence. The emotional metonymy at work through “alas” additionally seems
primarily to occur through women’s voices and experiences in this scene of the popular romance,
for directly afterwards the narrator turns once more to how “Alle the ladyes nowe of the lond”
are to be notified of her upcoming nuptials.

444 Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “Alas.”
flebilis heu mastos cogor inire modos. In Chaucer’s Boece, this opening line becomes, “Alas! I wepyng, am constreyned to bygynnen vers of sorwful matere, that whilom in florysschyng studie made delitable ditees.” This is not to say that all medieval conception of “alas” so closely connected to tears, but there is something significant in both Middle English Dictionary entries incorporating the expression of grief into their denotations. However, Chaucer’s reconfiguration of the opening line of Boethius to foreground heu and to construe flebilis [tearful, doleful] as actively weeping is certainly suggestive that the Middle English alas can be read as an emotive for the act.

Before Arthur presents Dame Ragnelle’s offer to Gawain, and king cries out, “Alas!…Nowe woo is me / That I should cause Gawen to wed the, / For he wole be lothe to saye naye.” Arthur’s exclamation is an emotive of his woe, of “his hartt hevy and greatt” that characterizes his emotional state as he reckons with the price that Gawain must pay for Ragnelle’s king-saving wisdom. Arthur’s commentary on his inner turmoil aligns with Rosenwein’s assertion that “the very definition of emotions” is about “appraisals of things affecting me.” Arthur’s woe is situational, and it is dependent upon a number of factors that bring about a negative appraisal. Gawain’s love for Arthur, on the other hand, is unconditional, for he tells Arthur that he will wed

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446 Chaucer, Boece, lines 1-3.

447 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 303-305.

448 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, line 326.

449 Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages, 166.
Ragnelle “att whate tyme ye wolle sett...For your love I wolle note spare.”\textsuperscript{450} Gawain’s love for Arthur supersedes all other emotional states, and it is the embodiment of C. Stephen Jaeger’s notion of ennobling love.\textsuperscript{451} This is a “spiritualized love,” an elite, cultivated “form of aristocratic self-representation.” Jaeger defines the overarching concept of “ennobling love” within five points:

1) “Friendship and love were social ideals of the aristocracy in the Middle Ages;”
2) “Ennobling love is primarily a public experience, only secondarily private;”
3) “It is primarily a way of behaving, only secondarily a way of feeling.”
4) “It is a form of aristocratic self-representation. Its social function is to show forth virtue in lovers, to raise their inner worth, to increase their honor and enhance their reputation. It is, or is seen as, a response to the virtue, charisma, saintliness of the beloved, and must be distinguished from the monastic ideal of communal friendship (caritas), which is given as a social duty to all alike.”
5) “From antiquity until the late eleventh century this ideal of a social elite was restricted to men...”\textsuperscript{452}

The bonds of love between Arthur and Gawain and the shared feelings of woe that all knights in Carlisle map out the emotional community. This is a community of shared care between the nobility, and their actions reveal as much. As I explain above, the ladies of the court likewise show such connections, as illustrated by Guinevere’s “Alas!” The queen speaks to the ways in which Ragnelle will affect Gawain directly and their community generally. Moreover, this

\textsuperscript{450} The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 367, 371.
\textsuperscript{451} Jaeger, Ennobling, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{452} Jaeger, Ennobling, 6. Elsewhere Jaeger pits courtly love against ennobling love, one in the service of romance, that is, the “grand amatory mode,” and the other a “nurturing base in the service of kings” (199-202), and The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle begins to shine light along the cracks and fissures of courtly love and desire: the bonds and love between men hold this court together, but those bonds and love are also already directed in the service of women, so desires are refracted and not always consistent with one another. The romance does not delve any further into the questions that these competing desires begin to present; instead, the narrative chooses to continue to follow codified behavior with little reflection. This is typical of popular romance.
emotional community of noble figures emotes the “alas” from within the walls of their court at Carlisle, a place that is ruled by aesthetic beauty and ideal forms, both physical and figurative. Not only are the courtiers expected to embody the finest physical figures they are able, and to adorn themselves accordingly, they are also to behave as such. This emotional arena calls for the careful cultivation of such beauty. Because emotional arenas pertain to how emotional communities adjudicate their emotional styles depending upon the spaces they inhabit, the performance of “alas” at Carlisle acknowledges the disparity between Ragnelle and their ideal. Both the community and the arena—all of Carlisle—are threatened by Ragnelle’s now official (through the betrothal) and imminent entrée into the court.

**Ragnelle’s Disruption and Late Medieval Marriage Practice**

As I note previously, Ragnelle’s betrothal and preparation for the upcoming wedding causes strife in Carlisle, as the details of Ragnelle’s wishes run counter to those that Gaynour suggests. The narrative sets the foundation for Ragnelle’s sotilte in these encounters that precede the wedding feast, particularly through the use of visual detail and the affective responses that Ragnelle inspires throughout the Arthurian court. As the narrative hurtles towards that spectacle, there are additional details in the connotation of the poet’s diction that further emphasize the wedding feast as the primary social concern regarding the union.

The phrase “brydalle thorowe” is particularly noteworthy: it has been previously glossed as “thoroughly” in multiple twentieth-century editions of this romance, if it is glossed at all, but

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454 Frederic Madden’s 1839 edition of Gawain tales does not provide a note about the phrase at all. Madden offers other interesting tidbits of related terms, particularly “thorowe” as “time, while.” See *A collection of ancient romance-poems, by Scottish and English authors, relating to that celebrated Knight of the Round Table*, introduction, notes, and a glossary by Sir Frederic Madden (London: R. and J.E. Taylor, 1839), 416. Laura Sumner’s edition, with an in-depth
Thomas Hahn contends that the noun comes from an obsolete denotation of Middle English *throw*, meaning “space of time” or “moment, occasion.” The word comes from the Old English terms *þrāh* and *þrāg*, both carrying a similar denotation as the Middle English.

Etymologically, *thorowe* is additionally related to the Old English *stund* and Middle English *stond*, *stounde*, *stound*—all variously denoting an event, season, or space of time. However, it can also mean a sudden attack or shock, related to modern English *astonishment*. Though a less direct etymological connection, the implications for wordplay are rich. This *thorowe* is at once a typical occasion—a wedding feast or reception—but it is a shocking, astonishing attack on all things courteous and polite. The *Oxford English Dictionary* likewise includes an obsolete denotation of “throw,” which tracks with the temporal meaning that Hahn reads here. Modern idiomatic English uses *(to) throw* as a transitive verb with a party or other event as its direct object; Middle English *thorowe* can function as a noun implying feast, banquet, or celebration.

While it may seem more correct to translate “brydalle thorowe” as wedding broadly to encompass the entire rite, Hahn specifically glosses this as a bridal feast. Hahn likely chooses this focus because the wedding banquet of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*

study of language and dialect in the popular romance, glosses “thorowe” adverbially: “thoroughly.” Sumner reads “thorowe” and “thourghe” the same, connecting both of these to the Old English “purh,” which translates the same in modern idiomatic English: through. See *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell*, edited Laura Sumner, Smith College Studies in Modern Language 5, no. 4. (Northampton, Massachusetts: Smith College Departments of Modern Languages), 1924.

455 Hahn, “Notes,” 76. The *Middle English Dictionary* includes many variants of “throw,” with the noun “throu” being the most closely related to temporal usage.


garners the most attention in the narrative, which moreover aligns with the cultural milieu in which this version of the narrative was written down. The wedding feast in late medieval Europe held as much socially legitimizing power as the church-blessed wedding, as Christina Normore argues.\textsuperscript{458} To that end, it is not a stretch for Thomas Hahn to gloss “thorowe” as the banquet, although late medieval marital practices appear to treat the sacral and social facets of the union together.

To read this “thorowe” as a wedding feast and not the ceremony underscores the importance of the feast, and in this case, amplifies Ragnelle’s actions. Considering how much food Ragnelle consumes at the banquet and how little attention the narrator pays to the actual ceremony, Ragnelle’s words here certainly imply that she has the feast in mind, and she wants as many ladies as possible to be spectators at her performance. Ragnelle not only needs social legitimacy, but she also equally needs to be a distasteful spectacle while gaining that official status. Whether she must embody the worst qualities of a dining companion or honored guest remains against her will, or whether she has some agency in the matter remains a puzzle. Regardless, Ragnelle does exhibit agency and concern for the type of nuptial ceremony to honor her, and the wedding feast provides an avenue for the greatest observation. At the feast, the bride is the center of attention, and as Normore contends, “[t]he bride’s performance at the wedding feast was the most scrutinized of all.”\textsuperscript{459} To focus solely on the wedding feast is to focus prominently on Ragnelle, which is precisely what the narrator does by foregrounding the wedding feast.

\textsuperscript{458} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 164-193.

\textsuperscript{459} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 171.
The historical record of medieval marital practice corroborates Ragnelle’s savvy and ability to navigate attempts to delegitimize her union with Gawain. The emphasis on the wedding feast and its publicity is not altogether surprising, when considered within the historical context of late medieval wedding practices. While medieval marriage practice held many of the same traditions we associate with marriage today, Normore stresses that beyond the “sacramental imagery” (rings, vows, spouses shown with hands clasped), “late medieval depictions of marriage become more unfamiliar to modern eyes,” with the emphasis focusing on “the public, festive, and extended nature of marital alliance.”

Historian Conor McCarthy makes the same twenty-first century and fourteenth-century marriage parallels:

…in the case of marriage, a couple getting married in the twenty-first century may do so in a ceremony of consent not dissimilar to that of a fourteenth-century couple. They express consent to marriage to one another, in front of witnesses, perhaps in a religious context. That may even be married in the exact same building. It is more likely that each of the two couples will cohabit, have sexual intercourse, share property, perhaps raise children. But it is ideology which defines the cultural meaning carried by these various actions. How the two couples conceive of marriage as a social institution is likely to differ enormously.

Georges Duby’s work with medieval history and art likewise outlines a similar framework of medieval marriage practices, with two parts of the union comprising of “public words and gestures.”

Firstly, the marriage itself, “a ritual of faith and pledge, verbal promises,” the ring; secondly, the wedding, “which was the ritual of the couple setting up house,” wherein “the married couple’s first meal was inevitably a great banquet.” Normore stresses the significance

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of the wedding feast, exploring the similar ideological framework of both modern and medieval marriage practices:

The most common and elaborate marriage feasts followed the exchange of vows, the direct ancestor of the modern wedding banquet. This banquet was a traditional site to announce one’s marriage in a highly public and memorable way, making witnesses of the gathered family, friends, and colleagues whose attendance proved their acceptance of the new couple’s validity. Since the vows were made prior to the meal and often in a different location, participation in the feast in and of itself was no real legal proof that the marriage had actually taken place: a witness to the banquet was not necessarily a witness of the vows. Yet a connection between the two forms of witnessing continued to be made, and attendance at the wedding banquet could be cited in testimony proving that a marriage had been concluded….\textsuperscript{464}

While the banquet itself is not proof of the actual ceremony, a ceremony without any sort of celebration or public recognition casts doubt on the legitimacy of that union. Normore’s reading here of medieval marriage practices is accurate, but she minimizes the power of public recognition, though she later acknowledges the problems of clandestine marriages. In \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, Ragnelle balks at Guinevere’s suggestion of a private ceremony because she knows the doubt that attends such clandestine unions. Ragnelle’s insistence for a well-attended (or at least well publicized) celebration is a the “practical standpoint” that Normore describes: “the validity of any marriage as a legal and social entity required public recognition.”\textsuperscript{465} Although Ragnelle knows that Arthur and Gawain both agree to

\textsuperscript{464} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 171.

\textsuperscript{465} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 167. Normore further notes that “[p]riests might bless the event, and family and friends witness it, but these elements were not required from a theological point of view (167). Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, for instance, speaks with marital authority of her five husbands at church door, emphasizing the proximity of the unions to the church as theologically sound marriages: “Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve.” (See line 6.) Her church door wedding was fancy and conspicuous enough, so this noble union in \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle} (similarly fictional, of course) might easily occur within a sacred space and be celebrated publicly.
this marriage and that they insist their word is true, Ragnelle knows that this otherwise
theologically litigated marriage would be true within the eyes of God, socially, it might not be
so:

Litigated clandestine marriages included marriages actually carried out with the blessings of
a priest but not publicized in the larger community to which the spouses belonged…. While a
clandestine marriage was in principle as binding as any other, in reality it was extremely
difficult to prove and thus to maintain. Religious ritual and theological support were not
sufficient; a couple also needed public acceptance and several reliable witnesses to defend
the sanctity of their union.466

Ragnelle and Gawain are married in a church, but that portion of the narrative is knit in “shortt
conclusion;”467 however, the narrator does note that this ceremony is well-attended: “She made
her redy fo churche to fare / And alle the states that there ware.”468 The significant action follows
the church ceremony, and this tracks with the historical record.

Many medieval literary texts explore concerns of the public credibility of marriage; for
instance, Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale illustrates not only the transformation of Griselda from country
bumpkin into queenly figure, but it celebrates the union openly. Walter has fine jewelry and
clothing prepared for Griselda “That unto swich a weddyng sholde falle,”469

The time of undren of the same day
Approcheth, that this weddyng sholde be,
And al the paleys put was in array,
Bothe halle and chambres, ech in his degree;
Houses of office stuffed with plente
Ther maystow seen, of deyntevous vitaille
That may be founde as fer as last Ytaille.
This roial markys, richely arrayed,

466 Normore, A Feast, 168.

467 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, line 598.

468 The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, lines 587-588.

469 Chaucer, The Clerk’s Tale, line 259.
Unlike Ragnelle, for whom wedding finery has no effect, Griselda is wholly transformed:

Of hire array what sholde I make a tale?
Unnethe the peple hir knew for hire fairnesse
Whan she translated was in swich richesse.\(^{471}\)

Through a physical transformation (and translation from village to court), Griselda is then prepared for the legitimate union with Walter. She is met with joy and revelry:

With joyful peple that hire ladde and mette,
Conveyed hire; and thus the day they spende
In revel, til the sonne gan descende.\(^{472}\)

This fairly short account details Griselda’s wedding finery, the manner in which Griselda is arrayed, her joyous entry from village to court, the rich foods readied for the celebration, and the joyous tenor of the court preceding and following the union.

Publicity lends marital unions credibility, and with widespread public knowledge, Ragnelle knows that neither can Gawain recant his vow nor the Arthurian court dispute the legitimacy of the marriage. What appears simply as a greedy desire for public fame and to stoke envy in her peers is actually a calculated and clever attempt to secure her newfound rank. Consider Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Tale, which depicts much the same narrative as *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*:

\(^{470}\) Chaucer, *The Clerk’s Tale*, lines 260-273.

\(^{471}\) Chaucer, *The Clerk’s Tale*, lines 383-385.

\(^{472}\) Chaucer, *The Clerk’s Tale*, lines 390-392.
Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,
That for my necligence I do no cure
To tellen yow the joye and al th' array
That at the feeste was that ilke day.
To which thyng shortly answeren I shal:
I seye ther nas no joye ne feeste at al;
Ther nas but hevynesse and muche sorwe.
For prively he wedded hire on morwe,
And al day after hidde hym as an owle,
So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule.\textsuperscript{473}

The Wife of Bath does not describe the bridal “thorowe,” and her lack of detail obscures the union even from the audience. The Wife of Bath does, however, illustrate the expected affective tenor of such an occasion: “joye” and the celebratory feelings associated with feasting. The glossary of \textit{The Riverside Chaucer} includes this usage from \textit{The Wife of Bath ’s Tale} under the meaning feasting, entertainment, yet the \textit{Middle English Dictionary} associates the spelling “feest(e)” with a clenched fist or the act of holding something tight or fast.\textsuperscript{474} The context of this “feeste” is indicative of the bridal feast, yet the nod to things such as tying things together or binding is a subtle allusion to the clasping of hands or hand-fasting rituals that are part of the wedding rites. The homophone of course also recalls the festal, which refers to church- and state-sanctioned public festivities that would involve the greater community. The cluster of meanings bringing together matters of marriage, feasting, celebration, and binding connotations further solidifies the affective underpinning of the wedding feast. One curious connotation of the “fēste” correlates the term to joy: “rejoicing, joy; maken feste, make merry.”\textsuperscript{475} Additionally, a further denotation means to “treat (someone) with due ceremony or respect, treat respectfully or in

\textsuperscript{473} Chaucer, \textit{The Wife of Bath ’s Tale}, lines 1073-1082.

\textsuperscript{474} \textit{Middle English Dictionary}, s.v. “Fēst.”

\textsuperscript{475} \textit{Middle English Dictionary}, s.v. “Fēste.”
friendly fashion; pay homage, show respect, pay compliments.” Here the lack of publicity signals a lack of joy, and a lack of joy signals a lack of publicity. Likewise, there is implication of disrespect and unfriendliness that underpins the usage of “feeste.”

Generally clandestine marriage was an accepted practice, though not necessarily ideal; however, there are a number of thirteenth-century legal examples that prohibit the practice. For example, 1 Salisbury 85:

Concerning clandestine marriages.
We similarly prohibit clandestine marriages, ordering that they shall be made in public in front of the church, in the presence of a priest who has been called for this purpose. If it has actually been done otherwise, it is not to be approved, except by our special authority. A priest who has refused to prevent unions of such a kind or who has presumed to be present at such, or any other person subject to a rule, according to the statues of the council is suspended from office for three years, and must are more harshly punished if the size of the fault demands it. But a suitable penance must be demanded of those who have presumed to couple in this manner, even in the permitted grades.

Consent and witness are strong concerns of those who controlled marriage in the Middle Ages, with the latter issue including both sacral and social valances. At its core, however, marriage comes down to “the consent of the persons to be married which created the marital bond,” and to “Church canonists of the central Middle Ages…[it] was not necessary for a public ceremony to be held, or for their families to consent,” even though the Church deemed them ideal.

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476 *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “Fēste.”

477 De clandestinis matrimoniiis.

Michael M. Sheehan’s analysis of historical documents of medieval marital legislation offers a granular portrait of the theological concerns regarding marriage practices in the Middle Ages. Sheehan explains that the requisite “priestly blessing” was a concern appearing in the historical record as early as 1076, wherein Lanfranc’s Winchester council of 1076 decreed that the marriage bond necessitated a priestly blessing, and the absence thereof would nullify the marriage. In the next century, the matter of publicity reappeared multiple times: first in the Council of Westminster (1102), and later in the Provincial Council of Canterbury at Westminster (1175), “secret marriage” was forbidden. Anxieties around covert, secret, or hidden unions arose from both theological and lay sources, and the Church frequently aligned with secular model. As a means of prohibiting, or at least curtailing, clandestine marriage, “[t]he betrothed were not allowed to marry until their intention to do so had been published and there had been opportunity for a wider public than those present at their engagement to object to the proposed union.” This announcement would be public. Regulation of marriage announcements first sought to ensure publicity by reinforcing secular prohibitions of clandestine marriage, forbidding the priest to be present at such a union; second, the possibility of discovering

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480 Sheehan “Marriage Theory” 410. In the case of the 1102 decision, Sheehan notes, “promise to marry made without witnesses were to be considered null if either party denied them.” See Concilia Magnae Britanniæ et Hiberniæ, edited David Wilkins, 4 volumes (London, 1737), 1.383.


482 Sheehan, “Marriage Theory,” 432.
impediments was enhanced in widening the circle of those who would be informed of the couple’s intention to marry by the priests’ publication of the fact in churches. Interestingly, while the regulation of marriage regarding repeated announcement of betrothal, prohibition of clandestine marriage, and requisite priestly blessing sought to give the wider public time and space to challenge the upcoming union, no such option seems available to the Arthurian court in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. Perhaps this lack is owing to Ragnelle’s service to Arthur, but the court seems only able to dispute the marriage by way of feeling. Without explicit verbal challenge, the court consents to that which Arthur, Gawain, and Ragnelle have already brokered.

Normore and Ribordy echo this concern for witness and consent, and they point to public betrothal and celebration of nuptials as a safeguard against questions of lacking consent. Normore describes the great importance on participation in wedding celebration as an indicator of consent from all parties, noting that “[p]articipation and the display of consent in wedding banquets were not limited to, or even primarily focused on, the invited guests;” in fact, Normore points to Geneviève Ribordy’s study of marital litigation among the French nobility to note that full participation in festivities would “attest to the consent of the new bride participating joyfully in the celebration.” Wedding feasts, then, carry legitimizing power.

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McCarthy further troubles the questions of public consent and celebration regarding marital union, explaining that “the consensual theory of marriage” necessitated “only an exchange of consent between parties for a marriage to be valid,” which therefore could be “seen as conferring legitimacy upon privately contracted unions that ignore the ecclesiastical regulations with regard to contracting in front of the church, in the presence of a priest…."\textsuperscript{486} As such, consent alone does not mean a marriage is legitimate, and in the case of \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, Ragnelle deftly addresses such concerns by insisting that the steps leading to her wedding to Gawain be made into a spectacle at every turn. Aside from the initial presentation of her terms to Arthur, every aspect of the wedding brokerage and the ceremony itself is witnessed.

Following the private terms that Ragnelle presents in the forest to Arthur, she manages to broker not only verbal agreements with both Arthur and Gawain (with Arthur proxying for Gawain’s affirmation), but she also successfully negotiates an official betrothal at court. Shortly after her arrival at Carlisle, there is a public betrothal:


downquote\begin{verbatim}
“That I may nowe be made sekyr.
In welle and wo truite plyphte us togeder
Before alle thy chyvalry.
This is your graunt; lett se, have done.
Sett forthe Sir Gawen, my love, anon,
For lenger tarying kepe nott I.”
Then cam forthe Sir Gawen the knyght:
“Syr, I am redy of that I you hyghte,
Alle forwarde to fulfylle.”
“God have mercy!” sayd Dame Ragnelle then;
“For thy sake I wold I were a fayre woman,
For thou art of so good wylle.”
Ther Sir Gawen to her his trowthe plyphte
In welle and in woo, as he was a true knyght;
Then was Dame Ragnelle fayn.\textsuperscript{487}
downquote

\textsuperscript{486} McCarthy, \textit{Marriage}, 28.

\textsuperscript{487} \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, lines 527-541.
It is tucked away and seems to happen immediately before the marriage, but there is actually an unspecified duration of time built into the narrative. This means that Ragnelle is at court for a while before being officially brought into their circle via marriage, but we know nothing of her behavior or their reception of her. This is part of what causes Guinevere to balk, initially saying she “agrees” with Ragnelle’s wishes, adding a “but…” and insisting that her suggestions are merely to guarantee the highest honors for Ragnelle.

Unfortunately, the popular romance does not offer a glimpse of Ragnelle’s thought processes, so we may appreciate her savvy only in hindsight. Still, everything she does leading up to the wedding makes sense within the historical milieu. She sets things into motion to reverse her curse, or at the very least to mitigate its effects, but her behavior at the wedding feast runs counter to her seeming control. This scene is the only one in which Ragnelle does not appear to be in control of her actions. She cannot control her appearance, but she can be very particular about what her body does, particularly in terms of her movement and speech. This echoes how the romance calls into question Ragnelle’s innate goodness (or badness), as I have discussed above.

**Ragnelle as “merveille” at the Wedding Feast**

The onset of the feast in this popular romance signals the first official event wherein Ragnelle is a full-fledged part of the community. The wedding feast celebrates Ragnelle’s worst attributes. Her presence is no longer a threat but is a matter of fact, yet they are unable and unwilling to accept this as fact, and the feast-goers simultaneously ignore and gawk at Ragnelle. Herein lies the *sotilte*, as well as avenues for commentary on their failures. This depiction of a literary feast is curious for its great level of detail. Usual feast descriptions emphasize the same point: at the feast was plenty; all were pleased.
For example, Froissart’s Chronicle of the Grand Tournament in London inspired by Queen Isabella’s joyous entry into Paris in 1390 emphasizes the tournament above all else, but Froissart is clearly interested in the festal, which encompasses the tournament, games, feasting, and other codified activities of the social elite. Of the feast, Froissart is vague, and he only mentions that the feasts occurred during this event: “imitation of [the Parisian celebration], the king of England ordered grand tournaments and feasts to be held in the city of London, where sixty knights should be accompanied by sixty noble ladies, richly ornamented and dressed.”

Froissart is far more concerned with the grandeur and visual aesthetics of this opening gathering of the Grand Tournament. Writing about civic festes in the Low Countries and Northern France, Juliet Vale contends that in the historical records for festes staged in Ghent, Lille, Douai, and Bruges, the typical order of events included “one or two days’ jousting” and potentially “feasting, dancing, religious services and processions.” These Continental events follow closely Froissart’s record of the English celebrations. Aside from the visual splendor and martial play at the Grand Tournament, Froissart stresses the diplomatic potential of such an event:

On the Tuesday, the tournaments were to be continued by squires, against others of the same rank who wished to oppose them. The prize for the opponents was a courser saddled and bridled, and for the tenants of the lists a falcon. The manner of holding this feast being settled, heralds were sent to proclaim it throughout England, Scotland, Hainault, Germany, Flanders, and France.

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488 Froissart, Chronicles, pp. 478 ff.


490 Vale, Edward III, 25.
The food is not the interest—feats of arms and occasions to prove one’s mettle are of much greater concern. This blending of tourneys, dancing, other visual entertainments, eating, and diplomacy all coalesce into the festival.

Similarly, John Paston (the Son) writes to his mother of the marriage between Charles the Bold and Margaret of York in Burgundy in 1468:

As for tydyngs her, but if it be of the fest, I can non send yow; savyng my Lady Margaret was maryd on Sunday last past, at a towne that is callyd the Dame, iiij. myle owt of Brugys, at v. of the clok in the mornyng; and sche was browt the same day to Bruggys to hyr dener; and ther sche was receyvyd as worchepfully as all the world cowd devyse, as with presession with ladys and lordys, best beseyn of eny pepyll, that ever I sye or herd of. Many pagentys wer played in hyr wey in Bryggys to hyr welcomyng, the best that ever I sye.491

Of the whole affair, John tells his mother, “as of lords, ladys and gentylwomen, knyts, sqwyers, and gentylmen, I hert never of non lyek to it, save Kyng Artourys cort. And by my trowthe, I have no wyt nor remembrans to wryte to yow.”492

Food-focused descriptions aren’t rare, though they typically fall outside the realm of chronicle and romance. Genres such as conduct manuals or even grammatical treatises493 tend to

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492 “John Paston,” 318. Of this experience, Rosenwein explains, “For example, in the fifteenth century, when one member of the restrained and reserved English Paston family visited the exuberant court of Burgundy, he was much amused. But he did not become part of that very different emotional community.” See Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What*, 40. I agree with Rosenwein’s assessment—John Paston is not a part of the Burgundian emotional community, for he is but a visitor. Of spaces and places, Rosenwein initially treated neighborhoods or parish churches to be emotional communities, but she has since refined her take: “she came to treat them as shared spaces that helped reveal the characteristics of a given group” (Rosenwein and Cristiani *What* 40). That being said, however, he takes part in the festivities and is moved by the pageantry and entremets that unfold around him. What is more, Paston’s letter to his mother invokes a particular kind of community, the literary Arthurian community—the very emotional community at the heart of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*.

493 Alexander Neckam’s twelfth-century Latin grammatical treatise *De nominibus utensilium*, for example, includes both a list of items that one might expect to find in a kitchen and pantry as
include far greater detail on specific foodstuffs, their preparation, and the ordering of feasts, probably in large part due to their utility value. *Le Ménagier de Paris*, for instance, includes not only an appendix of recipes but also a wealth of information on procuring such ingredients and, most importantly, records of the dishes served forth at three feasts. Of Monseigneur de Lagny’s fish-day feast, the author of *Le Ménagier de Paris* notes that first, the “preparation of tablecloths, tableware and crockery, [and] decorative greenery” is to be undertaken, and “ewers and footed hanaps, two comfit dishes, silver saltcellars, two-day old bread, crust removed, used as individual trenchers.” One guest at this dinner, the Monseigneur de Paris, is served by his own squires and is “served separately in covered dishes.” This particular feast is noteworthy, as it departs from the norm—guests do not share platters of each course here; rather, there is a sense of dining privately while together. The dinner includes an opening course of wine, fruit, and biscuits followed by a second course of many pottages—the author includes a succinct list of ingredients for these, a number of saltwater fish, entremets of plaice and lamprey in boue, then


497 Greco and Rose suggest that this is a precaution against poisoning, but they provide no further explanation.

498 The author includes detailed instructions for preparing lamprey, as well as a lengthy explanation of the “boue sauce”: ground ginger, cinnamon, long pepper, grain of paradise,
the second course, and the author provides a note for the servers or host that “fresh napkins and 16 oranges are appropriate here.” The second course includes an elaborate fish roast of “porpoise in its sauce, mackerel, sole, bream, shad with cameline sauce or verjuice, rice topped with fried almonds; one pound sugar for the rice and oranges.” The dessert mixes elements of cooked and fresh fruits as well as soft and crunchy textures in a compote topped with white and red comfits. Following dessert, guests enjoy still more wine and spices, along with small snacks, before they retire to the drawing room while their servants then eat. This dinner is not particularly elaborate, nor or is a well-attended state affair dictated by degrees of diplomacy; however, even a fairly private affair includes an understood and expected order, as this dinner illustrates. Another aspect of this food-centric description is that the author depicts neither the interpersonal communication or relationships at play nor the affective dimensions of the guests’ reactions to the dishes served forth. It is simply a receipt of the dinner with some colorful commentary on the excessive wine that the host serves his guests.

In addition to this meal, the author describes a wedding feast to be held on a Tuesday in May for “just twenty platters”—that is, for forty guests. The platter for the roast includes “a quartered kid (a section of kid is better than lamb), a gosling, two spring chickens and sauces for nutmeg mixed with ground toasted bread and vinegar, then the mixture is strained. The sauce is poured over the lamprey as they finish cooking, and it tempers the vinegar flavor. See recipe 185 in The Good Wife’s Guide / Le Ménagier de Paris, 304.


these: orange, cameline, verjuice.” The author also provides *entremets* for this wedding feast: “aspic of crayfish, loach, young rabbits, and pig.” Sadly there is no description of the appearance of this aspic nor its presentation to the wedding celebrants, though follows the roast portion in the order of dishes. A supper for this same day for half as many guests includes the same *entremet*, which suggests either that jelly is more of an *amuse-bouche*-style dish rather than a large display piece for the guests to dismantle as they consume. The leftover jelly would not carry the same marvel and entertainment at the supper following its initial debut if it weren’t something that could be presented once more with delight. The *entremet* and dessert are to precede “Dancing, singing, wine and spices, and torches for lighting,” and here the author finally alludes to tenor of the celebration—this wedding feast is not expected to be a somber affair; rather, baked into the agenda are expressions of joy, mirth, and togetherness.

Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* similarly includes instances of food detail, though not to the degree of *Le Ménagier de Paris*. In fact, the whole of the tale-telling enterprise spurs from the promise of a meal for the best tale at the Host’s, Harry Bailly’s, Tabard Inn. While food is not a consistent explicit theme throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, the General Prologue includes two character sketches that revolve around food: the Cook and the Franklin.


Chaucer’s Cook is not a man concerned with participating within the *habitus* of the upper classes; rather, he is much more of a utility figure for making the whims of the rich go off without a hitch. The Cook’s succinct portrait in the *General Prologue* touts his ability—in addition to mentioning a troubling malady:

To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.
Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale.
He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.  

Despite his knowledge of cooking methods and appropriate application of spices, the Cook’s “mormal”—an open wound—on his leg is disconcerting, and it quite spoils his top-tier blancmange. The Cook’s skin lesion further illustrates that the juxtaposition of food and malady is not uncommon in medieval literature.  

This thematic convergence is not surprising, for the materiality of foodstuffs and the body both pertain to something ever-changing, in flux, and ever working against entropy. Like Ragnelle, though to a far lesser degree, the Cook is characterized by perceptible physical defect that stands in stark contrast to whatever positive addition his cookery skills might bring to the table. Chaucer does not illustrate the Cook at work within his element—the kitchen; rather, he focuses on kitchen labor and related skills.

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508 Consider also the episode of the Fisher King in various Arthurian narratives featuring a king with a grievous injury to his thigh or groin, and in Chrétien de Troyes’s versions of the tale, the Fisher King is a protector of the Holy Grail and reveals some knowledge of the item’s whereabouts preceding the serving of a feast, parading various items through the hall as a sort of sacred *sortile* for Perceval. See Chrétien de Troyes, *The Story of the Grail*, in *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances*, translated and edited by William W. Kibler (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 419-22.
Chaucer’s Franklin, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the power that food and largesse carries, as his food-minded, table-centered characterization attests. His description in the General Prologue further illustrates the manner by which one might ascend socially through food and companionship:

A FRANKELEYN was in his compaignye. 
Whit was his berd as is the dayesye; 
Of his complexioun he was sangwyn. 
Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn; 
To lyven in delit was evere his gone, 
For he was Epicurus owene sone, 
That heeld opioun that pleyn delit 
Was verry felicitee parfit. 
An housholdere, and that a greet, was he; 
Seint Julian he was in his contree. 
His breed, his ale, was alweys after oon; 
A bettre envyned man was nowher noon. 
Withoute bake mete was nevere his hous, 
Of fissh and flessh, and that so plenteous 
It sneved in his hous of mete and drynke; 
Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke, 
After the sondry sesons of the yeer, 
So chaunged he his mete and his soper. 
Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe, 
And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe. 
Wo was his cook but if his sauce were 
Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his geere. 
His table dormant in his halle alway 
Stood redy covered al the longe day.\(^\text{509}\)

Chaucer says much about the great quantity, quality, and variety of the foods that grace the Franklin’s table without mentioning a particular dish (save the preferred general breakfast of “a sop in wyn”). The description of the Franklin’s table actually far exceeds description in many literary or historical works; even so, the lack of specificity remains in keeping with usual feast-tropes.

\(^\text{509}\) Chaucer, The General Prologue, lines 331-354.
Instances wherein the food is described in great detail are a detour from the norm, and they signify something defective in the character, situation, or the storyteller, as seen with Chaucer’s Squire’s effusive depiction of a feast and its marvels. Recall Cambyuskan’s feast from Chapter 1, wherein the young man proclaims, “I won nat tellen of hir strange sewes… / Ther nays no man that may reporten al,” yet proceeds to provide very specific feast details.\textsuperscript{510} The Squire is youth personified, and his detail-oriented tale belies its narrative deficiencies, but he is also trying his hand at the use of litotes to embellish the audience’s imagination. That being said, even this level of feast-detail in either historical or literary narrative signifies something out of the ordinary. \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle} amplifies the feast details even further, highlighting the absurdity of the situation.

The narrator of \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle} takes the normal details of feasts to excess, noting how Ragnelle eats, what she eats, and how much she consumes:

\begin{quote}
When the servyce cam her before,  
She ete as moche as six that ther wore;  
That mervaylyd many a man.  
Her nayles were long ynychys thre,  
Therwith she breke her mete ungoodly;  
Therfore she ete alone.\textsuperscript{511}
\end{quote}

The narrator’s use of passive voice to describe the movement of the dishes parallels Ragnelle’s own involuntary voracity, and her apparent inability to act any differently. Any food that comes near her claws is drawn to her, and Ragnelle is boundless—what should serve three pairs of dining companions serves one. Her appetite is a marvel to those around her, and it is likewise a disgusting display that causes them to abandon her to her own devices. That “she ete alone”

\textsuperscript{510} Chaucer, \textit{The Squire’s Tale}, lines 69, 72. Also see Chapter 1, 19-20.  
\textsuperscript{511} \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, lines 604-609.
because of her rapacity is the most profound departure from the typical order of operations. This succinct but dense description of Ragnelle’s many missteps also serves to illustrate the ideal feast in sharp relief: when working properly, this shared space is filled with a constant flow of movement and jocundity.

Similarly, the narrator repeatedly emphasizes the marvel of Ragnelle: “Al men thereof had mervaille.”

In this short statement, along with the prior statement that her hunger “mervaylyd many a man,” the narrator emphasizes how strongly Ragnelle’s fellow celebrants gaze upon her. Ragnelle’s ability to stop the order of the service simply by her eating habits alludes to the placement and function of the Middle English *sotilte*: these interludes would fall between courses, signaling change and serving as entertainment as the next course was brought to table.

Three times the narrator mentions specifically their eyes upon her: twice with “all men” and once speaking of “Bothe knyght and squyre.” The collective astonishment is strong, and the curious choice of mentioning eyes upon her three times furthermore connects Ragnelle’s performant to the *sotilte*, for many upper-crust feasts included three courses (of many dishes each), with the interlude falling after each of these. Ragnelle visually interrupts and disrupts other sensory experiences of this wedding feast.

Because she is “fulle foulle” in appearance and deed, Ragnelle is the embodiment of anti-courtesy and disgust at the feast table. Her morals and agency come into question through her poor behavior, and Normore makes an explicit connection between one’s bearing and one’s

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512 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, line 612.

513 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, line 606.

514 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, line 616; 617.
ethics, further bringing emotions into the mix: “Manners and morals were united by the fact that both required a high degree of personal training and control were meant to create regulated subjects. Proper etiquette likewise slipped easily into the realm of beliefs and emotions.”⁵¹⁵ Sue Neibrzydowski rightly argues that “Dame Ragnell’s monstrous consumption renders her wedding banquet a parody of a courtly feast,” and “those present can only look on with horrified fascination.”⁵¹⁶ Bynum speaks of the emotional multivalence of wonder, particularly the “wonder-response” and “wonder-reaction” that people have to that which astonishes.⁵¹⁷ She argues that “the complex semantic fields for ‘wonder’ and ‘the wonderful’ suggests that the wonder-reaction ranges from terror and disgust to solemn astonishment and playful delight. Wonder often has a mischievous quality in medieval accounts.”⁵¹⁸ Miller speaks to this, as well, asserting that “Disgust makes beauty and ugliness a matter of morals.”⁵¹⁹ Being disgusted and doing that work of condemnation leaves the disgusted also affected: even as expressing disgust “constitutes an assertion of superiority,” it also comes at a cost to the disgusted, in that the “moral work” of disgust does not grant “unambiguous pleasure.”⁵²⁰ Disgust, in Miller’s

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⁵¹⁵ Normore, A Feast, 129.


⁵²⁰ Miller, Anatomy, 204.
figuration, divides and separates.\textsuperscript{521} In The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, disgust is the sticky feeling associated with the wonder of the marvel (to borrow and grossly oversimplify Sara Ahmed’s notion of an emotional experience that one cannot shake). Williams describes a framework of wonder as something which “can be an emotion, a way of seeing, or a mode of engagement; it can be a reaction to objects or events that are aesthetic, natural, or supernatural.”\textsuperscript{522}

John Lydgate’s “Dietary,” a fifteenth-century poem admonishing readers to practice moderation in all things, emphasizes self-control and personal will, and the poem offers insight into Ragnelle’s behavior and the perceptions thereof. The poem illustrates the mind-body relationship by way of the household, primarily in terms of eating and also through one’s comportment in interpersonal relationships. Of Lydgate’s “Dietary,” Claire Sponsler argues that the poem aspires to inspire its readers “to preserve health by protecting the body and, to a lesser extent, the soul. And its focus is on the individual body, understood as an engine of consumption—not just of food, but also of emotions, thoughts, other personal activities, and even social relations.”\textsuperscript{523} In addition to providing an series of behaviors to eschew, “Dietary” offers corresponding affects to cultivate. “If so be that lechys do thee fayll,” Lydgate recommends temperate diet, temperate work, and above all else, a cheerful disposition.\textsuperscript{524}

\textsuperscript{521} Miller, Anatomy, 96; 140.

\textsuperscript{522} Williams, Middle, 12.


Lydgate’s poem offers a glimpse into the behavior expected from adults, with continual return to temperance and restraint, advising readers in the first stanza to:

> Drynke holsom drynke, fede thee on lyght brede,
> And with apytye ryse fro thi mete also.\(^{525}\)

Then, after much repetitious variation on the theme, Lydgate reminds the readers yet again in the final stanza that moderation removes all excess:

> Thus in two thyngys stondys thi welthe
> Of saule and of body, who lyst them serve:
> Moderate fode gyffès to man hys helthe,
> And all surfytys do fro hym remeve.\(^{526}\)

> ... Curtas of langage, of fedyng meserable,
> Of sondry metys not gredy at thy tabull,
> In fedyng gentyll, prudent in dalyens...\(^{527}\)

While Ragnelle grossly violates most of Lydgate’s precepts, particularly in her voracity, she does follow his advice to:

> Not malas for non adversyté,
> Meke in trubull, glad in poverté,
> Riche with lytell, content with suffyciens...\(^{528}\)

Ragnelle never complains about her state; she instead works to reverse the charm her stepmother has placed upon her by seeking out the remedy through marriage to Gawain. The disjuncture between her apparent self-control in this arena versus her lack of any control when it comes to

\(^{525}\) Lydgate, “Dietary,” lines 3-4.

\(^{526}\) Lydgate, “Dietary,” lines 73-76.

\(^{527}\) Lydgate, “Dietary,” lines 20-22.

\(^{528}\) Lydgate, “Dietary,” lines 12-14.
appearance and alimentary behavior causes confusion, and this confluence presents the platform for her uncouth *sotilte*.

Much like Lydgate’s push for restraint, Mark Addison Amos’s reading of *The Book of Courtesy* sees the poem asking “its readers to address the ways others perceive them, yet in its addition of the moral discourse of virtue and vice it interrogates the distinction between sign and essence.”529 *The Book of Courtesy*, Amos argues, suggests that an unmannerly disposition disposes one to vice:

> For that is a token of wantoun inconstance  
> Whiche wil appeyre your name & disauance  
> The wise man saith who hath these thingis thre  
> Is not lyke a good man for to be . . .  
> These ben þe signes / the wiseman seith sicherly  
> Of such a wight / as is vnmannerly nyce  
> And is ful likely disposid vnto vyce.530

More than simply being seen as *predisposed* to such bad actions, Amos argues, suggests the inverse: “the tactical warning—behaving churlishly makes one a churl—and its hopeful converse—behaving nobly can make one noble: one’s manners (or any program of behavior) can lead to a fundamental inner transformation.”531 In other words, to choose to behave badly or to give into vice is to eschew virtue; it is to remove any inner virtue from oneself. It’s more than simply illustrating that one is *disposed* to vice; one *is* vice embodied. However, one can choose to change and to inculcate goodness by deliberately acting in a virtuous manner.

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530 *The Book of Courtesy*, 110.

531 Amos, “For Manners,” 45.
In both Lydgate’s “Dietary” and *The Book of Courtesy*, readers are urged towards self-control as a means of salvation and social acceptance, but Ragnelle’s *sotilte* disregards the kind of restraint and decorum that these poems propose, instead turning these precepts upside-down in a burlesque of manners. By expressing neither discernment nor exhibiting self-control, Ragnelle casts aside social expectation and the inner structures thereof at the wedding banquet. As Sponsler notes, “Historians of food have demonstrated that in medieval Europe, diet was socially stratified, with meat, fish, wines, and spices consumed by the wealthy, grains and ale by the poorer people. In other words, food consumption was coded for status.” While such a reminder might seem obvious, bearing in mind that every aspect of food and its consumption was coded in medieval Europe very much informs this wedding banquet as well as Ragnelle’s unplanned entertainment. Such utter disregard for a stratified diet—itself a microcosm of the stratified society in which these dishes appear—is indicative of the paradox that Ragnelle embodies. This liminal status—at once a newly-raised noblewoman and at once a fallen figure—makes it difficult for the court to interact with Ragnelle in the usual manner. That is, they struggle to welcome and honor her at the wedding feast, they are unable to share pleasantries with her, and they are most certainly unable to revel in her great beauty (altogether absent) or any other redeemable character trait.

Like the threat of endless consumption and the annihilation that Richard poses to the Saracens in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Ragnelle, too, figures as a vortex that might devour all around her—literally and figuratively. The threat of her assimilating them (rather than Ragnelle assimilating to their court culture and affecting their habits to the best of her limited ability)

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within her grotesque body causes distress amidst the court. The most logical way, given the circumstance and context, is for Ragnelle to be set aside as the *sotilte*. As a marvel, she is tolerated, and she is something to be endured for the duration of the event. By the framework of the *sotilte* and feast, the court can treat Ragnelle’s grotesque presence as something ephemeral.

The group at Camelot continues to be captivated by Ragnelle in the worst sense of the word. Mary Leech goes so far as to say that “the courtiers recognize that she does not belong, but they have no power to reject her,”\(^5\) which is true, but that also oversimplifies what’s happening in this text. The way that they continued to be captivated by and interact with Ragnelle is completely legible within the framework of the feast, and that’s why I read her as the *sotilte*, and some of her power arises not only from her union with Gawain, but also because she is performance art. Even as they might want to distance themselves, they can’t fully do so because she has become a part of the very social fabric not only by way of marriage but also by way of being an intrinsic part of the festal.

Ragnelle’s blurred status as both an insider and an outsider spreads throughout the meal. Political theorist Jane Bennett’s concept of “thing-power,” which she describes as “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle,” further illuminates the utility of the *sotilte* during the wedding feast.\(^6\) In other words, the *sotilte* is a vehicle for presenting things—objects, visuals, performances—that subsequently induce the feelings of wonder in onlookers. Bennett notes the transformative nature of food and eating: “Eating appears as a series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and

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outside becomes blurry: my meal both is and is not mine.” While Ragnelle herself is certainly not a thing, her status and performance as sotilde casts her into that category.

Leech further reads Ragnelle as an agent of “social pollution.” Though still a foil to purity and cleanness, Ragnelle does not act as “a typical incursive figure, one attempting to bring lower class pollution into the noble community, nor is she pollution from within the community as she comes from outside the social structure.” Leech claims that Ragnelle’s knowledge, gained at the margins of society, enables her to permanently tie herself to the model of chivalric society: Gawain. Leech provides no explanation for how and why Ragnelle’s knowledge base arises from the margins—could she not have learned much before her magical transformation from maiden to hag? How long ago was Ragnelle transformed? Despite the romance’s exposition following Gawain breaking of the curse, these details remain unexplained.

Leech’s argument that “Dame Ragnell’s ability to enter Arthurian society presents a myriad of contradictions and reveals a social system at odds with itself” also underscores the instability of the insider/outside binary in this court.

The confounding presence of that which does not belong is entirely in keeping with the medieval literary feast, particularly in relation to the marvel or sotilde. While the sotilde, a wonder of the banquet, usually functions as pleasure, something “wonderful, marvelous, and strange” as

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535 Bennett, Vibrant, 49.


Normore describes,\textsuperscript{540} witnessing Ragnelle’s appetite and her inability to converse or be convivial at her bridal feast illustrates her separation from the courtly community. In Middle English romance, the \textit{sotilte} does not consistently function as a pleasant source of wonder. Everything in Ragnelle that would be courteous turns sour, and her fellow diners judge her as an unworthy dining companion, leaving her instead to fulfill her individual appetite. The court chooses to ignore the bride and thereby open the door to moral reprobation on their behalf.

A number of factors drive the court’s soft rejection of Ragnelle, not the least of which is her agency—she is a woman driven by what she wants and will assert herself to achieve it. Ragnelle’s deft agency and cunning only further confound the Arthurian court and awaken misogyny and disgust within the community that would shun her. As Leech contends, “Rather than being controlled or diminished by her assumed role as an object, Dame Ragnell shows power by being able to place herself in the position of desired object when she clearly is not desirable in any way.”\textsuperscript{541} Leech is mostly right. Ragnelle does reverse expected order, but Ragnelle cannot exert total control over the emotional reaction of those around her. She is not omnipotent and able to emotionally manipulate the Arthurian court she’s entering, try as she might. Nevertheless, Ragnelle’s objective is not to gain the acceptance and approval from the entire court; Ragnelle only needs to gain Gawain’s hand in marriage and his acquiescence to her sovereignty for the curse to be broken. The off-putting form of her curse only compounds Ragnelle’s carnivalesque, ironically granting her greater power to do as she pleases.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{540} Normore, \textit{A Feast}, 131.
\item \textsuperscript{541} Leech, “Why,” 220.
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The disgust that she causes arises from Ragnelle’s violation of the *habitus* of the courtly community, forcing them to face a number of challenging realizations: first, Ragnelle’s uncouth behavior is another reminder of what a (presumably) fallen noble looks like; second, her eating habits and incorporation into the court form a “specter of boundary violation and loss of bodily integrity,” and third, they must now come to terms with a living, breathing embodiment of the grotesque as a part of their courtly community. Ragnelle’s performance of bad behaviors diminishes the symbolic cultural capital of the Arthurian court. To embrace her, they welcome lowered standards willingly; to shun her, they likewise violate norms. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s use of *habitus* figures predominantly on the cultivation and presentation of upper-class norms. Such careful, even anxious, attention to the presentation of self in medieval romance attests to a curated habitus among nobles, and the Arthurian tradition contains a number of notable traits and behaviors that underscore a particular idealized constellation of these seemingly-innate, inherent behaviors. To Bourdieu, taste is distinctive feature of the habitus of upper-class culture, with its inherent sprezzatura:

> The dual meaning of the word ‘taste’, which usually serves to justify the illusion of spontaneous generation which this cultivated disposition tends to produce by presenting itself in the guise of an innate disposition, must serve, for once, to remind us that taste in the sense of the ‘faculty of immediately and intuitively judging aesthetic values’ is inseparable from taste in the sense of the capacity to discern the flavours of foods which implies a preference for some of them.⁵⁴³

To fail to live up to the seemingly innate, though deeply cultivated, disposition is to fail to live up to the *habitus*, and one is therefore not worthy of that finery and exclusivity.

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Ragnelle’s failure to adhere places her apart from the rest of the court and guests, and this distinction that arises from feelings of disgust and exclusion speaks further to the ways in which this community acts upon their feelings. The judgment that Ragnelle’s companions direct towards her distinguish their behavior and taste from hers, further setting her at the margins of the community. And, by their exclusion, they additionally seek to further codify “good” behavior through practices of consumption, which Bourdieu describes as a curious effect of a consumable product that in turn produces culture:

“…the consumer helps to produce the product he consumes, by a labour of identification and decoding which, in the case of a work of art, may constitute the whole of the consumption and gratification, and which requires time and dispositions acquired over time.”

Likewise,

The habitus, an objective relationship between two objectivities, enables an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between practices and a situation, the meaning of which is produced by the habitus through categories of perception and appreciation that are themselves produced by an observable social condition.

Consumption produces and products determine consumption. It’s a reciprocal relationship, and in the case of a consumable that is also a work of art—the medieval feast is very much edible artwork—there are rules and affectations that govern interactions with that ephemeral product.

Food itself is a material and symbolic good. Sponsler draws from Bourdieu to connect food to the notion of “symbolic capital,” a “material in the sense that it is created by material forces—such as social institutions, labor practices, and power structures—and has material impacts—raising or lowering status and maintaining patterns of social relations.” To Sponsler, reading

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544 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 100.


Bourdieu, symbolic capital affects material capital, and vice versa, and in some instances, the symbolic can serve in place of the material. Such fluidity between symbolic and material capital makes real the adage, “manners maketh the (wo)man”—in other words, Ragnelle embodies the interaction between literal and figurative social power and capital.

In that same vein, actions carry great symbolic power when parsing out the *habitus* of a given community, and eating is a deeply charged human need and choice. What one eats and how one eats is not simply driven by need; it is driven by a number of sociocultural factors that coalesce into a valance of *habitus*. Eating the wrong thing or eating in the wrong way carries not just the potential for bodily harm—in terms of illness—but also of social harm. Hostetter similarly argues that “[f]ood preferences and practices often mark cultural and social identity in ways that separate and join different groups of people,” with the consumption of certain foods fomenting tension and division.547 The central tenet of Hostetter’s analysis of the function of food in medieval English romance “can be expression in a maxim: *Food choice is always a political act.*”548 I would add that food choice is always a *social* act, although in a courtly space, even social ritual is politically tinged. Ragnelle, ever ambivalent about food and only seemingly interested in ingesting great quantity, topples the political machine behind the usual stately feast and poses a threat to adjacent courtly society. Her undiscerning and boundless appetite is incongruent with the courtly paradigm. As Sponsler notes, “[e]ating thus raises the specter of boundary violation and loss of bodily integrity; in other words, the stakes may be higher for food consumption than for the use of other consumer products.”549 Sponsler traces Bourdieu’s


figuration of *habitus* to Marcel Mass’s use of the term as something “to describe this structural apprenticeship whereby individuals absorb a culture’s norms and standards…By habitus, Mauss means all the learned behaviors of the body—its motions, gestures, and postures.” As such, according to Sponsler, Bourdieu’s usage of *habitus* “usefully foregrounds the way that dietary practices and rules intersect with both the body and culture, operating where the two overlap.”

The court’s *habitus* does not allow for the kind of insatiable hunger that Ragnelle embodies, and the court struggles to respond accordingly to Ragnelle. Edward Vasta explains the power that Ragnelle holds in this scene in terms of Bakhtin’s grotesque:

> Banquet imagery and wedding feasts also function centrally and importantly in grotesque realism and carnival laughter. Body and world unite in the act of eating, for the body ‘triumphs over the world, over its enemy; celebrates its victory, grows at the world’s expense. This element of victory and triumph is inherent in all banquet images.’ In Ragnell’s case, the victory and triumph reign not only over the world’s aliments, but also over her stepmother and Arthur, both wielders of power, and from whom she and her brother must break free.

I take Vasta’s point a step further: the ever-stretching grotesque threatens to consume all, and Ragnelle’s long reach at the banquet table is not something that court can outmaneuver by simply ignoring her. Simply ignoring Ragnelle will not successfully keep her influence at bay, and by treating her as a separate spectacle divorced from their coterie, the group is still partaking of her performance. By doing so, the Arthurian community engages with Ragnelle, and they are in turn affected—perhaps permanently, the popular romance suggests—by her actions and presence.


Whereas my previous chapter discusses the aspects of dread inherent to the grotesque as they appear in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, here the carnivalesque and grotesque work in concert to evoke simultaneous disgust and mirth. Vasta sees this playful illustration of the carnival at work in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* as a sort of carnival mask: Ragnelle’s obscene behavior and repulsive appearance is something magically donned and doffed depending on how characters engage with official culture. This interplay, Vasta contends, invites laughter within the courtly space and laughter at the court in such a predicament:

In giving Ragnell a sow’s ugliness and having her dismiss the court’s authority, suspect its social restraints, and reduce its courtiers to fear and shame, this romance not only renders Ragnell an invitation to medieval laughter but also renders the court, and authority itself, and the seriousness of official culture, an invitation to medieval laughter. And the laughter is carnival laugher: that is, a laughter that liberates, equalizes, and expresses a universally human joy. But taking off the mask does not restore things as they were before. The mask, according to Bakhtin, “is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames….It reveals the essence of the grotesque.” To put on the mask and for others to engage with the mask, then, violates “natural” boundaries—as well as cultural ones—and this engagement does not happen in a vacuum. The articulation between grotesque, carnivalesque, and official culture means that one affects the other, and those effects will linger. This lasting interplay stretches even within the realm of official culture where the expected, proscriptive habitus is followed.

Because Ragnelle is grotesque and driven by base desire, they judge and deem her unworthy, yet their actions likewise illuminate their own shortcomings. So long as Ragnelle remains a

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spectacle on the margins, she can stay. Her companions do not want to welcome her, though they are content to gawk and judge. This uneasy acceptance marks her as the sotilte, as the court accepts her presence at the table but not within the fuller social context. They refuse to come to terms with what Ragnelle signifies for the court, deferring instead to a framework that excludes or excuses her appearance and behavior as the exception, not the norm.

This insider-outsider status is not uncommon throughout the historical record of feasting in from the late medieval and early modern eras, as seen in the Bal des Ardents, Edward’s Arthurian interludes, Henry VIII’s penchant for donning a disguise at feasts. With the exception of the French example, the identities of the disguised were known by the court, yet all either did or were expected to play along with the ruse. It is likewise rooted in the Arthurian

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555 Vasta, “Chaucer, Gower, and the Unknown,” 413.

556 Edward Hall, Hall’s chronicle : containing the history of England, during the reign of Henry the Fourth, and the succeeding monarchs, to the end of the reign of Henry the Eighth, in which are particularly described the manners and customs of those periods. Carefully collated with the editions of 1548 and 1550 (London, 1809), 512-513: Henry VIII secretly entered the lists on January 12, 1510 and ran in them “vnknownen to all persones, and vnloked for,” and after his impressive performance at that joust continued the festal jollity by sometime later parading into the Queen’s bedchambers with a number of his retinue:

“…his grace therles of Essex, Wilshire, and other noble menne, to the nombre, of twelue, came sodainly in a mornynge, into the Queues Chambre, all appareled in shorte cotes, of Kentishe Kendal, with hodes on their heddes, and hosen of thesame, euerie one of them, his bowe and arrowes, and a sworde and a bucklar, like out lawes, or Ilobyn Hodes men, whereof the Queene, the Ladies, and al other there, were abashed, as well for the straunge sight, as also for their sodain commyng, and after certain daunces, and pastime made, thei departe.”

557 Around the same time as the Robin Hood disguise, King Henry VIII is said to have participated in (if not staged directly) a complex mumming. Henry’s inability to sit still at this feast recalls King Arthur’s depiction in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:

“The banket beyng ready, the Kyng leadyng the Quene, entered into the Chambre, then the Ladies, Ambassadours, and other noble menne, folowedin ordre. The Kyng caused the Quene, to kepe the estate, and then satte the Ambassadours and Ladies, as they were
literary tradition with the fair unknown motif, such as Chrétien de Troyes’s depiction of young, naive Perceval in *The Story of the Grail* or Malory’s *Tale of Sir Gareth*.

**Ragnelle, the Long Sotilte**

There is great pleasure in being fooled by banquet craft. Following the (interrupted) feast scene, Ragnelle’s marvel continues through the private revelation of her condition to Gawain, to their shared experience of her restoration to her “true” self, and even through the couple’s presentation of that marvel to the delighted court. In conforming to the beauty and behavior standards deemed appropriate for this courtly emotional community, Ragnelle is deemed worthy and joyously accepted. The difficulty in accepting someone so at odds with the court’s *habitus* has been delightfully and magically whisked away.

For Arthur, however, the *sotilte* persists: he remains confounded by Gawain’s transformation into a thoroughly romantically-involved husband:

Gawen lovyd that Lady, Dame Ragnelle;  
In alle his lyfe he lovyd none so welle,  
I telle you withoute lesyng.  
As a coward he lay by her bothe day and nyghte  
Nevere wold he haunt justyng aryghte;  
Theratt mervaylyd Arthoure the Kyng.  

Ragnelle *has* upset the court dynamic, though not in the manner that the narrative initially suggests. Gawain is no longer the knight he once was, and while it may be typical for a married

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*Marshalled by the kyng, who would not sit, but walked from place to place, makyng chere to the Quene, ^and the straungers: So- dainly the kyng was gone. And shortly after, his grace with the Erie of Essex, came in ap- pareled after Turkey fasshio, in long robes of Bawdkin, powdered with gold, hattes on their heddes of Crimosyn Veluet, with greate rolles of Gold, girded with two swordes, callkd Ci- miteries, hangyng by greate baffderikes of gold.”*

558 Normore, *A Feast*, 143.

559 *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, lines 805-810.
knight to eschew the joust and instead focus on marital duties. The lingering uncertainty leaves both Arthur and the reader ruminating over this unexpected change. Ragnelle’s ability to stretch convention just to a breaking point before releasing the tension tests the elasticity of those rules. And convention does not simply snap back into place—for the duration of Ragnelle’s life and marriage to Gawain, something is fundamentally different. Arthur remains confused following Ragnelle’s miraculous transformation into a beautiful, pleasing wife. Jaeger’s *Ennobling Love* offers one approach for understanding Arthur’s lingering bewilderment: Arthur’s critique of Gawain’s privacy with Ragnelle, remember that ennobling love is frequently a homosocial bond, and it is “primarily a public experience, only secondarily private.”

The so-called “disordered” love that Arthur perceives between Gawain and Ragnelle is the kind of “inordinate love” that is described in an anonymous Middle English lyric:

> I shall say what inordinate love is:
> The curiosity and wodness of minde,
> A instinguible brenning fawting blis,
> A gret hungre, insaciat to finde,
> A dowcet ille, a ivell swetness blinde,
> A right wonderfull, sugred, swete kinde,
> Or withoute quiet to have huge labour.

The “gret hungre, insaciat to finde” that Gawain now has for Ragnelle is like the great, insatiable hunger that Ragnelle expressed before her transformation. Now Gawain loves Ragnelle in a way that is otherwise incompatible to chivalric strictures, and it is a “curiosity and wodness of minde.” Now shared between Ragnelle to Gawain by way of Gawain’s seeming uxoriousness,

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562 McCarthy makes an excellent point about the love-madness that “I shall say what inordinate love is” suggests:
from Arthur’s perspective, the disruption that Ragnelle brought to the Arthurian court cannot be escaped. Despite Ragnelle’s transformation and explanation, disorder and confusion persist while Ragnelle lives. Understanding Ragnelle as a complex, long sotilte throughout the popular romance helps to make sense of the ways in which the romance invites wonder, uncertainty, and emotional investment on both the part of the textual court and the audience.

“The comparison of excessive love to madness, wodness, and the suggestion of a parallel with physical sensations such as inextinguishable burning and insatiable hunger, is something that we also find in medical texts, which define eros as an illness akin to melancholy, caused by a defect in the estimative faculty of the brain, which causes the sufferer to overvalue the object of their desire, and to become obsessed with them.” See McCarthy, *Marriage*, 100.
CHAPTER 4

THE NEVER-ENDING SOTILTE OF SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an anonymous fourteenth-century Middle English chivalric romance that appears in a single manuscript.\(^{563}\) Its sophisticated narrative shares many of the same thematic elements and commonplaces as the Middle English popular romances that I explore in my previous chapters, but the Gawain-poet refines these elements and explores the ideals of courtesy and chivalry in a tightly interwoven manner. Literary critics have long been enthralled and perplexed by the courtly romance, such as Caroline Larrington, who speaks highly of the tale: “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the most artistically accomplished and most singular Arthurian poem in Middle English,” noting that its shared thematic elements with other medieval romances are arranged in a fresh and complex manner.\(^{564}\) J.J. Anderson likewise states his appreciation of the narrative succinctly: “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight tells a good story.”\(^{565}\) Jill Mann sees the poem as a luxurious exploration and fusion of the relationship between outward display and inward virtues.\(^{566}\) Elizabeth D. Kirk describes Sir Gawain and the

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\(^{563}\) BL Cotton MS Nero Ax.


\(^{565}\) J.J. Anderson, Language and Imagination in the Gawain-poems (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 158.

Green Knight as “the most radiant and festal of poems, whose every detail conveys high, skilled, deliberate delight,” with its temporal setting—pointing to the “embodiedness and immediacy” of fourteenth-century “religious observance and experience” Blending “the aesthetic, the social, and the mythic” to further enhance “pleasure and profusion in sharp contrast with cold and deprivation” additionally enhances the affective sociality and spirituality of the romance. Corinne Saunders offers this take on the complexity of the affective dimensions of this courtly romance:

What of a poem that at so many points seems to contravene expectation and convention, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight? Here not lovesickness but more existential concerns are the focus, interwoven with chivalric challenges. The poet conveys much through action and dialogue, combined with third-person description, but is also evidently interested in psychology and in affective and cognitive processes. Both bodily affect and mental processes are described in nuanced ways from the start, as in the description of Arthur’s ‘ȝonge blod and his brayn wylde’ (young blood and wild brain).

This romance engages the senses and affects through not only its luxury and beauty but also its unique meditation on Gawain’s “protracted, mystifying, and discomfiting ordeal” spurred on by

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The thematic and narrative structures of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* concern fracture and reintegration, and it is a celebration and exploration of cyclical change—namely, flourishing, decay, and renewal. Such themes are continually presented by way of the spectacle and marvel. This chapter focuses on two unexpected *sotiltes* of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—the first unfolds at Camelot and sets the entire romance narrative into motion, and the second *sotilte* commences as Gawain first perceives Hautdesert, though the festal elements of artifice and its dangerous allure appear throughout the entirety of the romance.

The *sotiltes* of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* likewise share elements that appear in their popular romance siblings, namely a lack of clear resolution following the disruptive manipulation that the *sotilte* imposes upon the gathered communities. I analyze two primary *sotiltes* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the first is a most literal *sotilte* in form and function, disruption of the Christmastide feast in Camelot; the second is a figurative irruption of feast-language during Gawain’s isolation, when Hautdesert suddenly appears and calls to mind the paper castles of banquet tables. Although I focus on but two of the *sotiltes* at play in *Sir

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571 Even the form of the plot adds to these themes of cyclicality and renewal. The romance is comprised of 101 alliterative stanzas that are traditionally separated into four “fitts,” and the verse structure is a *bob* and wheel form that links the stanzas. Baked into the very structure of this romance is cyclicality that always turns back to what has come before while moving ahead. The one- or two-stress “bob” sets up and determines the rhyme for the ABAB rhyming schema (with “B” coming from the “bob”) for the four-line, three-stress “wheel.” The wheel frequently provides clarification or commentary upon the action that has just taken place, effectively turning back to what has come while also moving the narrative forward. Each fitt incorporates some elements of the festal, with the first and third including the most detailed of feasts.
Gawain and the Green Knight, the festal infuses nearly every scene of the romance, and there is a secondary feast at Camelot preceding Gawain’s quest for the Green Chapel and a number of significant feasts at Hautdesert that speak to how the narrative stresses spectacle and marvel. I touch upon the Hautdesert feasts in particular to explore how Gawain’s perception and judgment are affectively manipulated by the Green Knight’s (Lord Bertilak’s) spectacle.

The first fitt of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight takes part in the long tradition of linking Arthurian narratives to the Matter of Troy, here taking a leaf from Geoffrey Monmouth’s Historia regum Britanniae and illustrating the link between Aeneas the British Isles by way of “Felix Brutus,” who “On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez / wyth wynne.”572 The narrator then turns to Camelot, where it is New Year’s Day, and the festivities of Christmastide are in full swing—there is fifteen full days of feasting, games, dancing, and widespread mirth punctuated by piety and Mass. The New Year’s Day feast begins no differently than those that precede it, with Arthur’s customary edict that he shall not eat until he has heard of some marvel forestalling his participation in the first course. Suddenly, a large green man, wielding an axe in one hand and bearing a sprig of holly in the other, riding upon a large green horse barges into the feast hall. Arthur’s marvel has arrived. The Green Knight speaks with mockery and disdain for Camelot and all of its finery, acting as if he does not know who Arthur is, infuriating the king. The Green Knight challenges the king to a game—Arthur shall be granted the chance to deal the Green Knight one blow with the axe, on the grounds that the Green Knight deal that same blow back to him in a year’s time. Arthur, young and excitable, looks ready to take on this deadly

chall
challenge, but Gawain intercedes on his uncle’s behalf, speaking courteously and soothing

Arthur’s anger and humbling himself before the shocked court. He takes on the challenge and
lops off the Green Knight’s head with one stroke. The head rolls about the court and courtiers
kick it about like a ball, which then proceeds to spout blood freshly, until the Green Knight’s
body seizes the head, and the Green Knight speaks to the court, reminding Gawain of his
expected presence at the Green Chapel in a year. The Green Knight mounts his large green horse
and rides away, still bearing his severed head. Arthur makes light of what has transpired, and the
feast continues.

The second fitt concerns the interim year, and the poet speaks of the passing seasons and the
changes that they bring. Gawain readies himself for the journey to the unknown Green Chapel on
All Souls Day (November 2), and the romance lingers on Gawain’s shield and fine gear. His
shield is painted red and features a golden pentangle, the five points of which correlate to the five
virtues to which Gawain adheres: fraunchyse, felaȝschyp, cortaysye, pité, and clannes, which
mean generosity, community/sociability, courtesy, pity/compassion, and purity. Inside his
shield is a painting of the Virgin Mary. Gawain travels near the English-Welsh border, enduring
hardship from the wintry terrain and fierce beasts that he encounters in the wilderness, and in the
depths of this bleak midwinter, Gawain cries out, praying to God that he find some comfort. He
almost immediately happens upon Hautdesert, appearing beautiful and craftily made. He is
welcomed in by a kindly porter and treated to warm clothes, a good meal (despite it being a fast
day), and is enveloped in the courtly comforts he longed for while alone in the wilderness. Lord

Larrington notes that these five points allude to other sets of virtues in addition to his own
code: “faith in the five wounds of Christ and the five joys of Mary, faultlessness in the use of his
five fingers and his five wits.” See Larrington, “English Chivalry,” 254.
Bertilak reveals to Gawain that the Green Chapel is nearby and urges Gawain to remain at Hautdesert for a time. He also proposes that they engage in a game of exchanged winnings in the following days, to which Gawain agrees.

The third fitt depicts the games of hunting, seduction, and feasting. Gawain sleeps in and is visited by an amorous Lady Bertilak, who teases the knight and seeks to seduce him, all while Lord Bertilak successfully hunts deer. Bertilak returns to Hautdesert and presents the kill to Gawain, and Gawain wraps his arms around Lord Bertilak’s neck and gently and courteously kisses his host. The next day the pattern repeats, with Lady Bertilak further attempting to seduce Gawain and Lord Bertilak hunting, this time for boar, and the men exchange their winnings. The third day Lady Bertilak once more seeks to seduce Gawain, but this time appeals to the material aspects of his courtesy and chivalry—she seeks to grant him some token of her affection, and he refuses her offers except for the green girdle, which she claims will keep Gawain magically safe and sound. Lord Bertilak hunts and kills a fox, and he presents this to Gawain once more at the hall before their nightly feast, but Gawain does not hand over the green girdle to his host, though he gives Bertilak a third kiss.

The fourth fitt primarily concerns Gawain’s travel to the Green Chapel and his fateful flinch as the Green Knight moves to deal Gawain’s return blow. Gawain steels himself to receive a deadly wound from the Green Knight only to experience a slight nick from the large axe, and Gawain springs to his feet ready for combat. The Green Knight reveals his true identity, Lord Bertilak, and explains that Morgan orchestrated the ruse to test Camelot and perhaps frighten Guinevere to death, and that Lady Bertilak tested Gawain repeatedly to see the extent of his courtesy—the knight almost passes these tests, except for hiding away the green girdle. Gawain is indignant and shamefaced, and he refuses to join his hosts at Hautdesert for further
celebration, instead turning homewards and vowing to wear the green girdle ever more as a sign of his shame and failing. The court at Camelot, overjoyed at his return, rejects his shame—for they “Laȝen loude þerat”574—reinterpreting the green girdle as a symbol of the court, decreeing that all knights shall don one like it as a sign of their love of Gawain and their distinction as knights of the Round Table. The court’s laughter makes light of Gawain’s perceived shame, and he does not speak again in the romance, with the collective voice of the community taking over once more with the same mirth and vigor that characterizes the first fitt.

The Arthurian Emotional Community at Camelot

The narrative proper of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* opens by situating this group of stalwart knights and comely ladies—all “fayre folk in her first age”—at a Christmastide feast:

Þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse
With mony luflych lorde, ledez of þe best,
Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rich breþer,
With rych reuel oryȝt and rechles merþes.

…
Wyle Nw þer watz so ȝep þat hit watz I cummen,
Þat day doubble on þe dece watz þe douth serued.575

It is New Year’s Day, and the youthful king will have a double-portion of dainties available to dole out as he pleases to those whom he most honors. Bishop Grosseteste’s treatise of household statutes admonishes lords and other heads of household to take great plates of food and to share those dainties with the guests who sit beside them as well as those near the high table who please them:

…commaunde ȝe þat youre dysshe be welle fyllyd and hepid, and namely of *entermes*, and of pitance with-oute fat, carkyng that ȝe may parte coureteysly to thoo that sitte beside, bothe of the ryght hande and the left, thorow alle the hie tabulle, and to other as plesythe you,

574 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 2514.

575 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 55; 37-40; 60-61.
This feast, the narrator tells us, “watz ilyche ful fiften dayes, / With alle þe mete and þe mirpe þat men couþe avyse”—it was unceasing for a full fifteen days with all the meat and mirth that anyone could devise. That this fifteen day stretch of feasting is as ample and overabundant with good feelings as anyone might *avyse* (devise) is an important reminder that all aspects of such large events in this era would be well orchestrated and prepared for beforehand. It is noteworthy—and perhaps a literary marvel in itself—that such ample supplies would be at the ready in the midst of winter. The emphasis on and expectation of a planned event is key for the disruption that will transpire only two stanzas later.

Not only are the beauty, youth, and luxurious menu options at Camelot of the utmost caliber, so too is this iteration of the Arthurian court characterized by its superlative emotional tenor—primarily, they are full of mirth, and their actions speak to such feeling:

> Loude crye watz þer kest of clerkez and oþer,  
> Nowel netted onewe, neuened ful ofte;  
> And syþen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,  
> Ȳȝed ȝeres-ȝiftes on hiȝ, ȝelde hem bi hond,  
> Debated busly aboute þo giftes;  
> Ladies laȝed ful loude, þoȝ þay lost haden,  
> And he þat wan watz not wrothe, þat may ȝe wel trawe.  
> Alle þis mirþe þay maden to þe mete tyme…

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576 “See that your dish be well filled and heaped namely with delicacies (*entremets* in the sense of delicacy, not in the sense of the interlude or marvel) of pieces without fat, taking care that you may give courteously to those who sit beside you, both on the right and left hand, through all of the high table, and to others as it pleases you, that they might have the same that you have.” Bishop Grosseteste, “Household Statutes,” in *The Babees Book*, edited F. J. Furnivall, EETS OS 32 (London, 1868), 330, italics mine, translation my own.

577 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 44-45.

578 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 64-71.
The narrator speaks of their mirth multiple times in the first few stanzas of the romance, and there’s no direct or indirect speech early on to indicate any sort of emotives at work, their gaming, laughing, playing, and making merry straight from Mass does not indicate that this is a particularly contemplative or sober bunch; rather, they are light and, as the narrator describes Arthur, somewhat childish. Much ink has been spilled attempting to ascertain the nature of the narrator’s commentary in this line—whether Arthur is meant to be seen as a failed king and somehow morally deficient or simply an untried youth. By extension, there has been much speculation regarding the overall nature of this iteration of Camelot.

Despite the poet’s insistence that Camelot is full of incomparable people, they are also lighthearted and predisposed to mirth:

\begin{quote}
Ęe hapnest vnder heuen,  
Kyng hyȝest mon of wylle;  
Hit were now gret nye to neuen  
So hardy a here on hille.\end{quote}

This emotional community leans towards happiness, and much of their mirth and goodwill registers by way of the exchange of objects or the adornment of the hall for these Christmas festivities. Beyond noting that “All watz hap vpon heȝe in hallez and chambrez,” the poet uses additional adjectives and adverbs to describe the overall emotional timbre of the court in a single stanza.

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579 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 56-59.

580 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 48.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word or Phrase</th>
<th>Line Number and Relevant Context</th>
<th>Middle English Denotation*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ful or wel gay</td>
<td>74 (Guinevere’s cheerful disposition at the Christmastide feast); 179 (describes the Green Knight’s comely and festive dress); 598 (Gringolet’s tack is outfitted handsomely as Gawain prepares to leave in search of the Green Chapel); 791 (the battlements and garrets of Hautdesert appear to be of the finest quality and style); 935 (Gawain is glad to join the ladies Lord Bertilak at Hautdesert for an intimate gathering);</td>
<td>“Joyous, merry, gay; light-hearted, carefree”</td>
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<td>glad</td>
<td>495 (Gawain was glad when he began games in the hall); 989 “(to glade”; i.e., to gladden, Sir Gawain at Hautdesert); 1079 (Gawain laughs gladly at Hautdesert)</td>
<td>“joyful, merry, gay; cheerful, jolly; full of joyous or festive spirits, rejoicing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glaum</td>
<td>47; 1426 (gla, glam at the hunt near Hautdesert); 1652 (gla and gle at Hautdesert)</td>
<td>All three senses used through the Gawain-poet’s works; (b) most applies here: “(a) A loud noise, clamor, din; (b) loud talking, chatter; merrymaking; (c) a loudly-spoken message”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gle</td>
<td>46; 1536 (with Lady Bertilak); 1652 (at Hautdesert)</td>
<td>“Entertainment, sport; (b) sporting jest, mockery”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jolilé and joly</td>
<td>42; 86 (Arthur is jolly and childish)</td>
<td>In this specific instance, used as example quotation in MED: “vigorously, stoutly,” but the first denotation is also brought to mind: “Happily, gaily, gladly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joy (and other forms thereof)</td>
<td>86 (Arthur is “so joly of his joyfnes”); 646 (the “fyue joyez” of Mary); 910 (Camelot courtiers make joy); 1177 (joy of the hunt at Hautdesert); 1681 (Lord Bertilak declares, “Make we mery quyl we may and mynne vpon joye”); 1762 (Lady Bertilak warms Gawain’s heart with joy)</td>
<td>“A feeling of happiness or pleasure; a state of happiness or well-being”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laȝed (and laȝen)</td>
<td>69 (the ladies laugh full loudly though they “lose” Christmas games); 316 (the Green Knight “læys so loud,” mocking Arthur and Camelot); 464, 472 (twice following the Green Knight’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
departure, first when Arthur and Gawain begin to laugh as the Green Knight leaves, then Arthur assures Guinevere: “Wel bycommes such craft vpon Cristmasse, / Laykyng of enterludez, to laȝe and to syng, / Among þise kynde caroles of knyȝtez and ladyez”); 909 (Bertilak laughs loudly upon “realizing” that Gawain is his guest); 2514 (Camelot welcomes Gawain home and diminishes his perceived personal failings with their great mirth)

|mery (and merily) | 497 (“men ben mery in mynde quen þay han mayn drynk”); 740 (“merily” Gawain rides in the wilderness); 1681 (“Make we mery,” at Hautdesert); 1736 (Lady Bertilak’s ermine trim and decolletage); 1885 (singing carols at Hautdesert); 1953 (making merry at Hautdesert on Gawain’s last night) | “Cheerful, mirthful, blithe;” can also refer to one’s comely appearance |

|mirpe (and other forms thereof) | 40 (merþes), 45, 61,106 (mirthe), 541 (merþe), 899 (merþe from wine at Hautdesert) 981 (merþe also used once to describe Gawain’s experiences at Hautdesert), 1656 (merþe at Christmas in Hautdesert), 1763 (merþe with Lady Bertilak), 1951 (merþe and mynstralsye at Hautdesert) | “The feeling of joy or state of happiness; delight, gladness” |

reuel | 40 (Christmastide at Camelot) | “Merrymaking, revelry, carousing; joy, happiness” |

* All denotations listed in this table come from the *Middle English Dictionary*.

Table 4.1. Table of “happy” words in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Of these terms, there are at least eleven instances that connote happiness in some manner at Camelot during the Christmastide feast, and the poet’s repeated usage of related “happy” words compounds the court’s predilection towards such a demeanor. The instances in which the

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581 At Hautdesert, the usages that I have collected in Figure 1 total at least 18, and this greater number is due, in part, to the duration of Gawain’s stay at Hautdesert (he arrives on Christmas
narrator describes Camelot in the happiest manner both fall during Christmastide, and the materiality and the timing of such goodwill and heightened feelings of happiness, jollity, and mirth are worth exploring. Many of the stock phrases related to merrymaking appear both at Camelot and Hautdesert during the New Year’s festivities, and as such, critics have long compared these courtly spaces. Given the intentional influence that Morgan orchestrates over Camelot mediated by the Green Knight, it is all but impossible not to consider the relationship between these two courts, especially given the familial thread linking the two by way of Morgan. Some call them mirrors; others note the public versus private and known versus unknown nature of each castle, respectively. Nevertheless, despite the relatively brief depiction of Camelot in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and with the exception of the Green Knight’s deft affective manipulation, all is suffused with many explicit instances of generally happy emotions.

The context of this first feast in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* determines the degree to which happiness infuses nearly every aspect of the events that unfold prior to the Green Knight’s intrusion. Charles Moorman describes the ubiquity of Christmas-ness throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: “in each of the sections, the main action is surrounded and enveloped by a picture of Christmas revelry and courtly life which serves to make the poem an almost Eve and is to meet the Green Knight at the Green Chapel on New Year’s Day). Camelot, on the other hand, only gets a single day of detailed focus (New Year’s Day for the Christmastide Feast), with broad strokes of the passing year that follows until Gawain departs on his quest.

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continuous Christmas celebration.”  

From the poem itself, Christmastide means days of mirth, merrymaking, feasting, and gift-giving punctuated by Mass or other religious observation—events that sound strikingly similar to contemporary celebration of Christmas.

Feeling and materiality coalesce in this space, and the details that the narrator provides all operate as “happy objects” that comprise the feast experience for guests. Ahmed describes the feelings that we imbue into objects and materiality, arguing for a deep connection between embodied feeling, objects, and place:

We are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things. An object can be affective by virtue of its own location (the object might be here, which is where I experience this or that affect) and the timing of its appearance (the object might be now, which is when I experience this or that affect). To experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object, but to “whatever” is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival.

Ahmed describes the affects wrapped up in the objects—everyday or otherwise—with which we interact.


584 Sarah Ahmed, “Happy Objects” in The Affect Theory Reader, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 29-51, 33. Ahmed bases a significant portion of her arguments about judgment and good feeling upon John Locke’s formulations of judgment/evaluation, and when she turns to the social good, she continues with this same foundation. When expanding “good taste” out to the larger culture/society, she cites Locke’s ideas of personal preference and taste: “For as pleasant tastes depend not on the things themselves, but their agreeabibity to this or that palate, wherever there is great variety; so the greatest happiness consists in having those things which produce the greatest pleasure” (Locke quoted Ahmed 34). Ahmed adds this idea from Locke to the “chanciness of happiness—the hap of whatever happens” (34-35), and she reminds us that “taste is not simply a matter of chance;” rather, it “is acquired over time” (35). Another way that happiness is inspired and then perpetuated comes through the cultivation of habit. Ahmed turns to Bourdieu and the idea of habitus, and such actions forge and solidify links between an object/place/time and one’s experience of happiness just as good taste gets rewarded and thus becomes habit. We return to what feels good and inspires happiness time and time again; “we assume we experience delight because ‘it’ is delightful” (35).
The Christmastide feast at Camelot in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* emphasizes the importance of objects and the spectacle. Guinevere becomes the primary focal point of the dais, surrounded by sendal, finely embroidered tapestries, costly gems, and a canopy of “I tolouse” above her.  

She is an object of the court, part of the Christmas tableau to please and delight guests, inasmuch she is also an interactive and lively fellow guest. The feast, according to Derek Brewer, involves many aspects of social and political concerns. For the host, Brewer contends, one would expect to receive deference and service from the guests, who in turn would expect “welcome luxury of food and drink, a break in routine…recreation, play, singing, dancing, entertainment, and the sense of being an élite, or on the fringes of it.”

Medievalist Sharon Wells expands that the feast setup of a medieval hall would have a raised dais at one end of great room—hence the “high table”—where the lord and other guests of honor would be seated.

Although the “hall was a multifunctional space and as a result possessed little fixed furniture,” the order of operations therein was highly regulated and ordered. The lord’s table would be set up at the end of the hall furthest from the service, with other guest’s tables set up longitudinally from that dais. Wells notes that in addition to this raised table, there would be cupboards and shelves nearby to display the costly plate, with the number of shelves indicating a

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585 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 78.


587 Sharon Wells, “Manners Maketh Man: Living, Dining and Becoming a Man in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Rites of Passage: Cultures of Transition in the Fourteenth Century*, edited by Nicole F. McDonald and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), 67-82, 70.

lord’s status by the late fifteenth century. The Gawain-poet does not mention the plate, but Wells notes that such cupboards would often be draped with silks and other hangings, and even a carved canopy.\(^{589}\) The high table served a dual-purpose: it was meant to “ensure the visibility of the head of the household and to allow the observation of all the guests in the hall.”\(^{590}\) Observing and being observed is an important act for heads of households and other noble figures, and Bishop Grosseteste entreats heads of households to have the whole household eat together:

Make ye your owne howse|holde to sytte in the alle, as muche as ye mow or may, at the bords of oon parte and of the other parte, and lette them sitte to-gedur as mony as may, not here fowre and thre there: and when youre chef maynye be sett, then alle gromys may entre, sitte, And ryse.\(^{591}\)

Such ceremony and hierarchy brought unity, Wells argues:

Not only was the superiority of the lord guaranteed, the status of every single member of the household (and also that of guests) was reflected in what was eaten, who served whom and the number of people with whom an individual was expected to share a mess. Household unity existed through the emphasis on hierarchy.\(^{592}\)

Ceremony and regulation are expected in noble spaces, and even one’s seating arrangement in relation to the dais speaks to the emphasis on hierarchy in medieval feasting practice. Those seated at the high table have their hands washed first, received food first, and are the prime audience for entertainment and pomp.\(^{593}\) And beyond receiving honors first, the higher one sits—

\(^{589}\) Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 70.

\(^{590}\) Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 70.


\(^{592}\) Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 71.

whether “above the salt” or otherwise, with this phrase being understood to refer to whether one sits near or below the salt cellar or nef—would bring additional pomp:

In very prestigious households, [the lord’s] food would have made a ceremonial entrance, perhaps accompanied by music from the musicians’ gallery located about the service doorways. It then made its way to the high end of the hall to be expertly carved in front of the lord.594

The splendor of the feast rings out in these early stanzas of the romance. Christina Normore draws from Elias Canetti’s concept of the arena to think about feasts, for “[t]he seating arrangement of feasts share some of these features;” that is, “the inescapable experience of others seeing and feeling what ones sees and feels within the arena feeds the sense of excitement.”595 Distance (or the lack thereof) plays a role, too: “The distance at which many figures are viewed heightens the intensity of the emotional feedback: robbed of their individual features, other humans come to serve as simple validation of the viewer’s own emotions.”596 Where the connection between arena and feast hall begins to break down, however, is within the very notion of enclosure, as Normore explains: “But where Canetti’s sporting arena is perfectly enclosed by the bodies that line it, the feast space is liable to breaks and interruptions;” that is, the very structure is prone to intrusion.597 Normore calls “[t]he most obvious of these” intrusions the “entremets [introduced] into the feast hall space.”598 As I have shown in my previous

595 Normore, A Feast, 54.
596 Normore, A Feast, 54.
597 Normore, A Feast, 55.
598 Normore, A Feast, 55.
chapters, and as the remainder of this chapter will further illustrate, literature amplifies this tendency, allowing for more porous boundaries. This porosity, I argue, allows for greater feeling and emotion to foment, particularly with instances of intrusion at work. Interactions between characters and their environments—both the intangible and material aspects thereof—in the midst of disturbance is heightened in a community where both materiality and feeling carry great significance.

With Ahmed’s description of happiness in mind, consider the poet’s description of the Christmas games that occur prior to the intrusion—the nobles exchange “hondeselle,” gifts or tokens exchanged especially on New Year’s, but the term also connotes newness in terms of a gift or sum of money given to a new business as a token of good luck. “Hondeselle” or “hansalle” derives from the Old English “handselen” and Old Norse “handsal,” translating as “hand gift.” The intimacy of gift giving is woven into the very term for such exchanges, with one’s own hand taking agency in the act of giving. Presents bring joy and excitement to this space, and Christmastide is the time in which such personal exchanges are expected and celebrated with delight. Gift-giving of this type is part of the Christmas festivities, and such exchanges are not expected to occur in this manner throughout the remainder of the year.


600 Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “Hanselle.”

601 It is worth noting that Jennifer Fast points out that the Green Knight is referred to as Arthur’s “hondeselle” in Fitt 2 of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: “The narrative turns of this miniature drama are worth examining in detail, not only because they serve as the first presentation of game in a poem rife with references to play, but also because the entire adventure of the Green Knight is described as a ‘hanselle’ [hand gift] given to Arthur in Fitt 2 (491), indicating that, at some level, the game serves as a metaphor for the entire work.” See Jennifer Fast, “They ‘Laȝed . . . Þey Lost’: Laughter in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” Arthuriana 31.1. (2021): 92-115, 94.
Christina Normore explains that gift giving held a central role in “elite late medieval culture,” and as such, “it is not surprising to find that its giving practices were complex.”\(^{602}\) Feasts and gift giving likewise go hand in hand in late medieval society, and Normore explains that “the winter holiday season was associated then as now with gift giving and sharing,” as “many Northern European rulers not only hosted banquets for their courtiers but also exchanged gifts both within and between households.”\(^{603}\)

Ahmed’s description of the formation of emotion through intimate contact with things (and people) is particularly salient in this scene of giving. It is not clear what the “hondselle” that the nobles exchange are, nor are the rules of the game particularly clear, but what does command attention in this scene is the mirth that such games effect. Jennifer Fast reads the laughter that ensues as “the metronome which beats out the tempo of the festal progression.”\(^{604}\) Such gift-giving elicits laughter in the hall, and this nonverbal emotive of joy and delight is shared amidst the courtiers who participate in the revelry, especially those who lose (for they laugh, despite losing). This laughter reveals the deeply social nature of mirth and merrymaking in the romance—contrast such positive social feeling to Gawain traveling alone in the desolate wilderness, where there is neither mirth nor joy, only despair, until Hautdesert appears almost miraculously. Fast identifies this early scene as the foundational moment illuminating Camelot’s

\(^{602}\) Normore, *A Feast*, 181.

\(^{603}\) Normore, *A Feast*, 181. Normore further wonders how much of an obligation the receipt of gifts placed on the receiver, particularly in terms of “truly valuable gifts.” Gift giving and gift receiving in the context of nobles extending valuables to their subordinates, formed “bonds…rarely as simple as a straightforward quid pro quo.” See Normore, *A Feast*, 183.

“ability to subsume threat and loss into its comic order.”\textsuperscript{605} The laughter in this initial scene of the first fitt moreover illuminates both aspects of the denotation of laughter from the \textit{Middle English Dictionary}. First, laughter is revelry, mirth, the expression of joy, and merrymaking, which correlates closely to modern English usage today.\textsuperscript{606} Likewise, Middle English laughter may also pertain to mockery and derision, as depicted through the Green Knight’s derision as he “laȝes so loud” while pretending not to know who the king is.\textsuperscript{607} Laughter tells something of a person’s or community’s internal state. Despite the Green Knight’s festive dress and claims to engage in a Christmas game, his intent is to ridicule. Whereas the Green Knight’s sarcastic laughter highlights his insincerity and goading, the laughter of Camelot does more than simply reveal their joyous hearts. Arthur and Gawain later laugh following the Green Knight’s departure as a means of diminishing the stress from the Green Knight’s challenge and shocking ability to survive decapitation. As Kirk explains, Arthur attempts to “help the court recover from their fright” by equating all to a Christmas game.\textsuperscript{608} This laughter is a means of mockery in itself—the king and knight minimize the harm of the Green Knight’s disruptive interlude. The laughter is restorative and normative, forced as it may be in this very moment. In the final scene of \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, laughter brings the appearance (if not reality) of unity to the court once more, with all laughing at Gawain’s shame and cajoling him: “Þe kyng confortez þe knyȝt, and alle þe court als / Laȝen loude þerat.”\textsuperscript{609}

\textsuperscript{605} Fast, “They ‘Laȝed . . .’” 94.

\textsuperscript{606} \textit{Middle English Dictionary}, s.v. “laughen.”

\textsuperscript{607} \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, line 316.

\textsuperscript{608} Kirk, “Wel bycommes,” 106.

\textsuperscript{609} \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, lines 2513-2514.
As much as derisive laughter can disturb a courtly community, joyous laughter likewise restores what Elizabeth D. Kirk describes as the “aristocratic ethos”:

Because one has a certain sensibility and belongs to a group that shares it, that sensibility will be provided for as a matter of course. No sign that it is achieved at the price of any effort or depends on economic and political underpinnings can be allowed to surface. (This myth is, of course, as conspicuously unrealistic in terms of the real world economics and politics of aristocracy as such myths by definition are.)

Laughter, then, is the seemingly effortless affect that restores order and normalizes whatever disruption may threaten community stasis.

Much about this first feast in Camelot emphasizes—paradoxically—how simultaneously normal and how exceptional the court is. Camelot is normatively spectacular, and it is a gem among nobility. Camelot, the Gawain-poet stresses, is first among nobility. Evelyn Reynolds discusses the function of kynde in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, drawing upon the concept’s valances of wonder, normalcy, and morality. Reynolds delves into the significance of “kyndely” in “þe fyrst cource in þe court kyndely serued,” arguing that it is indicative of the propriety of this feast scene. Like Derek Brewer, Randy P. Schiff, Jill Mann, and Jonathan Nicholls, Reynolds agrees that courtly propriety undergirds the Camelot feast, and that this scene


611 Mann and Normore likewise emphasize the moral aspects of all things kynde, with the former relating Aristotelean virtues specifically to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Mann, “Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics,” especially 234-236). Normore draws from the same Aristotelean notions of virtue from *Nicomachean Ethics*, stressing that it is understood to be fitting for those who can live at a certain station (particularly the nobility) to do so—through dress, social function, and largesse. (See Normore, *A Feast for the Eyes*, especially 105.)

612 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 135.

is not indicative of immoral excess or disordered values. Sharon Wells, on the other hand, begs to differ: Wells’s essay stresses not only the beauty and superlative nature of the Camelot feast but also its impropriety. Arthur is not at the head, according to extant custom of the later Middle Ages; Guinevere is. To Wells, things are chaotic, though it is beautiful chaos:

> Literary critics, such as Brewer and Nicholls, have often remarked how the feast at Camelot in *Sir Gawain* is the model of perfect courtesy and etiquette. Indeed, I would suggest that it is constructed precisely as a perfect model of the medieval feast in order to make that which is wrong take much sharper focus.616

Likewise, Aisling Byrne sees disorder at work in this feast, specifically arising from Arthur’s refusal to eat (which I explore more closely in the next section). Byrne makes an excellent point about the latent disruption inherent to medieval feasting practices that is worth considering in light of questions of the ethics or propriety of this feast:

> The feast in medieval culture is already an arena of latent threat, an opening onto disorder rather than a refuge from it. In many ways it is the world in microwcosmic and heightened form; its harmony, founded on the careful balancing of extremes, is as precarious as, and intrinsically linked to, the moral equilibrium of the human being, beset by the temptations inherent in earthly existence.617

Byrne’s assertions echo Ken Albala’s description of late Renaissance dining practices, namely that all “was an elaborate performance in cooking, serving, and eating,’’ even more importantly, the feast “was also a mummery or ‘dumb show’ for the real power relations that took place

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615 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 67-82.

616 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 76.

outside the banquet hall.” In literary depictions of the feast, the same “opening onto disorder” that Byrne identifies threatens to derail the narrative entirely. Consider, for example, Chaucer’s exuberant Squire and his fumbled attempt to dazzle his fellow pilgrims in his tale. Sharon Wells neatly describes the bumble:

…feasting plays such a large part that it actually impedes the progress of the narrative. If one looks carefully at ‘The Squire’s Tale’ one notices that the narrative is so weighed down by feasting and gourmandizing that it fails to take off. The Squire’s youthful lack of control is betrayed in his inability to get a feast to behave in a controlled fashion within his attempt to create a romance.

My reading aligns more closely with Reynolds, Brewer, Schiff, Mann, and Nicholls, in that I see the Christmastide feast at Camelot as a truly magnificent event not jaded by the cares of age and responsibility. Camelot in this first age appears almost innocent in their exuberant mirth and joy, and the Gawain-poet is insistent that all is kynde; that is, right and proper. As Reynolds explains,

What is ‘kyndely’ is what is ‘natural, normal’; in this scene, what is ‘kyndely’ is chivalric order, wealth, good food, music, and human unity. Kynde equates family with wealth, custom with courtesy, tradition with politeness. Indeed, in this appearance kynde is an adverb modifying ‘serued,’ so that now activity—hosting, serving—can be characterized based on its suitability to family and family place…To act ‘kyndely’ at Camelot is to act in a manner


619 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 75.

620 With one caveat: Schiff somewhat sneers at the conspicuous display of wealth and excess at Camelot as untrained imitation, not unlike Chaucer’s Squire from *The Canterbury Tales*. In particular, he describes Camelot as “decidedly frivolous” and degenerate in comparison to its Trojan forebears and is interested in tracing the links that the Gawain-poet makes from the medieval Arthurian setting to Camelot’s purported origins and lineage (in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, linking to Troy and specifically the descendent of Aeneas, Brutus). See Schiff, “Unstable Kinship,” 81-102; 83.

621 There is, however, one detail that troubles this magnificence—Arthur awaits a marvel and does not eat while his guests begin the feast without him. I will explore this in greater depth in the next section, but it is worth noting here first.
appropriate to noble bloodline, by virtue of Camelot as court, and by virtue of Camelot’s family affinity. *Kynde* here denotes happy noise and abundance—again, especially in adverbial form, a specific category of active hospitality.\(^{622}\)

Order is expected at once to be something practiced and innate in courtly circles such as the Arthurian community at Camelot. The knights and ladies are naturally inclined towards the decorum and festivity that a feast space requires. Acting within the bounds of expectation and training are common themes of conduct literature in the later medieval era, but, as almost any medieval romance illustrates, it is just as natural and expected to see things go awry. The marvel is thus an expected and sanctioned means of *kyndely* inserting an interlude of chaos into an otherwise well-orchestrated, tightly-controlled event.

**Arthur’s Custom of Awaiting a Marvel**

The notion of “No marvel; no meal” is common to Arthuriana. Arthur’s custom of suspending the start of a feast until he experiences some marvel occurs throughout insular and continental romance and is “almost always followed by an interruption of the festivities by a figure from outside the court bearing a challenge or a message to the assembled knights.”\(^{623}\)

Aside from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the custom appears in Chrétien’s *Perceval*, Malory’s *Sir Gareth tale of Orkney*, the German *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal*, and the Occitan *Jaufré*, and it is mentioned in Wolfram’s *Parzival*, Ulrich’s *Lanzelet*, Wirnt’s *Wigalois*, the Vulgate *Merlin, La Vengeance Raguidel, Caradoc, Gorlagon*, and even appears outside of the

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\(^{622}\) Reynolds, “*Kynde,*” 33. Reynolds further argues that *kynde* throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in all of its iterations and connotations creates a sense of wonder—that such things can be normal, right, and typical in their superlative excess is in itself a wonder, and that a marvel like the disruptive Green Knight might be normalized—made *kynde*—as a usual Christmastide game makes *kynde* something potentially full of wonder.

\(^{623}\) Byrne, “Arthur’s Refusal,” 63.
Arthurian tradition in two Robin Hood narratives, *Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar* and the *Geste of Robyn Hode*. The *Geste of Robyn Hode* parallels the Arthurian pause quite closely:

> Than bespake hym gode Robyn:  
> “To dyne have I noo lust,  
> Till that I have som bolde baron  
> Or som unkouth gest.”

Refusing to eat—especially if such refusal halts the start of the feast for all—is disruptive. However, as Derek Brewer, among many others, has pointed out, the pause and explicit call for a marvel is a narrative commonplace to romance that opens the door to *aventure*. Additionally, the *Gawain*-poet is keenly interested in the effects and symbolism that feast disruption can bring to a community. In *Cleanness*, there are at least five feasts that all feature some form of disruptive or intrusive elements. *Cleanness* is didactic in nature but is also a deeply courtly narrative, and its connections to the kinds of courtly concerns that suffuse *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* make the poet’s affinity for interrupted feasts especially poignant. A final note on *Cleanness*—the disruptions at play in this didactic text are the result of bad behavior or function as punishment being meted out on figures. That is not entirely the case for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or really any other Arthurian narrative that features intentional pause as a disruptive force. Disruptive as such a pause may be, it serves as a driver for narrative

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626 Byrne, “Arthur’s Refusal,” 64.

Nevertheless, how that pause plays out in the romance illuminates the kind of community that each text presents. There is some variation amongst narratives regarding whether the court accepts his pause without question, begins to feast without their king, or expresses frustration at the delay.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the narrator describes Arthur’s pause arising from three specific reasons, if one considers his “childishness” a contributing factor:

Arthur will not eat until all are served (reason one), and because he is somewhat childish (reason two), and because he had nobly decreed that he will never eat upon such an important day (reason three) unless he hears of some adventurous thing, an unknown tale, or some other marvel—or, he will be satisfied with a knight to join him in jousting, the more life-threatening, the better. Many scholars have focused on Arthur’s “sumquat childgered” demeanor and his

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628 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 85-102.
busyness to do “his zonge blod and his brayn wylde.” To Hostetter, Arthur acts rashly at this feast. Wells speaks of Arthur’s immaturity: “Arthur reveals himself as the equivalent of a modern child who whines for his pudding whilst failing to each his plate of broccoli and spinach.” J.J. Anderson likewise reads Arthur’s behavior before the feast unfavorably. Not all read Arthur negatively, for Brewer is ambivalent about whether Arthur’s childishness is worth censure, yet he does direct readers to J.A. Burrow’s reminder that this scene conforms “to the tradition of its genre in favouring the young and the new,” a predilection which Brewer reads as “including the New Year, and this fair folk in the first age.” Melissa Raine compares Arthur’s restraint in Malory’s *Tale of Gareth* to the eponymous character’s later personal restraint as an indication of character strength rather than defect:

Gareth in each case eschews the personal affiliations that would be implied if he accepted their hospitality, and his obedience is stressed over his personal comfort. His restraint here parallels Arthur’s conventional refusal, at the Tale’s outset, to eat until presented with a wonder: in both cases, resisting the immediate physical gratification of fine food to which they are entitled demonstrates an adherence to a more stringent ethical code than their companions.

Most critical commentary of Arthur’s refusal to eat focuses on the imposition of his will upon

629 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 86, 89.

630 Hostetter, *Political Appetites*, 16.

631 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 77.


others; Raine, on the other hand, urges us to consider the ethical dimensions of Arthur’s own personal delay of delicacies as something more than simply forcing others to wait.

In the larger corpus of Arthuriana, Arthur’s inaction “is open to the charge of discourtesy: in refusing to eat, the king holds up the enjoyment of his guests if the desired adventure is not immediately forthcoming,” and a number of Arthurian romances illustrate Kay expressing his displeasure at the imposed delay. A most humorous example of Kay’s impatience occurs in the early thirteenth-century Occitan romance, *Jaufré*:

Kay stepped before the king and said, ‘My lord, if you please, it must be time to eat now!’ The king turned on him and said, ‘Kay, you were born to be unpleasant and to speak like a churl. You know full well, for you have seen it many times, that I will not eat for anything, no matter how long I must hold court, until an adventure comes, or some strange news of a knight or maiden. Go sit somewhere else’.

Arthur’s frustration with Kay, especially when coupled with Kay’s typical boorish demeanor,

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Ab aitant denant lu rei ven  
E ditz: ‘Seinner, sazons seria  
De manjar uemais, sius plasia.’  
El rei es se vas el giratz:  
‘Qexs, per enuig’, a dit, ‘fus natz  
E per parlar vilanamens,  
E ja sabes vos veramens,  
Et aves o vist moltas ves,  
Qieu non manjaria peres,  
Qe cort tan esforsada tenga,  
Entro qe aventura venga  
O calque estraina novela  
De cavaler o de puiseila.  
Antaz sezer a una part!’

does not offer textual critique of the king; however, Kay might be saying what everyone is thinking. Nevertheless, no such clear frustration occurs in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for Arthur does not keep the feast from commencing. Many critics have failed distinguish *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* from its counterparts in Arthur’s refusal to eat—he requires the marvel before he will eat; he does not disallow the feast proper from beginning. Few critics read this detail correctly, instead assuming that Arthur keeps everyone waiting as he does in similar feasts. Normore, for one, focuses on the romance’s specification that Arthur “stondes in stale þe stif kyng hisseluen”—that is, Arthur, the stalwart king, stands tall by himself. While Arthur stands apart, Gawain, Guinevere, and Agravain all sit together, while Bishop Baldwin and Ywain share a table, and “Þen þe first cors come with crakkyng trumpes,” and “Dayntés dryuen þerwyth of ful dere metes,” and this ample first course of no fewer than twelve dishes for each dining pair is served.

While the court does not censure Arthur for his behavior as the feast commences, they do later offer quiet critique of the king’s actions. As Gawain rides away in search of the Green Chapel, they joylessly and tearfully bemoan Gawain’s fate. “Wel much watz þe warme water þat

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637 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 107. This line, particularly the word “stale,” is tricky. The Gawain-poet uses it in *Pearl* when describing the luminescence of jasper, and the *Middle English Compendium* uses this quotation as a basis for the (also tricky) denotation: “One of the uprights of a ladder…a rung in a ladder; also, a position in a series, [or] a handle…a shoot of a plant, stalk.” See “stale,” *Middle English Compendium*. Tolkien translates this line as, “Thus there stands up straight the stern king himself,” and Marie Borroff offers, “So he stands there in state, the stout young king.” See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Sir Orfeo*, edited and translated J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 27 and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience*, and *Pearl: Verse Translations*, edited and translated by Marie Borroff (New York: Norton, 2001, line 107.

638 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 109-129.
waltered of yȝen” the poet explains, while they exclaim to one another how much of a shame it is to lose Gawain in such circumstances, and they wonder to themselves, “Who knew euer any kync such counsel to take / As knyȝtez in cauelaciounz on Crystmasse gomnez!”\textsuperscript{639} The courtiers wonder how a king could take such counsel as knights quibbling (“cauelaciounz”\textsuperscript{640}) in Christmas games. In hindsight, the courtiers wonder whether the price of losing Gawain for the sake of a Christmas game is really worth the cost, which may, perhaps explain the shocked silence and astonishment that overtakes Camelot during the Green Knight’s intrusion and deadly challenge.\textsuperscript{641} Anderson turns to an earlier part of the second fitt wherein the narrator “appears to confirm his critical view of Arthur”:\textsuperscript{642} “This hanselle hatz Arthur of auenturus on fyrst / In ȝonge ȝer, for he ȝerned ȝelpyng to here.”\textsuperscript{643} Of this passage, Anderson contends that “[t]he conjunction for leaves no room for doubt that the meaning is that Arthur has brought the situation upon himself, and the implication is that he has paid the price of his rashness.”\textsuperscript{644}

\textit{Sotiltes in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}

The primary sotilte of \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} is characterized by its orchestrators’ intent to confuse and harm those who behold and interact with it. The staging of deliberately

\textsuperscript{639} \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, lines 686, 674-675, 683-684.


\textsuperscript{641} Anderson finds their reaction “unreasonable” and further illustration of their immaturity. See Anderson, \textit{Language}, 169.

\textsuperscript{642} Anderson, \textit{Language}, 168.

\textsuperscript{643} \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, lines 491-492.

\textsuperscript{644} Anderson, \textit{Language}, 168.
tricky situations is a natural part of the courtly milieu in terms of feasting contexts, and Arthur stresses this to Guinevere and the shocked courtiers after the Green Knight’s exit: “Wel bycommes such craft vpon Cristmasse.” In other words, Arthur contends, it is normal for such beguilement at Christmastime. The Green Knight’s sudden intrusion of the feast hall fulfills Arthur’s need for a marvel before he can eat, and it is perhaps the least figurative of all sotiltes that I explore in my dissertation, closely aligning with typical feast protocol. Unplanned sotiltes or entremets are not a feature or function of feasts from the historical record; however, as this intrusion and countless others from the corpus of medieval Arthurian literature illustrate, unplanned intrusion is frequently a set piece of Arthuriana. The sotilte is not simply decoration for courtly narrative—it is a way of inviting larger, metanarrative social commentary, of forcing action upon characters (in that an otherwise stable community is suddenly destabilized to some degree), or acting as catalyst for some other aspects of narrative development—such as setting in motion an aventure. The Green Knight’s disruption initiates these potentialities in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Theodore Silverstein identifies the great ramifications that this unplanned sotilte holds for the court:

The pause which ensues would be awkward at any party, and this is, besides, the merry Christmas season, when Arthur welcomes wonders. He hastens to comfort Guenevere and carry on the feast: like Belshazzar our courteous king is, after all, a host. But there is also the courteous Sir Gawain. What of him at this moment of youth and jollity? In answer the poet suddenly abandons narrative to intervene in his own poem with solemn admonition…Thus the episode comes to an end which is no end, with a gaiety that is no gaiety. Our hero is in trouble and we know it.

645 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, line 471.

646 Of course, beheading is atypical at actual feasts, per the historical record; however, as I discuss in Chapter 2 with the “Test de Turk” or “Turk’s Head” sotilte wherein a dish is made whimsically to resemble a severed head.

The narrator’s “solemn admonition” to Gawain highlights the relationship between spectacle and reflection as well as the ramifications of one’s behavior in a space wherein one expects leisure and entertainment. The lighthearted jollity that characterizes the court prior to the Green Knight’s arrival changes significantly, and the Gawain-poet’s direct commentary to Gawain signals such a shift:

> Now þenk wel, Sir Gawan,  
> For woþe þat þou ne wonde  
> Þis auenture for to frayn  
> Þat þou hatz tan on honed.648

Think well, the narrator urges Gawain, you not shrink in fear (wonde) from that danger (woþe), to refrain from this adventure that you have taken on in hand. Beholding and reflecting on spectacle and deed becomes Gawain’s common action throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to varying degrees of deep introspection and success.

Prior to the Green Knight’s arrival, the poet’s gaze moves about the great hall, taking in the luxury and courtesy of the guests as if viewing all through Arthur’s somewhat wild vantage point. Once the Green Knight bursts into the room, all eyes are upon him, and Camelot’s collective gaze cannot look away, lest they miss some minute detail about the massive man. Sarah Stanbury’s work with the Gawain-poet and perception draws from Alain Renoir’s description of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’s “cinematographic” approach to this feast scene. In Stanbury’s words, Renoir’s take is that the poet uses a method of “the drawing out or foregrounding of a visual detail as the background fades.”649 He arrives and all else seems to

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648 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 487-490.

disappear up until the Green Knight addresses the court directly, and they have a difficult time coming back to themselves, as evidenced by their still silent gaping at the man. Because of the Green Knight’s confusing and dazzling array of characteristics, what he is and what he means not only perplexes the courtiers of Camelot but has long befuddled critics: “The nature of the green man (magical, illusory, or marvelous in origin) and the meaning inscribed in his color are questions that the text—and an army of modern interpreters—never fully answers.” The perplexing power of the visual in its literal and symbolic aspects is key to this scene. Like Richard keenly observing his Saracen guests at the macabre feast in Richard Coer de Lyon, the Green Knight trains his eyes on Camelot. And in this act of beholding, Sarah Stanbury argues, a reciprocal sort of vision takes place, for “[t]he Green Knight’s gaze turns festival into spectacle: we are not simply present among the members of the court participating in a Christmas holiday but also intrude, spectators looking in on ourselves.” I would argue that this festival is already spectacle, and by nature of the sudden sotilte that the Green Knight inflicts up on Camelot, the emphasis on spectacular visuals increases sharply. Williams describes the work that the spectacle places upon those who behold such marvels: “Marvelous spectacles command attention and require responses that combine that immediate with the reflective, the affective with the

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650 Stanbury, Seeing, 97. There are a number of critics who have read the Green Knight as Green Man or some iteration of Nature of pagan god. A.C. Spearing offers an overview of these views, noting John Speirs’ reading of the Green Knight as Green Man or vegetation god of time immemorial, Larry D. Benson’s reading of him as an amalgamation of Green Man and some other wild man figure, or the Christian readings offered by B.S. Levy and Hans Schnyder, who read the Green Knight as Devil and Christ, respectively. See Spearing, The Gawain-Poet, 179. More recent scholarship that takes an eco-critical approach adds additional valances to the symbolism of the Green Knight, and these are beyond the scope of this current project, but future work on the symbolism of the literary sotilte may incorporate such perspectives.

651 Stanbury, Seeing, 98.
The Green Knight punctuates a space that has otherwise been Insular and subsequently reveals the previously unacknowledged porosity or permeability of the space. To minimize any harm that the Green Knight’s entry might have inflicted upon the court, Arthur normalizes what has transpired. After his initial flare of anger and humiliation, Arthur sidesteps any reflective attention to the Green Knight’s marvel, instead offering assurance to Guinevere:

Þaȝ Arþer þe hende kyng at hert hade wonder,  
He let no semblaunt be sene, bot sayde ful hyȝe  
To þe comlych quene wyth cortays speche,  
“Dere dame, to-day demay yow neuer;  
Wel bycommes such craft vpon Cristmasse,  
Laykyng of enterludez, to laȝe and to syng,  
Among þise kynde caroles of knyȝtez and ladyez.  
Neuer þe lece to my mete I may me wel dres,  
For I haf sen a selly, I may not forsake.”

Arthur ultimately normalizes the Green Knight’s *sotilte* to the feast-goers. The form and function that the Green Knight adopts and plays to the Arthurian Court—they attempt to laugh and cajole, and when that fails, the whole thing nearly goes off the rails. There are issues of emotional register and expectation to unpack, here. The gap between host and unexpected guest (and marvel) is wide. While it may be typical for games at Christmastide, that the Green Knight has interrupted the feast and intruded upon the most defensible part of Camelot (per Scully’s description of the Great Hall and its utility) to wound and wrong the court so deeply is neither a normal experience for this holiday nor emotional community.

There are two aspects of the Green Knight’s *sotilte* that depart from the norm, however.

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652 Williams, *Middle English*, 1.

653 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 467-475.
typical Arthur purports the interlude to be. Firstly, the *sotilte* is unplanned by and unknown to the host. Secondly, building upon this surprise, the Green Knight’s *sotilte* is threatening. The Green Knight’s *sotilte* is not simply threatening in word—for his mockery of the court and incitement of Arthur towards rash and life-threatening behavior is problematic in its own right—but also in substance. The Green Knight invades the great hall and denies hospitality.

Despite the abnormal circumstances in which the Green Knight’s *sotilte* takes place, numerous scholars have remarked that the entry is reminiscent of the *sotilte* or *entremets*. Normore, for example, contends that the *Gawain*-poet “intentionally recalls the real-world *entremets* or rather its Middle English equivalent, the interlude or *soteltie*.” Normore’s approach focuses on how audiences receive artistic representation, so she ultimately casts her reading of the interlude in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in terms of its moving effects on the reader. This affective layer certainly exists for the audience, and it is also present for those within the romance who behold such manipulative spectacles:

> If interlude evokes both liminality and play, *soteltie* refers to the quality of subtlety or ingenuity that went into making and appreciating these performances, much as does Arthur’s alliterative linking of craft as appropriate to celebrate Christmas. Within the idealized but also often imitated world of Arthurian romance, wonder thus serves multiple interrelated purposes. Based at once in the startlingly exotic, the skillfully made, and the thought-provoking, wonder creates the pleasure required for elite enjoyment while also challenging even the most seemingly refined guests to soul-searching and moral improvement. For late medieval elites who looked into such an Arthurian mirror, the complexity and possible efficacy of the aesthetic of wonder would be difficult to ignore.

Normore sees wonder as both pleasure and a heuristic device that leads to introspection and self discovery—these are not mutually exclusive, of course, but if Gawain’s shame-spiral at the end

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of the romance is indicative of the displeasure that accompanies the epiphany of moral decay, then soul-searching and subsequent moral improvement is not always a pleasant undertaking. Normore stresses that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a piece of fiction, that is, an artwork, and it therefore must have an outward-facing intent.

Similarly, Wells reads the Green Knight’s arrival “suspiciously like the arrival of a complex ‘soteltie’ or ‘entremet’, which would be brought out at the end of each course at great banquets to the accompaniment of music.”

Turning to Chiquart’s castle *entremet*, for example, Wells sees the *sotilte* as reaching fantastical proportions. Terence Scully describes this *entremet* as “one of the most complex and impressive of all the creations of which we have any detailed record.”

This *entremet* is recorded in Burgundian chef Master Chiquart’s fifteenth-century *Du fait de cuisine* and features a massive castle *entremets*, which I do not reproduce in its entirety, for it continues for multiple pages describing how to cook each piece of the *entremet* to make the artifice most effective for spectators:

For a raised *entremets* /30v/—that is, a castle. For its base you need a good big four-man litter, and on that litter you need towers set at each of its corners; each and every tower is to be fortified with crenellations and machicolas. In every tower there must be archers and crossbowmen to defend that fortress. Furthermore in every tower there will be a candle or torch to give light. The towers will show branches bearing flowers and fruit of every sort of tree, and upon those branches will be birds of every variety. In the courtyard at the foot of each tower there will be what follows.

At one of the towers, a boar’s head, emblazoned and glazed, breathing fire.

At another tower, a large pike; that pike will be cooked in three ways—the one-third at the tail, fried, the one-third in the middle, boiled, and the one-third at the head roasted /31r/ on the grill. That pike will be placed at the foot of the next tower looking out, its mouth breathing fire. Now you must consider the saucing with which that pike should be eaten, and

656 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 78.

657 Terence Scully, *Du fait de cuisine / On Cookery of Master Chiquart (1420): with the original text of Sion, Bibliothèque cantonale du Valais, MS Supersaxo 103*, transcribed and translated with commentary by Terence Scully (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies), 2010, note 10.1, 137.
that is: the fried with oranges, the boiled with a good green sauce sharpened with a little vinegar, and the roasted pike should be eaten with green verjuice sauce which is made with sorrel. At the foot of the next tower, a glazed piglet looking out and breathing fire.

And at the foot of the last tower a skinned and redressed swan, likewise breathing fire.

In the center of the courtyard below the four towers there should be a Fountain of Love. Through a spout there should gush rosewater and mulled wine. Over that fountain should be set cages holding doves and every sort of flying bird. At the highest points of the castle there should be standards, banners and pennants. Alongside the fountain /31v/ should be a peacock which has been skinned and redressed.658

From here Chiquart instructs the chef in the “artifice of the peacock”—skinning, roasting, and redressing the fowl so that it might be the centerpiece of an entremet as well as providing preparation for the other animals involved in the staging of this castle, including hens for the crenels around the courtyard, glazed hedgehogs, meatballs, “Spanish pots made of meat and all glazed,” and all other sorts of formed and painted meat pastes additionally adorn this fanciful

658 Chiquart, Du fait de cuisine / On Cookery of Master Chiquart (1420): with the original text of Sion, Bibliothèque cantonale du Valais, MS Supersaxo 103, transcribed and translated with commentary by Terence Scully (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies), 2010, 137-142. This excerpt is as follows in Scully’s transcription:

Pour ung entremets /30v/ esleve • cest assavoir ung chastel y fault faire pour son fondement une belle letiere grande a porter • a quatre hommes et en la dicte letiere fault quatre tors a postez en chescun quarre [de] ladicte letiere une • et une chacunce tour estre bien bertrachie et foresie / et en chacunc tour hait arbalestiers & archiers pour deffendre ladicte fortalice / et encor mais en chacunc tour ung cierge ou torche de cire pour enluminer et porteront branches de tous arbres portans flours & fruictz de toutes manieres • et pour ce dessus lesdictes branches oyseaux de toutes manieres et en la basse cour aura au pie de chescune tour / en lune de les tours une hure de sanglier armee & doree lanczant feu • d’autre part ung grant lucz / et ce lucz sera cuitz de troys manieres le tiers du lucz sera frit • devers la queue / et lautre tier du mielieu sera boullir • & lautre tier de la teste sera rusti • /31r/ sur le gril • Et leditz lucz sera assiz au pie de lautre tour en regardant de hors dela beste gectant feu • or fault adviser le saucery dudit lucz a quoy il se doibt mangier cest assavoir le frit avecques orenges • le boully / a une bone sauce verd / que soit aygretre dun pou de vinaigre • et le roustz dudit lucz / se doibt mengier a verjust verd • qui soit fait de oyselle • Au pie de lautre tour ung • porcellot dorez regardans de hors • et lanczant feu • et au pie de lautre tour ung cigne escorchiez / et revetuz aussi gectant feu • et au mielieu des quatre tours / en la basse cour une fontaine damours / de la quelle fontaine el doibt saillir par ung canon leaue rose / et le vin cle • & dessus ladicte fontaine soient geyves garnies de coulombs et de tous oyseaulx volans et ou plus hault dudit chastel • hait estendars bampnieres et pennons • et du coste /31v/ de ladicte fontaine hait ung paon qui soit escorchiez et resvestus.
The four men bearing the litter are to be obscured curtains painted to resemble billowing and crashing waves, with fish, ships, and all other sorts of maritime tableaux. Chiquart is not satisfied with this degree of artifice and calls for still more in the *entremet*: there are to be three or four youths “tresbien touchans” (playing very well) the rebec, lute, psaltery, and harp, and with good voices that harmonize in such a pleasing way as to be sea sirens: “acorda/33r/bles [sic] doulces / et amenables / affîn que il soit proptrement que ce soient serennes dedans mer • pour leur clément chanter.” The remainder of the recipe for this *entremet* offers preparation instructions for the proper sauces to accompany the peacock.

Chiquart’s castle *entremet* is fascinating in its own right, but it is particularly noteworthy for the coordination, preparation, and planning that such strategically constructed and performed *entremets* would require. Each aspect of the complex castle would require a number of cooks to execute, and the procurement of the raw foodstuffs would be a feat in itself. The preparation and presentation of such an elaborate *entremet* would involve people with very specific positions: the larder, poulterer, bakers, butchers, an army of scullion, as well as both the *escuiers de cuisine* (the so-called “kitchen squire” whom Scully says would give Chiquart orders) and the steward. Beyond the kitchen, Chiquart’s artwork requires commissioning artists (to paint the billowing waves, fish, ships, and so forth), musicians, hiring actors or involving nobles to act as archers and other defenders of the baked fortress. Chiquart presents this *entremet* in his *Du fait de cuisine* as if it is his own brainchild, and that may be so, but we also know that the entire

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659 Chiquart, *Du fait*, 143.

660 Chiquart, *Du fait*, 144.

661 Scully, *Du fait*, 34, note 66.
enterprise of inscribing these recipes was largely owing to his employer, Amadeus VIII, Duke of Savoy. So many hands go into the creation and staging of this massive artifice. The only folks likely in the dark about the interludes might be guests who do not happen to be attached closely to the Duke and his retinue or Duchess Mary.

Likewise, the anonymous conduct verse “Office of a sewer” collected with *The babees book* and *The bokes of nurture* explains the conversations that a sewer (from the Old French *esculier*) would have with various offices related to food service in an aristocratic household. The teacher exhorts the young pupil (“my son”) to “drede yow no þynge daungeresnes,” for he shall “enforme yow feithfully with right gladsom chere” his kitchen “lore.”  

Ensure that the head of household, especially, is prepared first by handwashing and saying grace before the meal:

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Take hede whan þe worshipfulle hed / þat is of any place
hath wasche afore mete / and bigynnethe to sey þe grace,
Vn-to þe kechyn þan looke ye take youre trace…
Entendying & at youre commaundyng þe seruuaundes of þe place;
Furst speke with þe pantere / or officere of þe spicery
For frutes a-fore mete to ete þem fastyngely,
as buttur / plommes / damesyns, grapes, and chery,
Suche in sesons of þe yere / ar served / to make men mery,
Serche and enquere of þem / ye suche seruyse shalle be þat day;
þan commyn with þe cooke / and looke what he wille say;
þe surveyoure & he / þe certeynte telle yow wille þay,
what metes // & how many disches / þey dyd fore puruay.
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The speaker offers his pupil a rubric for how a formal meal should operate, and it is particularly interesting that the sewer is to get the lord seated and ready for the meal then to duck into the kitchen and ask questions. It seems that the narrator takes poetic license, as one would expect the official interface between high dais and kitchen to be more prepared before the start of the service. While this conduct poem does not outline the service and staging of a *sotilte* or *entremets*, the many concerns all levels of kitchen staff (from the lowly scullery to the noble steward) would need to address are on display in this brief verse.

Since many levels of the host’s household would be involved in and aware of the spectacle, the expectation and anticipation of the *entremets* would not lead to widespread shock, astonishment, and fear. Even though, as Hostetter argues, “[a]ny lordly diner could expect to be stunned by a well-made *entremets*, especially on an important feast day,” as Chiquart’s sophisticated *entremets* illustrates, the marvel could hardly be a complete surprise. To Camelot, the Green Knight’s imposition feels shocking, astonishing, and frightening. Wells briefly touches upon the tendency of the *sotilte* to be interactive, citing the “1479 feast marking the installation of John Morton as bishop of Ely,” which “served to celebrate the trustworthiness of the new bishop and ratified his position on both a regal and divine level.” Wells does not mention the manipulation at work, but here at least touches on the Aristotelean appeal to pathos. Nevertheless, the interactive *sotiltes* and *entremets* of the later Middle Ages certainly intended to move spectators to particular goals (as planned by the host). The Green Knight is no different, except he is not the host of this Camelot feast. Neither Normore, Wells, nor Hostetter see

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666 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 79.
anything odd about the Green Knight’s sotilte:

Scholars tend to see the ensuing disorder as a result of the Green Knight’s failure to fit in with feast etiquette. In contrast, I would argue that the Green Knight can be seen as a perfectly regulated part of the feast, while it is Arthur’s behavior prior to and after his arrival the is the cause of disorder. 667

Hostetter notes how the Green Knight’s “fantastic entrance and appearance recalls another sort of wonder, the entremets or soteltie, a culinary interlude between courses of a banquet.” 668 Hostetter contends that the sotilte “was designed to shock the jaded appetite,” and in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight means to challenge “the self-satisfied court of King Arthur, replete with the amazing, elaborate cuisine of the late Middle Ages.” 669

Other readings of the Green Knight as a challenge to Camelot do not fully consider the wider feasting context in which it takes place, such as Greg Walker’s exploration of the “fundamental test of the nature of the Arthurian court” that the Green Knight poses. 670 Walker is primarily interested in the role, status, and experience of the individual in the romance, and I extend Walker’s reading to consider the community and setting to parse out the dynamic, “ongoing process of negotiation and revision” that being in a courtly space necessitates. 671 Walker, like David Aers, reads the Green Knight and the men of Camelot as sharing the same fundamental

667 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 78. Wells further suggests that the Green Knight riding about in the hall is reminiscent of or corresponds to “the official horseman who would ride round at a new monarch’s coronation.” (See Wells 80 and Froissart 466).

668 Hostetter, Political Appetites, 17.

669 Hostetter, Political Appetites, 18.


values. Aers contends that “[b]oth challenger and challenged understand that fame, pride, ferocity, wrath, renown, and heroic language are essential virtues in this community’s project and self-image.” Aers contends that the challenge to courtesy that the Green Knight stages additionally “challenges the very identity of the courtly community, its virtues, and goals, all of which could be reaffirmed through the encounter.” Walker instead contends that “although the Green Knight seems deliberately to have set up his challenge in this way, Gawain steps in precisely to forestall such a confrontation, by offering an alternative reading of Camelot’s ‘project and self-image’ in which such qualities play only an incidental part.” To Walker, Gawain not only tries to reinstate Arthur as the authority in the room, but he also aims to reestablish unity and order. Although Walker is correct in reading that the Green Knight’s methodology of challenge and testing is deliberate, he does not consider the context (a sotilte—inherently challenging and subtle in its craft), and he ultimately sees disjuncture between the Green Knight’s hostility and “precise nature and careful articulation of his challenge to the court.” By not considering the festal elements of the Green Knight’s challenge fully, Walker cannot see how the interactive interlude attempts to engage and endanger Arthur directly, thereby achieving his (Morgan’s) goal of frightening Guinevere to death. In other words, without considering the disruption as sotilte, or at the very least adjacent to such interludes, the Green Knight’s actions and later explanation seems nonsensical.


673 Aers, Community, 158.

674 Walker, “The Green Knight,” 120.

A.C. Spearing likewise discusses Arthur’s “classification” of The Green Knight’s entry and behavior in keeping “with the enterludez appropriate for the Christmas season,” arguing that such taxonomy has “wider significant than might appear, for it seems likely that such pageants really could have formed part of the Christmas festivities in the court for which the poet wrote.” Spearing further contends that “Arthur’s words thereby help to reinforce the ambivalent suspension of the action between jest and earnest which is found throughout the poem.”

It is odd that the Green Knight’s uninvited intrusion upon a Camelot feast and subsequent unplanned sotilte is not seen as odd by critics when considered in the greater scheme of late medieval interludes. In the realm of the literary imagination, of course, things function differently, but a courtly audience of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight would recognize the licenses that the Gawain-poet takes to great literary effect. Beyond the unplanned nature of this sotilte, it also represents the Green Knight coming into the center of Camelot, the great hall. Because Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the most courtly romance that I discuss, I provide further details about the kind of space in which this feast might take place.

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676 Spearing, The Gawain-Poet, 177. Spearing’s opening chapter of this monograph makes the case for a single poet of Patience, Pearl, Purity/Cleanness, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, based primarily on matters of language and style. Elsewhere throughout the study, the chapters devoted to each of these four works from the Cotton Nero a.x. MS speculate about who the Gawain-poet may have been (Spearing presumes a man), infers from his language that he had some entry into courtly society, and uses the themes throughout all four poems to argue that he was interested in spiritual and ethical matters of a Christian perspective.

677 Spearing, The Gawain-Poet, 177.

678 The popular romances that I analyze in prior chapters take the nuance of the great hall for granted, even though they do consider preeminence in the hall as a marker of prestige (or insult, depending on where one falls in the hierarchy). Here, however, the resplendent halls are teeming with detail that need to be contextualized to be appreciated fully.
Terence Scully, describes a typical table setup in the later Middle Ages, stressing the multipurpose nature of the great hall:

The table at which formal meals were served and eaten in the late Middle Ages was different from ours in several ways. In a strictly physical sense it did not have the same sort of permanence as we give all of our ‘dining-room furniture’ today. In point of fact there was no such thing as a dining room or even dining hall at that time; no room was set aside as a site specifically or exclusively for the function of eating…In any noble castle or manor or spacious townhouse there was, however, customarily one room that was designed to be capacious enough for relatively large public assemblies.679

In fact, Sara Paston-Williams describes the advent of separate dining spaces and permanent dining room tables in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but before that, the great hall would be a multipurpose room wherein various types of furniture would be brought to and from depending upon the occasion. Like Scully, Paston-Williams writes that “[m]ost of the furniture associated with dining or feasting was not kept permanently in position because of all the coming and going and the lack of security.”680 Architecture likewise reflects this concern for security:

In many cases the Hall was located within the most defensive part of a castle. If the Hall shared a masonry wall with the castle itself, any window openings through that wall would be quite narrow and, inside, the natural light that made its way through the thick embrasures quite dim. Because dinner, the main meal of the day, was served near noon, this relative obscurity was not such a great problem.681

It is not insignificant that the great hall often appears in the most defensible part of a castle, and


681 Scully, Art of Cookery, 167.
this is the site of the highly ceremonial social rite, thereby linking defense, protection, and social cohesion symbolically through the very architecture of the space.\textsuperscript{682} The kitchen, as well as the pantry, buttery, and other kitchen-adjacent spaces, might be placed some part away from the great hall and main fortification or castle, primarily out of safety concerns, as uncontrolled fires were a major concern. As Woolgar notes, kitchen design was “frequently a detached building” made in such a way that would “mitigate the inconvenience of its function…on the very real risk of fire.”\textsuperscript{683} As kitchen technology improved—better hearths, more controllable fires, and so forth—kitchens moved closer to the hall.\textsuperscript{684}

Considering that security is a primary concern for the construction and placement of the great hall and kitchen, the Green Knight’s intrusion of Camelot and his disruption of the proper order of the first course of the feast underscores his seemingly practiced performance of disdain towards the court. The Green Knight supersedes such security measures in an otherworldly way. He operates within a liminal space of known and unknown—being at once courtly and not, human and something else, being jolly and threatening—and the Green Knight wrests control of

\textsuperscript{682} For examples of castle layout and architecture in England during the later Middle Ages, see C.M. Woolgar, \textit{The Great Household in Late Medieval England} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 46-72 and Michael Thompson, “Castles,” in \textit{A Companion to the Gawain-Poet}, edited Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 119-130, especially Figure 6, the ground-floor schematic of Hadron Hall Derbyshire, reproduced from P. Faulkner of the Royal Archaeological Institute. Woolgar provides blueprints of a number of castles from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the location of the great hall in each varies from being centrally located to being built on the opposite side of the primary entrance to the castle. Woolgar moreover provides details on the schematic layouts of sample thirteenth-century manor houses and compares these to the contemporary castle layouts. In all, Woolgar’s study confirms Scully’s arguments—the great hall would be centrally located in some way in relation to the remainder of the greater structure.

\textsuperscript{683} Woolgar, \textit{The Great Household}, 140-141.

\textsuperscript{684} Woolgar, \textit{The Great Household}, 145.
the room from Arthur. This performance, as the Green Knight/Lord Bertilak later reveals to Gawain, is meant to harm and manipulate. How he is able to enact such affective movement and subsequently what effects his actions have immediately and in the long term for Camelot are tricky answers to tease out.

**Intentional Emotional Manipulation at Work**

While the Green Knight’s meaning and intention is not immediately clear during the Christmastide interlude, the deliberate manipulation is later revealed to be an inherent aspect of the Green Knight’s work in Camelot. Like the other elements of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that appear in threes, this *sotilte* is comprised of three main parts: entrance and silent presence, much like a tableau, direct challenge to the audience, and a marvelous beheading. Upon his entry, no one says anything, then, feigning ignorance, he finally asks the guests:

\[\text{Þe fyrst word þat he warp, “Wher is”, he sayd, “Þe gouernour of þis gyng? Gladly I wolde Se þat segg in syȝt, and with hymself speke raysoun.”} \]

\[\text{To knyȝtez he kest his yȝe, And reled hym vp and doun; He stemmed, and con studie Quo walt þer most renoun.}\]

The Green Knight is large and appears half-giant in form alone, and as he addresses Camelot for the first time is still astride his horse—at least, the poet does not indicate that he has dismounted.

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686 One could argue that this *sotilte* is more of a four-part situation, with the entrance, challenge, beheading, and exit comprising each node of the narrative. I read Gawain’s dispatching of the Green Knight by way of lopping off the knight’s head as part of the exit.

687 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 224-231.
and his gaze is above everyone: “heȝe he ouer loked.” The Green Knight positions himself such that everyone else must peer up at him, and his hulking size commands their attention and wonder. As a man who clearly knows fashion—considering his finely craft clothing, broad shoulders, small waist, and comely calves—the Green Knight also surely knows who Arthur is, especially since he’s ridden his horse right up to the dais. The court, still stuck in silence, do not respond to the Green Knight’s question of “Where is the governor of this company?” but instead marvel at his presence and words. Note the three iterations of terms associated with marvel, italicized below:

Ther watz lokyng on lenþe þe lude to beholde,
For vch mon had meruayle quat hit mene myȝt
Þat a häpel and a horse myȝt such a hwe lach,
As growe grene as þe gres and grener hit semed,
Þen grene aumayl on golde glowande bryȝter.
Al studied þat þer stod, and stalked hym nerre
Wyth al þe wonder of þe worlde what he worch schulde.
For fele sellyez had þay sen, bot such neuer are;
Forþi for fantoum and fayryȝe þe folk þere hit demed.
Þerfore to answare watz arȝe mony aþel freke,
And al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten
In a swoghe sylence þurȝ þe sale riche;
As al were slypped vpon slepe so slaked hor lotez
in hyȝe—
I deme hit not al for doute,
Bot sum for cortaysye—
Bot let hym þat al schulde loute
Cast vnto þat wyȝe.  

The people marvel at the hue of the Green Knight, thinking it greener than grass, and they perceive the gold to glow brighter because of it. They wonder deeply at what he intends, and though they have seen many marvels (fele sellyez), none have been such as this one. Their

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688 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, line 223.

689 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 232-249.
collective astonishment recalls Dorigen’s dismay at Aurelius’s ability to make the black rocks seemingly disappear, “That swiche a monstre or mervaille myghte be! / It is agayns the proces of nature.”

Arthur, stepping into his official role as host and king, finally addresses the newcomer, “Wyȝe, welcum iwys to þis place,” but the Green Knight refuses Arthur’s hospitality and scoffs at the king’s suggestions.

Instead, he lays out his terms for the game, thus shifting into the challenge portion of the sotilte: a blow in exchange for the same blow to be dealt in return in a year’s time. Silence overtakes the court once more, and the Green Knight mocks the king and knights and calling them “on þis bench bot berdlez chylder.” Arthur is, understandably, incensed, and I turn to discussion of kingly anger below to explore what Arthur is doing in his reaction to the Green Knight’s insolence. Having deftly enraged Arthur, the Green Knight seems to imperil the king, but Gawain courteously takes up the king’s place in the game of blows, diffusing the tension between the Green Knight and Arthur and shifting the narrative focus to himself (Gawain) for the remainder of the romance.

By accepting the Green Knight’s terms, wielding the axe, and beheading the Green Knight before his fellow celebrants, Gawain sets into motion the romance’s existential exploration of the “complex interactions between mind, body, and affect.”

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691 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, line 252.

692 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, line 280.

for his own pleasure, the Green Knight inflicts another shockwave through the court. Once Gawain sunders the Green Knight’s head from his body,

\begin{verbatim}
Þe fayre hede fro þe halce hit to þe erþe,
Þat fele hit foyned wyth her fete, þere hit forth roled;
þe blod brayd fro þe body, þat blykked on þe grene;
And nawþer faltered ne fel þe freke neuer þe helder,
Bot styþly he start forth vpon styf schonkes,
And runyschly he raȝt out, þere as renkkez stoden,
Laȝt to his lufly hed, and lyft hit vp sone…
\end{verbatim}

The Green Knight’s head rolls to the ground, and the people kick it about while his body bleeds, then the strong body strides forth and lifts up his severed head. The Green Knight somehow speaks to the crowd, reminding Gawain of his agreement, and speeds away on his horse. The scene is darkly comic, reminiscent of a Monty Python sketch, for all of its impossibility—a dead man, well, a man who ought to be dead speaks, urging a knight to remember and make good on his promise. In a sense, the Green Knight is vaguely reminiscent of a martyred figure who still miraculously manages to engage with others even after death, but with the Green Knight, this is more than just a half-life. He seems nonchalant in his decapitation, “As non vnhap had hym ayled.”

Aside from the detail that the people kick the head about, we do not hear how they react to the Green Knight’s severed head addressing the crowd. The poet only recounts the reaction of Arthur and Gawain, who

\begin{verbatim}
At þat grene þay laȝe and grenne,
Þet breued watz hit ful bare
A meruayl among þo menne.
\end{verbatim}

694 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 427-433.

695 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, line 438.

696 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 464-466.
They have certainly received their marvel, and they laugh and grin at the Green Knight—this calculated emotional response starkly contrasts the recent ire from Arthur and practiced calm courtesy from Gawain to diffuse his king’s anger. There are two additional comments from the Gawain-poet that suggest that Arthur and Gawain feel discomfort after the Green Knight’s exit, implying that their laughter and grinning is actually an affectation and therefore artificial. That Arthur feels “at hert…wonder” but outwardly normalizes what has transpired is an indication that his inward state is incongruent with his outward display, for “He let no semblaunt be sene.” Moreover, the Gawain-poet addresses Gawain in the wheel, urging him to “þenk wel” about the agreement and disallow fear from causing him to fail to fulfill his promise in a year’s time.

Arthur and Gawain are moved emotionally by their encounters with the Green Knight, and their subsequent model of appropriate emotional register as a corrective to the unwelcome shift in emotional display is in keeping with an emotive.

By performing the feelings—regardless of whether they actually feel the emotions—Arthur and Gawain are able to recalibrate their own emotional state but also to model how things should be for the court. They attempt to reinvigorate the festal.

In fact medievalist John Finlayson sees just this kind of feeling work taking place in the romance. Finlayson explains,

> Emotional and psychological reaction, particularly that of Gawain, is a prominent feature of this poem, as it generally is not of most M.E. romances. Thus, the reactions to the marvellous do not isolate these events from the main matter of the work, but rather, though unusual for

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697 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 467-468.

698 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 487-490.

699 See Chapter 1 for discussion of William Reddy’s emotives, 49-51.
romance, serve to assimilate the marvels to the more mundane events and objects of the narrative.\footnote{John Finlayson, “The Marvellous in Middle English Romance.” \textit{The Chaucer Review} 33.4 (1999): 363-408, 399.}

Arthur and Gawain must naturalize or normalize the Green Knight’s dismaying display before Camelot as well as the challenge and game that he proposes. Otherwise, the Green Knight’s actions are illogical within the context of a feast, and they threaten the cohesion that the court had heretofore mirthfully enjoyed. Fast echoes Finlayson’s argument, specifically addressing the ludic effects of deliberate laughter following the Green Knight’s departure. Fast argues that,

Arthur invokes the ludic context to re-define the Green Knight’s actions as not only fitting but also necessary for the continuation of the feast. He carries out this coup d’etat by claiming the events as a fulfillment of the condition he laid on the celebration that no food or drink be taken before a wonder presented itself.\footnote{Fast, “They ‘Laʒed,’” 95.}

This same pattern occurs when “Arthur dispels the gloomy ‘demay’ [dismay] which falls over the court after the Green Knight’s departure by enjoining them once more ‘to laʒe’ [to laugh] (470-474).”\footnote{Fast, “They ‘Laʒed,’” 95.} The romance’s “highly-structured use of laughter invites readers to meditate on the power of the ludic to maintain, dissolve, and evolve the social associations of Camelot and Hautdesert.”\footnote{Fast, ‘The ‘Laʒed,” 92.} The deliberate performance of laughter—despite any inward marvel or fear that either Arthur or Gawain might experience in the moment—acts as a form of corrective affective manipulation to counter the Green Knight’s successful emotional disorder in the court. Only after he leaves are they able to enact this remedial affect.

In the first fitt, the Green Knight’s manipulation is overt but not explicit. However, after
granting Gawain a single nick on the back of his neck, Bertilak reveals to Gawain the very specific affects that he and Morgan hope to bring about through the guise and distressing actions that the Green Knight undertakes:

Ho wayned me vpon þis wyse to yo
ur wynne halle
For to assay þe surquidré, ȝif hit soth were
Þat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table;
Ho wayned me þis wonder your wyttez to reue,
For to haf greued Gaynour and gart hir to dyȝe
With glopnyng of þat ilke gome þat gostlych speked
With his hede in his honde bifore þe hyȝe table.\(^{704}\)

Morgan arranges for Bertilak to assume the guise of the Green Knight with the hopes that he will test the “surquidré” of the court—that is, its pride or prowess.\(^{705}\) Morgan additionally hopes that the Green Knight’s appearance and grisly ability to speak and survive being decapitated will grieve Guinevere so greatly that her heart stops.

Like Bakhtin’s grotesque, the *sotilte* is always becoming and generating, bringing forth new potentialities, bursting forth at whatever seams intend to hem it in. The literary *sotilte* becomes uncontainable and influences many seemingly unrelated aspects of the narrative, sometimes for the whole of the tale. What is more, Bakhtin describes the Rabelaisian banquet as a stage setting, and this same sensibility informs the utility of the *sotilte* for Middle English romance, in that the feast element holds space for possibility.\(^{706}\) This long-reaching effect is the case for *Sir Gawain*

\(^{704}\) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 2456-2462.


\(^{706}\) Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 283.
and the Green Knight, and the Green Knight’s physicality embodies such grotesquerie, and this romance is a prime illustration of the tight weave between banquet images and the grotesque body in medieval literature, as Bakhtin broadly notes.\(^{707}\) In feasting imagery, the grotesque body is typically marked by “[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness,” all of which are present in the Green Knight’s hulking and monstrous yet comely form. Only after Gawain takes up the challenge and the Green Knight leaves is the court able to “laugh away” the terrifying monster. As Bakhtin argues, the carnival, carnivalesque, and grotesque are always, ultimately, funny—even terror, in comic monsters, is “defeated by laughter.”\(^{708}\)

The first course of the feast is barely served when an “aghlich mayster” bursts into the hall, and the Gawain-poet spends the next 87 lines describing the the Green Knight, his horse, and their accoutrements.\(^{709}\) The Green Knight appears “Half etayn,” with broad, muscular shoulders, a small waist, and is altogether “clene”—not only in the sense of being hygienically clean but in the sense of being well put together.\(^{710}\) He is, also, completely green in body and adornment. His horse is likewise completely green, and both are well-trimmed in finely embroidered work with golden thread and tooled metals. His golden spurs look nice with his well-trimmed hose and shapely calves, and the Green Knight wears no armor, only stylish garb.\(^{711}\) To those who behold him, the Green Knight appears “Wel gay” and not particularly threatening, save for the

\(^{707}\) Bakhtin, Rabelais, 299.

\(^{708}\) Bakhtin, Rabelais, 39.

\(^{709}\) Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, line 136.

\(^{710}\) Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 140, 143-146.

\(^{711}\) Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 151-174.
strangeness and uncanny aspects of his excessive form.\textsuperscript{712} Despite the first description as an “terrible lord”—with the wordplay on “mayster” sounding suspiciously close to “monster”\textsuperscript{713}—the Gawain-poet illustrates a strange but jolly figure. The two items he carries—a holly bob in one hand and a grisly, exceedingly sharp axe in the other—are the height of the Green Knight’s disjoined qualities. The Green Knight’s familiar-yet-unfamiliar guise marks him a liminal, monstrous figure. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen describes this sort of figure in “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” highlighting the general aspects of the Green Knight’s character that might explain the fear and manipulation that the Green Knight inflicts upon Camelot. Arthur expects a marvel—so, too, do the courtiers. They do not, however, expect something shocking and socially threatening. Cohen writes,

Through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delineated and permanently liminal space. Escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture.\textsuperscript{714}

The marvel functions as such a liminal, delineated space for the monstrous to exist within but safely demarcated from society, but it always threatens to turn delight into dismay.

\textsuperscript{712} \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, line 179.

\textsuperscript{713} As any middling Latin undergraduate might point out, the potential for wordplay runs deeper with the root \textit{monstrum} linking to the verb \textit{monstrare}, to advise, teach, reveal, or show. Baked into the very terminology of the modern English monster is the act of beholding, learning, and being taught.

The Green Knight’s Affects

The Green Knight’s *sotilte* manipulates the court into a collective sense of shame and embarrassment, as no one speaks up to answer the green man’s challenge. The silence in the hall must be deafening. The collective embarrassment is felt most poignantly by Arthur, as evidenced by his anger and rashness in moving suddenly to accept the game as “*þe blod schot for scham into his schyre face.*”\(^{715}\) A number of emotions historians have turned their attention to anger in the Middle Ages. White discusses the utility of royal anger during the Middle Ages, taking part in the well-established tradition of countering notions of hydraulic affect. White describes the intent of *ira regis* as follows: “Whether or not displays of lordly anger express what we would recognize as anger, they were gestures of a feuding culture. The same is true of other emotional displays. The hatreds expressed by lords were not simply passions or uncontrolled, unrepressed emotions.”\(^{716}\) White particularly speaks to how rulers might deliberately express anger as a powerful emotive to maintain or regain control in a situation that requires it, indicating a nuanced awareness and great degree of control of one’s emotions. Althoff distinguishes royal anger from the historical and literary records, noting that in the case of history, depictions of a ruthless and merciless king are rare; however, in the case of the latter, the “broader spectrum of the possible expressions of anger” are more freely illustrated.\(^{717}\) The takeaway here is that Arthur’s angry outburst need not be dismissed as the uncontrolled tantrum of a child. There is something nuanced at work in Arthur’s somatic responses to his anger and shame, as well as his quick move

\(^{715}\) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 317.


\(^{717}\) Gerd Althoff, “Ira Regis,” 60.
to action against the Green Knight.

As king, Arthur has a right to be angry. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight seems to support this approach, for only Arthur is overwhelmed by feelings of anger and shame at the Green Knight’s laughter. Elsewhere in Arthurian romance, Arthur performs anger in a similar manner. In discussing Arthur’s furor against Roman demands and expectation of tribute, Andrew Lynch notes that this is future-oriented feeling directed in the service of maintaining both his sovereignty as king and their collective sovereignty as a state. The feeling is neither singular nor singly felt: “it does not seem only a personal indulgence, a furor, because it is successfully communicated to a whole group. As long as the emotional communication between Arthur and his people is maintained—the feeling of we alle that Layamon emphasizes—envoys or courtiers or whole armies ‘work for the king emotionally,’ as if under a licence.”

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718 See Althoff, “Ira Regis, 60 and White, “Politics,” 142. Likewise, Rosenwein speaks of privileged anger in Anger: the Conflicted History of an Emotion. She offers a sweeping overview of larger cultures have historically treated anger, framing her survey with emotional communities as groups offering insights into the nuanced ways of feeling that exist within greater social structures. Her discussion of anger illustrates the deep privilege that expressions of anger reveal, in the past, anger was mainly decried or, at best, justified under certain strict circumstances. But was it lauded? Yes, a bit, but only when it was felt by people ‘worthy’ to feel and express it—mainly men, mainly elite men. Other people might fuss and rage, but theirs was not true anger, not dignified and just. It is true that the medieval clerics who termed anger one of the seven deadly sins also thought that people, all people, should rightly get angry at sin. But when we stop to ask precisely who in practice had the right to get justly angry, the answer is male clerics or male warriors. Some medieval women got righteously angry, but we know about them mainly from hagiographies: they numbered among the most elite of all people, the saints. See Rosenwein, Anger, 177.


feeling that moves from Arthur to the rest of Camelot occurs in both anger and mirth—when
Arthur and Gawain later perform laughter to return Camelot to an appropriate emotional tenor
for a Christmastide feast, the king is modeling the emotion that he wants the rest of the court to
adopt.

In the midst of Arthur’s anger, Gawain manages to keep his cool demeanor and chooses a
different tack to appeal to the king and to avoid direct mockery from the Green Knight—though
by the end of the romance, the Green Knight laughs at Gawain, inciting an inward-focused sort
of shame and anger, no less intense than Arthur’s outburst in Fitt one. How Gawain is able to
hold both Arthur’s anger and his own humble supplication simultaneously is unclear. While
Arthur’s sudden flush of shame may seem uncontrolled, a direct result of his youth and wild
brain, he still knows that he can wield emotions to his own (or Camelot’s own) political
advantage. Whether he is successful or adept at such deployment is another argument, but he is
at least attempting to perform righteous regal anger in response to the Green Knight’s contempt.

Sarah McNamer sees this sort of work at play in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* but reads
it as entirely fictive. McNamer notes Arthur’s quick emotional changes, almost as simultaneous
emotions, as

four feelings in quick succession...That Arthur could execute such fancy feeling in the blink
of an eye is in itself comic, but all the more so when we recognize that this seven-line
*abbreviatio* contains, in a sly parenthesis, its own highly dramatic shadow play as the entire
court copies Arthur’s sequence—even its somatics. The striking image of the collective face of
the court instantly flushing red in shame and anger in imitation of their king exposes the top-
down model of affective production as one of Camelot’s primary fictions.721

McNamer agrees that Arthur’s anger is the primary driver of the court’s collective anger—much

like the emotional metonymy that I describe in Chapter 3 when Guinevere’s sorrow feels for all—and that only after Arthur expresses his anger can they do so in turn. “He wex as wroth as wynde, / So did alle þat þer were.”

Neither the shame nor anger that overtake Camelot are fully processed. Gawain’s approach of humility—the counter to Arthur’s brashness—is a deft dance of courtesy in an effort to humble himself before Arthur while taking on the Green Knight’s challenge himself. His supplication to Arthur diffuses some of the tension that anger at being mocked and humiliated has brought to the feast hall. Gawain’s calculated approach to Arthur, beseeching him to give the game to Gawain, and he further humbles himself before Arthur and the other bold knights, claiming “I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt febles,” and that the loss of his life would therefore be a minor issue. Only Gawain speaks or acts in the face of Arthur’s potential rash behavior. The silencing and dampening effect that the Green Knight’s astonishing entrance, larger than life presence, and frightful proposition suffuses into this emotional community is never fully acknowledged. The murmurings of dissent—those who wonder later in the year at losing so great a knight to so trifling a circumstance as a game breathe some of the shame to life in Camelot, but even then so much goes unacknowledged. As J.J. Anderson explains, courtesy in Camelot means some things are never spoken. Jayme M. Yeo contends that Gawain’s motive in taking up the Green Knight’s game serves to correct the shame that has overtaken Camelot, and that fear and cowardice are the greater drivers towards inaction than shame that previously

722 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 319-320.

723 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 354-355.

724 Anderson, Language and Imagination, 176-178.
paralyze the court:

silence of the knights signals an affective tendency toward inaction that authenticates their cowardice, a fact that the Green Knight exploits as he issues his challenge; he presents his game as an explicit opportunity for Camelot to rescue its chivalric masculinity through a display of courage. Yeo assumes that fear causes inaction in Camelot. A.C. Spearing likewise characterizes fear as the driving force of silence and paralysis in Camelot as the Green Knight mocks the men: “The courtiers are perhaps less heroic than they might be in their response to the Green Knight’s entry, and in their silence here is a definite hint of fear.” The court marvels at the Green Knight, and the Gawain-poet makes this clear no fewer than four times, but their fear is never made explicit, only their subsequent anger and shame, first expressed by Arthur. The romance opens questions of the relationship between marvel and socially constructive and destructive feelings. Anderson reads their response as being “struck dumb,” that is, astonen (astonished). They are almost trapped in a fugue state as they the Green Knight, attempting to ascertain some knowledge about him. They are astonished until they can make sense of what transpires before them. Their marveling and the inaction that it causes throughout the community highlights the problematic potential of the marvel. It is not, to be trite, all fun and games.

Williams’s discussion of marvels aligns well with the assessment and judgment wrapped up in social constructivist notions of affect formation and expression. Norms of feeling and norms of display of such feelings require reflection, and the structures that undergird such norms are

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727 Anderson, Language, 158.
determined by one’s social grouping—that is, the emotional community, the emotional regime, or the emotional arena. Each iteration of “feeling rules” exists simultaneously and cooperatively, though sometimes they run counter to one another, when differing social rules require oppositional emotional expression—be it effusion or restraint. When sotiltes come into the mix, another affective valance influences the act of judgment and the following emotional expression that comes after such determinations. Williams describes the effect that courtly display is meant to have on spectators: “Courtly displays were often designed to impress.”728 While Williams may mean the act of instilling admiration and respect in someone, the broader denotation of the term, having an effect on someone, is highly accurate in this situation. The Green Knight assumes the form of a sotilte—an elaborately wrought, and in this fictional case, magical courtly display—and quite intentionally and effectively manipulates Camelot to the point of ruinous, belligerent behavior.

The Green Knight’s manipulation of Gawain does not end after he departs the Christmastide feast, but it instead continues throughout the young knight’s journey from Camelot in search of the Green Chapel. The way is perilous, and the Green Knight knows this. The quest is isolating and anxiety-inducing, and Gawain must surely feel like a dead man walking as he approaches certain doom. When Gawain perceives Hautdesert arising from the treacherous wilderness like an oasis, it seems as if his prayers have been answered. Like Arthur who requires a marvel before his meal can commence and receives his need shortly thereafter, Gawain prays that he might find some respite from the cold and hospitality, and Hautdesert almost immediately emerges like an apparition. I argue that this is deliberate on the Green Knight’s/Lord Bertilak’s

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728 Williams, Middle English, 4.
part—he knows how important courtly matters are to Gawain, and how courteous the youthful
knight strives to be. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, however, the figurative *sotilte* is
predicated on literal elements of the feast—Gawain’s quest is because of a marvel at a feast and
its attendant “game,” and here he longs for the luxury and comfort of courtly hospitality, with its
attendant marvels and artifice. Because of the very nature of the *sotilte*—craft, ingenuity,
trickery—Gawain’s own simile is unwitting foreshadowing for the duplicitous space that he will
soon enter. To that end, the Hautdesert appears the pinnacle of courtly spaces, and upon
perceiving Hautdesert, it becomes clear that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, feelings of
wonder that accompany the *sotilte* function as the sensibility—the lens—by which Gawain
perceives most things courtly.

The seasonal passing of time makes Camelot feel more “normal”—almost like an echo of
Arthur’s assertion to Guinevere that games such as the Green Knight’s are normal for
Christmastime. But this season cannot be normal, for Gawain has a responsibility looming over
his head that he cannot shirk. In speaking of the lyrical treatment of the seasonal changes from
winter to spring to summer, and towards winter once more (with little mention of autumn,
interestingly enough, though the poet does mention the timeframe of Michelmas and All
Hallow’s Eve), Silverstein builds upon arguments from Gollancz and Loomis about the older
mythological strain between winter and summer (summarizing Gollancz) and the Welsh
traditional tales that pit nature as an internal adversary (summarizing Loomis). Silverstein
takes the core of these arguments and further contends that the *Gawain*-poet uses the movement

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729 See Israel Gollancz’s notes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, EETS*, orig. ser., no. 210
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), particularly the note to *prepey* in v. 504; Roger
Sherman Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1956),
80.
of the natural world to illustrate how Gawain ought to develop and discipline his own character, namely emotion:

But two new conditions now transformed their character: first and most important, the narrative, at the hands of whatever intermediary, no longer personified their conflict as a combat between two quasi-human foes; the new plot was literal and not allegorical. For the English poet, indeed, the basis of a serious comedy that turned upon chivalresque distinctions and the Christian knightly nature of Sir Gawain. As a result the seasons themselves, divested of any older mythical disguise, now also functioned differently: as literal circumstance, but embodied in a piece of rhetoric, in character both an ornament and a device to discipline emotion.730

Silverstein’s expansion of Gollancz and Loomis is notable for two reasons. First, the emphasis on the literal and material aspects of the world of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and its characters. Second, Silverstein emphasizes the connection between these literal encounters and the emotions that they elicit as well as the subsequent need to control said emotions. The passage of time, though immaterial, is likewise felt materially through the changing of the seasons, and because “Gawain can only await the passage of the year before setting out for his own, more permanent, decapitation,” the movement towards Gawain’s inevitable departure “deepens our anxiety for the hero as his peril comes upon him.”731 Like the seasons, the landscape that Gawain encounters as he seeks the Green Chapel is truly threatening, filled with dangers both normal and marvelous.

Gawain’s Isolation

Gawain’s lonely, treacherous sojourn into the Wirral732 is an emotionally trying experience.


732 Scholarly convention places Gawain’s trek from Camelot towards the Green Chapel as somewhere around the English-Welsh border, with at least part of his journey placing him in the Wirral. See Michael J. Bennett, “The Historical Background,” in A Companion to the Gawain-Poet, edited by Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 71-90,
Before the knight is isolated in the Wirral, the poet mentions Gawain asking any “frekez þat he met, / If þay hade herde any karp of a knȝt grene”\(^{733}\) or of a Green Chapel nearby, indicating that he initially has some human contact. As he ventures further, he is without any touchstones of civilization, but Gawain’s perception retains a sense of astonishment at the dangerous natural world that surrounds him. The poet describes the difficulty of Gawain’s trek in terms of wonders:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Mony klyf he ouerclambe in contrayez straunge,} \\
\text{Fer floten fro his frendez fremedly he rydez.} \\
\text{At vche warþe oþer water þer þe wyȝe passed} \\
\text{He fonde a foo him before, bot ferly hit were,} \\
\text{And þat so foule and so felle þat feȝt hym byhode.}^{734}
\end{align*}
\]

Through the emphasis of the strange, the distance from his friends, the foes that challenge Gawain at each crossing, the poet conjures the image of an incomprehensibly unknowable landscape. Gawain is out of his element, both in terms of his isolation and the lack of a rigid

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\(^{733}\) \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, lines 703-704.

\(^{734}\) \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, lines 713-717. Because the Middle English of this section is especially tricky, I offer this modern English translation:

- Many a cliff he climbed over in strange countries,
- Far fled from his friends alone he rides.
- At each bank or water crossing that he passed through the way
- He found a foe before him, but a wonder it were,
- And that so foul and fell they were that he must fight [them].
social structure to govern his interactions with the land and its inhabitants. Without providing many details about Gawain’s thought processes or explicit feelings, the poet harnesses Gawain’s unsettled feelings through the ambiguous description of “So mony meruayl bi mount þer þe mon fyndez”—so many, indeed, that “Hit were to tore for to telle of þe tenþe dole.”

The poet spends one stanza mentioning the wild beasts that torment Gawain on his journey, but much more attention is granted to the knight’s inner turmoil:

By contrast, the poet evocatively conveys Gawain’s mental and physical suffering in the wintry weather: the realities of travel in midwinter afflict both body and mind. The poet recounts his inner dialogue: the prayers that precede his arrival at Hautdesert and his thoughts once he enters the place where both mind and body will be tested through the affective lures of sexual desire and love of life. Gawain’s thoughts process sensory perceptions and affective responses: he thinks that the castle he sees is ‘fayr innoghe’ (very fair, 803) and that the lady he sees is fairer than Guinevere.

The battles against beasts provide Gawain with a small connection to his social role as a knight, for he is skilled in martial matters and these provide some semblance of normal to his situation. He is not bewildered and overwhelmed in these scenarios—marvels and wonders as they might be.

It is not the “war” that “wrathed” him so much but the winter is much worse for Gawain’s emotional state. The poet speaks of the “peryl and payne” that Gawain faces in the frozen tundra, trudging forth in sleet, navigating partially frozen streams, and sleeping in his full armor while those cold streams turn to ice and “henged heȝe ouer his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.” On

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735 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 718-719. “So many a marvel the man found there in the mountains / [that] it were tedious to tell the tenth of it.”


737 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 726.

738 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 733, 727-730.
Christmas Eve Gawain finally prays to Mary that she grant him some lodging, and thereafter Hautdesert marvelously appears.\textsuperscript{739} His answered prayer is the kind of sacred marvel that Finlayson describes, and it therefore seems divinely provided lodging. Finlayson describes such events as “the miraculous, that is, the marvellous controlled by God.”\textsuperscript{740} Gawain’s isolation suddenly ceases when he perceives Hautdesert before him, a bit of civilization punctuating the wilderness. Hautdesert seems an answered prayer and an end to the hazard of the oppressive winter cold (not to mention the dragons, wolves, bears, giants, and wodwos\textsuperscript{741} that he battles along the way), it is not the first marvel that he encounters in the wilderness beyond Camelot. This sense of wonder is the framework by which Gawain makes sense of the world about him.

**Hautdesert, a Paper Castle**

One particular line from the Gawain-poet’s description fo how Gawain perceives Hautdesert is striking: “A castel þe comlokest þat euer knȝt aȝte, … þat pared out of papure purely hit semed,”\textsuperscript{742} which translates to, “A castle the comeliest the knight ever had [seen]…that cut out of paper entirely it seemed.” This superlative castle is also decorated with the most stylish features,\textsuperscript{743} and Thompson notes that “in the late fourteenth century it was a favorite practice to place ornaments, sometimes human figures, on top of the battlements which could of course be

\textsuperscript{739} Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 736-739.

\textsuperscript{740} Finlayson, “The Marvelous,” 364.


\textsuperscript{742} Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, lines 767, 802.

painted, gilded, or whitewashed.”\textsuperscript{744} Additionally, Thompson argues that form over function was a preferred sensibility in the period, for “people admired the beauty of a castle rather than its defensive qualities.”\textsuperscript{745} Whether or not Thompson overstates an appreciation of beauty as preference over defensibility, the arresting wonder of such a well-crafted, well-adorned, and apparently formidable structure is not lost on Gawain. It is so impossibly well-made that it seems to be a table decoration, like a \textit{sotilte}.

It is no surprise that Gawain’s mind turns to more specific, courtly marvels as he beholds Hautdesert. While the poet did not provide details of the marvels that Gawain experiences in the wilderness, when given the occasion to linger upon the comeliest castle, he will. Caroline Walker Bynum distills John of Salisbury’s notion of \textit{admiratio} to “a response to credible though deeply unusual events,” explaining that “it is also a response to singular events, what John of Salisbury calls ‘marvelous singularity.’”\textsuperscript{746} Bynum further explains,

In his collection of advice for courtiers and princes, John tends naturalize miracles (arguing that many—for example, changing water into wine—are only a speed-up of natural processes) and states explicitly that reason (in the sense of understanding cause) removes wonder.\textsuperscript{747}

One can infer from John of Salisbury’s \textit{admiratio} that a lack of complete understanding is the key to sustaining wonder. This is not to suggest that one should simply accept what appears marvelous without thought. Part of “amazement” as approached “by philosophers, chroniclers,

\textsuperscript{744} Thompson, “Castles,” 125.

\textsuperscript{745} Thompson, “Castles,” 125.


and travelers had a strong cognitive component,” in that “you could wonder only where you knew that you failed to understand. Thus wonder entailed a passionate desire for the scientia it lacked; it was a stimulus and incentive to investigation.” Likewise, a suspension of disbelief propagates and maintains marvel:

But as Gervais of Tilbury also said, if you do not believe the event, you will not marvel at it. You can marvel only at something that is, at least in some sense, there. Marveling responds to the there-ness of the event, to its concreteness and specificity. Amazement in suppressed by the citing of too many cases, the formulation of general laws, the inductio exemplorum. Wonder is at the singular—both its significance and its particularity.

The simultaneous Importance of the singularity and particularly of wonder—its uniqueness, difference—informs Gawain’s perception of Hautdesert as a superlative edifice. This space must be the best, particularly because of its surroundings.

Though it is unexpected and seemingly impossible for such a castle to exist in such a space, it does. And Gawain’s gaze lingers on both the natural and manmade, beautiful and defensible aspects of this sudden abode in the woods, “the world described is concentrated through a single lens, Gawain’s eye and senses, at first appearing as an unmediated record of actual experience.” Sarah Stanbury’s argument follows that Sir Gawain and the Green Knight follows a formulaic transformation of gaze: it moves from a mythic or sacred perception to one of inherent value, to one of ascribed value. This shift describes how Hautdesert appears. First

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750 Stanbury, Seeing, 105.

751 Stanbury, Seeing, 101, 104.
it is a sudden abode in the midst of a moat that follows directly after he makes the sign of the cross three times:

    He sayned hym In syþes sere,
    And sayde ‘Cros Kryst me spede!’
    Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot þrye,
    Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote…\(^{752}\)

This “won” (abode) is a sacred gift to Gawain, an answered prayer for hospitality and safety.

Rapidly Gawain’s gaze shifts into Stanbury’s second transformative state, inherent value, but Gawain does briefly circle back to the sacred. Suddenly the simple promise of respite from the biting cold becomes far more—it is surely the dwelling of some king, for it stands amidst a well-maintained copse of shining oaks,\(^{753}\) is surrounded by a moat, features a lawn, and other features of conscious cultivation to carve out a haven amidst the difficult terrain.

    Things move ever towards ascribed value—towards interpretation and some assertion of knowing, and this is where Gawain likens Hautdesert to a paper castle, something decorative, crafted, and found at a feast. The ascribed value of “paper,” especially chalk white paper, in the later Middle Ages appears a number of times in the historical record, but it appears less frequently in literature. Although the description of Hautdesert as a paper castle is not a particularly common simile in Middle English literature, it appears twice in the works of the Gawain-poet—once in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and once in a feast-specific context in *Cleanness*—and once in Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale. In *Cleanness*, the Gawain-poet writes,

    Burnes berande þe bredes vpon brode skeles

\(^{752}\) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 761-764.

Þat were of sylueren syȝt, and served þerwyth,
Lyfte logges þerouer and on lofte coruen,
Pared out of paper and poynted of golde…\(^754\)

Note that in *Cleanness*, the Gawain-poet uses the same “pared out of papure” structure as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, only the sense of each scenario is wildly disparate. In *Cleanness*, the poet speaks with disapproval of Belshazzar’s inappropriate feast. Such paper craft is simply that—ephemeral, artificial, and unnecessarily expensive with adornment. The spectacle of paper is to proclaim wealth and excess. The potential for such a reading exists in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, though in the immediate stanzas in which the simile appears, Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* speaks against courtly feasting culture as a sinful exploit:

Pride of the table appereth eek ful ofte; for certes, riche men been cleped to festes, and povre folk been put awey and rebuked./ Also in excesse of diverse metes and drynkes, and namely swich manere bake-metes and 256han-metes, brennynge of wilde fir and peynted and castelled with papir, and semblable wast, so that it is abusiouf for to thinke./ And eek in to greet preciousnesse of vessel and curiositee of mynstralcie, by whiche a man is stired the moore to delices of luxurie./ if so be that he sette his herte the lasse upon oure lord jhesu crist, certeyn it is a synne; and certeinly the delices myghte been so grete in this caas that man myghte lightly falle by hem into deedly synne.\(^755\)

The Parson speaks of “pride of the table” as an exclusive and excessive endeavor (in that poor folk are “put away” and “rebuked”). The excess of various types of dishes, echoes how such concerns were at the forefront of writings about sinfulness and the slippery slope that excess indulgence posed.\(^756\) Only in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* does the simile appear without


\(^756\) See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), wherein Bynum discusses the anxieties towards gluttony in the early church. Consider, for example, writing attributed to abbot Nilus who argues that Adam’s sin was gluttony: “It was the desire of food that spawned disobedience; it was the pleasure of taste that drove us from Paradise. Luxury in food delights
clearly indicating censure of the space to which it applies, yet the scene still foreshadows danger via duplicity and artifice by likening the edifice to the *sotilte*.

Even with the oblique reference to feasting, the *Gawain*-poet’s description of Hautdesert as a paper castle evokes the feast by way of the *sotilte*. Wells does not mention the *Gawain*-poet’s use of a paper castle in *Cleanness*, but she does connect the romance’s description of Hautdesert and Chaucer’s Parson’s usage to a *sotilte*. Wells does not delve into the import of such feast connections and instead simply notes that a paper castle recalls a feasting element. That she reads the Green Knight as *sotilte* or *entremet* is noteworthy, but she does not consider how his role as an outsider and an unplanned interlude with very explicit intentions of manipulating Camelot plays out in the romance. She more or less accepts that the Green Knight is a *sotilte* and uses that “normal” element to illustrate disorder on Arthur’s part. Kirk also describes the fairytale-like nature of Hautdesert’s sudden, miraculous appearance as “the perfect story-book castle looking.

the gullet, but it breeds the worm of license that sleepeth not” (Quoted Bynum 36). Bynum additionally discusses the legalistic framework that enabled aristocratic diners to work through theological loopholes and to therefore stage still elaborate feasts during fast days (see especially 41). Also see Melitta Weiss Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 75, 109. See *The Viandier of Taillevent: An Edition of All Extant Manuscripts*, edited and translated by Terence Scully (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988), 192-193 for detailed explanation of the relationship between overindulgence and other sins, particularly lechery. Adamson describes the ingenious ways in which medieval cooks worked around liturgical food restrictions and how the theological concerns initially focused only on type, not quantity, of food consumed during lean days. Note, too, that Adamson describes in this same section Augustine’s concerns with food in *Confessiones*, wherein he finds the temptation towards food a greater struggle than sexual temptation, for one must eat in order to live.

757 Wells, “Manners Maketh Man,” 81.

758 Wells conflates *sotilte* and *entremet* throughout the essay without comment. I have sought to use *sotilte* when speaking of English texts and *entremet* when working with French texts or continental works. As I explain in Chapter 1, these interludes overlap and are in many ways interchangeable and indistinguishable, but I still aim to use language deliberately when referring to insular texts.
as if it had been cut out of paper… the very paper castle that is a traditional decoration at feasts,”759 with no more commentary on its significance.

Orietta Da Rold’s study of the uses of paper in medieval England pertains to both the utility of paper and its symbolic value. Da Rold addresses Chaucer’s Parson’s less than glowing review of those who consume and imbibe excessively upon highly decorated tables:

In this rich performance, paper is a luxury plastic object at the service of an exotic ruler, an idolater of false gods; paper is used to boast power and riches. These are sentiments also reprimanded by Chaucer’s Parson in the Canterbury Tales. The humble Parson in his sermon uses the idea of paper at the dinner table to admonish; he considers paper embellishments as superfluous additions to banquets and entertainments….Chaucer’s Parson condemns the use of paper in lavish adornments on food in rich men’s feasts. On these occasions, paper decorations represent pride, one of the seven capital sins.760

The figuration of paper as a “luxury plastic object”—something much closer to gold leaf at the medieval feast than to a cheap menu in the modern day—is an expensive, lightweight, pliable material that can be easily cut and transformed.

Thirteenth-century European paper production practices frequently led to a fragile but fairly easy to produce material that was also lightweight.761 As paper production techniques were ever improved throughout the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries, paper became not simply relegated to clerical and official use, but grew into a common household item. For example, many medieval charms and medical treatises draw upon paper as an ingredient for such practical magic or as a bandage for first aid. Still other works describe using paper wrapping as a


protective layer for sweets and other delicate foodstuffs, affording paper a similar function as protective pastry shells such as those for meat pies. Paper takes on a protective, encapsulating quality in the later medieval era.

Da Rold wonders why paper holds the Gawain-poet’s attention as a descriptor in the poem and notes that “Gruffudd ap Maredudd, a contemporary of the Gawain poet, chose paper as a means to convey the impression of the imposing white walls of a fortress, of an almost inexpungable stronghold,” but she does not see the Gawain-poet drawing such similarities of strength. Instead, the whiteness of chalk and “comparison with paper captures the magnitude of the castle’s shape.” Its refinement, then, is what Da Rold argues makes paper an ideal simile to the Gawain-poet. However, this refinement also appears in the works of a number of medieval authors from this time period:

There is here a common ground: the colour of the paper that Dafydd ap Gwilym, Gruffudd ap Maredudd, Chaucer and Caxton experience is imagined in their writing as white and bright. Of course, the affordance of paper is also a poetic affordance, of a useful metaphor for clearness—almost irrespective of the real material—but it comes from a technological affordance of a clear writing surface.

Da Rold echoes Tolkien’s and Gordon’s approach, highlighting the significance of forms and shapes in the romance: Tolkien and Gordon’s note that “pared out of papure” reveals “the elaboration of the castle workmanship that the simile is meant to emphasize.” Additionally, Da

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762 Da Rold, Paper, 56.

763 Da Rold, Paper, 191.

764 Da Rold, Paper, 191.

765 Da Rold, Paper, 190.

Rold, Pamela M. King, and Piotr Sadowski, among others, “stress the dichotomy between the strong, fortified walls and the frail, ‘insubstantial’ nature of a castle cut out of paper.” Sadowski notes the architectural marvel of Hautdesert, explaining that “for all its architectonic splendor, [the castle] looked like paperwork ... enhancing the effect of visionary and dreamy ethereality.” I argue that this strange balance between formidable edifice and “dreamy ethereality” places Gawain’s initial perception and judgment of Hautdesert as *sotilte*.

W.R.J. Barron muses that the Gawain-poet may have imagined “Hautdesert “insubstantial in silhouette as the paper castles decorating the dishes at the feast,” like the “chalk-white chateaux of France which decorate the Duc de Berry’s Trés Riches Heures.” Da Rold notes how Barron’s reading connects “inspiration found in painted castles to the geography of the West of England to possible analogies with the use of paper for culinary decorations.” She contends that table decorations such as these “may certainly have inspired the Gawain poet in his paper comparison; in particular, the widely attested use of paper in food decoration might have stimulated the poet to assimilate paper to the medieval practice of decorating food,” but only briefly nods to how these decorations functioned in the literary tradition. Adamson notes that

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770 Notes how this Book of Hours is typically understood to depict truthful representations of medieval life. Also points to Ackerman as one source for discussing that the Gawain poet was inspired by paper decorations.

paper lances and helmets were made to for the entremets known as Coqz heaumez, or “Helmeted Cocks,” wherein “piglets and poultry are roasted, the latter then stuffed, glazed with an egg batter, and seated on the piglets. As a finishing touch, the cocks or hens are equipped with paper helmets and lances.”

Such entremets, Adamson suggests, blended the feast for the eye and the stomach.

As I have discussed elsewhere, interludes engage the beholder and require varying degrees of interpretation. Many scholars have focused on perceived misreading in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with great emphasis on Arthur’s mishandling of the initial disruption and Gawain’s repeated fumbles at Hautdesert. Kirk does not fully critique Gawain’s perceptions of the luxury of Hautdesert as wrong, yet she asserts that Gawain is “overwhelmed by the by the comforts, decor, and cuisine which outdo anything he is used to.”

This interpretation may well be true, despite Kirk’s lack of explicit evidence to support such a claim. I suggest that the juxtaposition of oppressive winter and crushing loneliness with the sudden appearance of Hautdesert set the remote castle’s splendor into even sharper relief than it may otherwise appear in contrast to Camelot, leading Gawain to be overwhelmed by the welcome and embrace Bertilak’s hospitality. Nevertheless, Hautdesert is a surprisingly luxurious space, and Gawain seems to read the castle and its court based solely on his experiences at Camelot—that is, a known, safe place where he is a part of the inner circle.

Adamson, Food, 300.

Adamson, Food, 110. Adamson describes here the shift from food-based entremets to those constructed from wood to act as props or stages for the enactment of historical or mythical scenes, and at that point, the entremet moves from being a feast for the stomach to one for the eye.

Literary critic P.B. Taylor argues that the cumulative effect of such misreading is comic, contending that this romance is funny primarily on the grounds that Arthur and Gawain get things “wrong.” The purported misreading that Taylor highlights throughout the romance shed light on presuppositions that many make or have made about the tale, though Taylor is not wrong that the poem’s narrative heavily relies on “treachery and misbalance.”\textsuperscript{775} However, Taylor is wrong to say simply that the paper-castles are hiding such treachery; if anything, they ought to indicate to Gawain that such craft and guile awaits him. Taylor is likewise incorrect to say that Gawain simply “mistakes” fast for feast—instead, it’s an exceptionally decadent fast-day spread that looks suspiciously just like a feast-day menu.\textsuperscript{776} Chiquart, in fact, specifically describes being responsible for an elaborate meal on a fast day, and most English cookery manuscripts likewise include versions for feast and fast day recipes of similarly-prepared dishes, as does \textit{Ménagier de Paris}. For example, the ample feast that Chiquart records from 1403 wherein he was responsible for the banquet that Amadeus VIII held to honor his father-in-law, the duke of Burgundy, on the occasion of Mary officially becoming Amadeus’s consort.\textsuperscript{777} This state banquet was held “on the small frontier castle of Tournus,” and it was a two-day affair that fell on lean days.\textsuperscript{778}


\textsuperscript{776} Taylor, “Commerce and Comedy in \textit{Sir Gawain},” 1.

\textsuperscript{777} Scully, \textit{Du fait}, 45, note 90.

\textsuperscript{778} Scully, \textit{Du fait}, 45, note 90. Throughout \textit{Du fait de cuisine}, Chiquart offers parallel menus for feast or fast day banquets, wherein meat dishes have parallel and equivalent lean ingredient dishes. The two-day banquet menu from 1403 features elaborate dishes made of lean ingredients, and even bespoke \textit{entremets} of Parmesan pies emblazoned with the arms of each lord before whom each \textit{entremet} would be served: “For the \textit{entremets}, Parmesan pies, /113v/ each one glazed and embanded with the arms of the lord before whom it is set.” These interludes of the second
Chiquart’s lean day menu and use of parallel meat and lean day ingredient options throughout *Du fait de cuisine* shows how extravagant even a fast day feast might be. Achieving a culinary wonder within a comparatively constrained toolkit is a wonder in itself. As such, Gawain’s perception of the wondrous lean day meal that he is served in Hautdesert is not wrong, just as his primary judgment of the castle takes in all aspects of this courtly space. It is not inaccurate to say that Gawain’s perception of Hautdesert as a *sotilte*—a paper castle decorating the feast table—cuts right to the heart of the Bertilak’s duplicity and Morgan’s cunning, and Jaeger’s description of the courtly mask is worth considering:

> It is a truism of court life that all public acts and words are a mask; to reveal one’s true sentiments and intentions is the act of a naive fool. Life is divided at two levels, and the man who cannot maintain this double life has no place at court. Cunning under these circumstances could be almost a positive quality, at any rate an ambivalent one.\(^{779}\)

Medieval literature must always move towards the contained, orderly, and aestheticized, per Jaeger. In this sense, the sudden castle is not only respite from the winter but also beauty and courtliness personified. But there is more at work, here, as it is likewise not wrong for Gawain to assume that Hautdesert is a haven in the wilderness, for as Cohen notes, “[e]xtended travel was dependent in both the ancient and medieval world on the promulgation of an Ideal of hospitality that sanctified the responsibility of host to guest.”\(^{780}\) Jaeger further contends that “The life of the court tended to be aestheticized, and the production of literature is a secondary response to that course are individual, which is unusual; however, they fulfill a dessert-like role in this case as the final element of the first day of banqueting. The other *entremets* throughout this menu are crafted for communal, such as the Glazed Pilgrim Pike (*Lucas dorés pelerins*), which is the lean day equivalent of Pilgrim Capons (*Chappons pelerins*). See Scully, *Du fait*, 43-45; 285-286.


\(^{780}\) Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 23.
fact. The poetry of ‘courtly love’ from European courts was a form of ‘ceremonial behavior’ closely related to court ritual generally. " Gawain’s mental transposition of an actual formidable castle to one made of paper—no less, perhaps even more, beautiful—underscores the literary tendency towards the “unreal” as well as the courtly preference for aesthetically pleasing objects.

Ultimately, viewing Hautdesert as a paper castle at once reveals its dangerous allure and speaks to Gawain’s own courtly assumptions and expectations. Gawain rightly perceives that this space is highly courtly, and it even exceeds his own expectations. This castle and this court, perhaps on account of the trials and tribulations that he has endured in the Wirral and beyond, become superlative, almost if not totally eclipsing Camelot during his stay. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, isolation is a deliberate tactic that the Green Knight deploys against the Arthurian community as part of his larger agenda of manipulation. Isolation weakens the bonds that hold all together—Gawain’s personal experiences beyond Camelot and the subsequent disentangling of the Pentangle, a symbol long recognized as the core of Gawain’s chivalric being, speak to such dangers. The paper castle, then, is very real, though entirely crafted.

The Green Knight claims to work for Morgan with the intent of frightening Guinevere to death. That would cause many a problem for Camelot, and while the Green Knight is unsuccessful in this first tack, he does succeed in isolating one member of the court, alienating him from the values he uploads as a member of said court, and causing him to experience a symbolic death in the process. All of the Green Knight’s influence derives from his successful manipulation of the Arthurian community as a sotilde intruding the Christmastide feast in Camelot. A festive, delightful bit of playful trickery on the one hand, and a dangerous, deceptive

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781 Jaeger, Origins, 42.
ruse on the other, the *sotilte* runs throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* beyond Camelot, with Gawain perceiving the larger world through a festal lens. Gawain beholds Hautdesert as a figurative *sotilte*, and his experiences with Lord Bertilak are almost exclusively in the mode of Christmas games—that is, always festal. Ultimately, this romance is primarily concerned with the manipulation that the Green Knight’s *sotilte* unleashes upon Camelot, and the eponymous hero’s subsequent life-altering quest. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* begs the question: how can a community fractured by affective manipulation reintegrate? Like its Middle English popular romance cousins, this courtly narrative is all the more fascinating for its lack of clear resolution and unsatisfactory explanation following the disruptive manipulation arising from the *sotiltes*. 
CONCLUSION

The notion of the medieval feast has long held people’s fascination, with threads connecting the Arthurian feasts of romance to pageantry around the Order of the Garter, to Victorian medievalisms, to modern interest in understanding and recreating historical cookery, and even to the curious anachronism of renaissance festivals as well as the dinner and a show model of the Medieval Times franchise. Common features of modern anachronistic medievalism involve disruption, drama, and tension—something is always scripted to go wrong, but fortunately, the audience enjoys a tasty treat with the show, all cheer “huzzah” at the appropriate moments, and everyone gets to go home afterwards with some sort of cutesy souvenir and perhaps mild digestive discomfort. There is no true fear of being harmed by the performers, and the boundary demarcating audience and spectacle remains largely intact (audience participation makes for mild porosity between actor and audience). These events are meant to be a safe, entertaining spectacle, and they follow specific protocols to ensure adherence to such expectations. All of these iterations and interpretations of the medieval feast highlight its penchant for flair and display, with both of these aspects resulting in awe, merrymaking, and mirth—in other words, in the positive feelings associated with celebration.

Feasts in Middle English romance are replete with feeling, and I have sought to highlight the sotilte as a feature of deliberate affective inspiration in these narratives. The literary sotilte becomes a device of artifice and affectation meant to move spectators emotionally and blur the demarcation between audience and performer by way of interactivity. Direct engagement renders
the experience of these interludes inescapable, and spectators become part of the show itself. The sotilte in the historical record engages with audiences through similar means; however, as I discuss in Chapter 1, many hands are involved in the planning and staging of such affairs. Literature, on the other hand, reduces the need for such realism, infusing a greater degree of narrative ambiguity in the sotilte and its performance. This ambiguity heightens the potential for affective manipulation, for the feast is already a space of sensory overload, as it were—by adding a degree of uncertainty, the sotilte ups the ante of in-the-moment assessment and interpretation that is driven by feeling and is subsequently a driver of feeling. In other words, the sotilte is a way of stimulating affective appetites, and just as medieval humoral theory indicates that particular foodstuffs and their preparation leads to particular behaviors and demeanors, so, too, can the sotilte act as a means of inspiring certain feelings.

Throughout each chapter, I have illustrated the forms that the literary sotilte can take in Middle English romance, with some sotiltes being intentional and designed to harm—threads of which appear in Richard Coer de Lyon with Richard’s lion’s heart-eating performance and the macabre feast, through Ragnelle’s mother’s magical transformation of her daughter into a repulsive figure in The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, and finally through the Green Knight’s (and Bertilak’s) threats and entrapment of Gawain to threaten both the knight’s life and ideals in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. In each of these romances, the sotilte is used literally and figuratively to test—both as a means of understanding and as a means of determining the extent of strain an audience might withstand—and frequently to harm. The manipulation and harm that arises by way of the literary sotilte typically stems from an individual agent or actor—who may or may not have agency, as seen with Ragnelle’s case in The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle—and exerts influence over many. Of course, such
simple scenarios are complicated by a romance such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, wherein Morgan orchestrates the *sotilte* that Bertilak carries out as the Green Knight. Nevertheless, the Green Knight is the agent who engages with Camelot and finds a way to upend order. Even in the case where an individual is targeted, such as the beheading game of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the entire community is threatened. Because the *sotilte* always involves and influences many, and because the *sotilte* is designed to make people feel a certain way, I have considered which emotion words are used throughout feast scenes and their disruptions, paying particular attention to who speaks, who acts, and whether they declare emotives explicitly or express their feelings obliquely. Furthermore, the history of emotions gets at the tricky feelings that are left unspoken and unacknowledged—how can we identify behaviors, reactions, and other telltale signs that something affectively is occurring within a text?

My dissertation approaches this question of *how* by way of the *sotilte*—although frequently a codified aspect of the feast in cookery manuals and chronicles, in literature, this festal interlude introduces a problem into an otherwise highly structured social ceremony. One might instead consider how any other sort of social alteration might affect the emotional fabric of a given group—be it an emotional community or an emotional regime—of characters within medieval romance. Death, violence, marriage, reconciliation, alliance, war and conquest or defeat, and travel and discovery are suitable themes and activities that could additionally provide access to the affective aspects of a given narrative. I have focused on the *sotilte* in Middle English romance because of its inherent metaphor and symbolism, and the interpretation that accompanies such sometimes ambiguous displays lends itself quite well to not only the inspiration of feeling in those who immediately encounter such puzzling displays, but so, too, does such inscrutability mark one delightful aspect of literary interpretation.
By design, the *sotilte* disrupts, though what affects it inspires—be they good or bad feelings—depend upon many factors, the primary arbiter of which is the person arranging the interlude. What they aspire to achieve and how to intend to inspire such feeling varies wildly. Frequently neither the orchestrator nor the intent of the *sotilte* are clear even following final explanation in the denouement of the romance. In all three of the Middle English romances I study, the provided explanations fall short of satisfactory resolution. For example, the extratextual reasons for anthropophagy in *Richard Coer de Lyon* pertain to the historical horrors of actual crusader cannibalism, but the romance itself never explains why cannibalism is an old knight’s clever solution to Richard’s wasting hunger. The romance harnesses the sordid and unclear history of crusader cannibalism as a source of power and control—the grotesque act of consuming another literally and figuratively becomes a powerful tool of psychological warfare for Richard. Likewise, why Richard decides to consume the vanquished lion’s heart as a deeply symbolic and aggressive gesture makes sense only because of his “lionheart” epithet. Nevertheless, his actions fall squarely within the functionality of the *sotilte*, illustrating the affective power that the performance carries. Regardless, Richard’s behavior causes deeply troubling affects for his victims, however confusing or diabolical his motives may seem. Similarly, Ragnelle’s physical and behavioral repugnance in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* does not seem sensical—her mother involuntarily charms Ragnelle and makes it such that the maiden cannot be returned to her true form lest she marry the best knight in the land. Why and how Ragnelle must behave repulsively in addition to appearing so remains a mystery, and her involuntary ability to cause a great stir in society persists even once her beauty is restored. The final romance that I study offers explicit explanation for its disruptive *sotiltes*, where the Green Knight turns Camelot upside down and exposes a rift within Gawain between
his ideals and his perceived failing. There is disjuncture between the Green Knight’s explanation and his subsequent actions. This lack of resolution is valorized within the romances themselves, for the desire to live as a unified emotional community dissolves or reinterprets any problematic explanations or outcomes.

In all of these cases, the sotilte hangs in balance with the greater narrative arcs of each romance. Even with the feast serving as a microcosm of the larger sociopolitical milieu, the interlude is inextricably tied to the day-to-day activities of the world beyond the feast hall. People are moved by the sotilte, and in the literary examples that my dissertation explores, these scenarios push people to react in a manner that challenges the emotional community’s or emotional regime’s typical affective rules. Because of the creaky articulations between what is acceptable and what is not, this disjuncture creates feelings that do not dissipate immediately following the close of the feast. The feelings persist, and this is especially true for the negative feelings. Given the nature of the manipulation, an intangible but wholly contagious, shared transmittable experience for a given emotional community can spell delight or tragedy.


278


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