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Roshani Chokshi March 26, 2013

Duality and Order: Establishing the Otherworld's Dominance and Role in The Hero's Journey

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Abstract
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The Middle English Breton lais famously boast an array of characters who later stoked the fantastical imaginations with their depictions of Otherworld figures such as supernatural villains, allies and lovers. My thesis examines the role of these Otherworld characters and evaluates their relationship with the main character in terms of the main character's spiritual and psychological transformation. Ultimately, I am examining why these Breton lais written around the 14th century necessitate the presence of the Otherworld figures. My research spans across three prominent Breton lais: *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor*. Each of these lais has an important supernatural character who establishes a change of fate for the protagonist. Among the topics my research addresses are the depiction of fairy motifs (such as grafted trees, portals into the Otherworld and depictions of fairies), the gender disparity between two characters (in the lais of *Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor*, the Otherworldly character evolves into a romantic interest) and finally the psychological suggestions embedded in the lai that depict the main character in all of his complexity. In order to achieve this, I contrast each lai with what I believe is its Celtic and Classical source story to deduce what was left out, and why, and how these additions or subtractions from the "original" story inform our understanding of the Otherworld.

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Introduction

Mythology and fairytales have always exerted a strong hold on my imagination because of their ability to explain phenomena as simple and necessary as a shower of rain or create a world that seems both radically different and wholly familiar. As miniatures of this storytelling tradition, the Breton lais of the 13th and 14th centuries synthesize aspects of mythology by borrowing thematic details while maintaining a fairytale's sense of both a grand adventure and the supernatural. The lais I have selected (*Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor*) draw on a spectrum of storytelling traditions that range from Classical to Celtic. Unlike mythological tales, these Breton lais explore the more intimate realm of the human mind. They do not aim to make sweeping observations, but rather an emotional experience or tension. These lais contain rich motifs that not only elucidate their Celtic and Classical influences, but also provide a thematic backdrop to their characters' psychological development.

In this thesis, I seek to answer the following questions: What message of these lais necessitates the presence of Otherworld figures? How does the inclusion of these Otherworld figures and the complexity of the lais' characters affect the dynamic of power between the fey and the human? To answer these questions, I have divided each discussion of the lais into two chapters and arranged the lais by a descending scale of character complexity beginning with *Sir Orfeo* (most complex character) to *Guingamor* (least complex character). The first chapter of each pair examines the lai's source stories to determine whether they are Celtic or Classical (or both). Evaluating the source material strongly affects our reading of the lais because we can see what aspects of the allegedly original tales were left out, built upon or expanded, and to what

purpose. The second chapter for each lai examines the motifs of the lais, the function of the supernatural character and the psychological development of the main character.

Throughout this thesis, I will also use terms such as "individuation," which I appropriate within the Jungian psychological framework to mean: "a developmental psychical process, the process whereby the innate elements of personality, the different experiences of a person's life and the different aspects and components of the immature psyche become integrated over time into a well-functioning whole."[1] The presence of a supernatural being in these Breton lais acts as a catalyst in the protagonist's individuation process. Analyzing the text through a psychological framework not only helps explain the significance of the lais' recurring motifs, but also serves as a benchmark to measure the protagonist's character development from beginning to the end of the lai.

When I refer to elements of either the mortal or supernatural world as "balancing the natural duality," I am referencing the innate cycle of nature and how nature keeps the world — both mortal and supernatural — in balance. I defined dualism based on the definition provided by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as: "a view of human beings as constituted of two irreducible elements (as matter and spirit)."[2] The world of matter represents the mortal world and the spirit world represents the fairy realm. The physical world includes the materialism of human life and the feudalistic organization of medieval court, whereas the natural world hosts the untamed fairies and feral flora and fauna of the natural world untouched by humans. Acts of chaos or instances that upset the existing dynamic between the two worlds pertains to accidental

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[1] Clendenen, Avis. "Encounter with the Unconscious: Hildegard in Jung." *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 40

2 "Dualism." Def. 2. Merriam Webster Online, Merriam Webster, n.d. Web. 12 February 2013.

crossovers from the mortal to the natural world that threaten to upend the inherent separation between them. The supernatural characters of the Breton lais appear to act as guardians of this inherent balance and hence I refer to Otherworld characters as "reinforcements/figures of balance." These supernatural characters act as extensions of the natural world; thus, whenever they enter the human realm, it is with a purpose.

Because of the Breton lais' Celtic influences, some of the terms I use to describe archetypal motifs deserve explanations prior to our discussion. In *Sir Orfeo*, I refer to the *aíthed* motifs, which refers to tales of abducted mortals who are then taken to the Otherworld. For *Guingamor* and *Launfal*, I use the term *echtra* or *echtrae* (pl.) to denote a genre of Old Irish literature that recounts a hero's adventure in an Otherworldly setting. The trope of the *echtrae* generally follows this pattern: hero is invited to the Otherworld by a beautiful maiden, hero either stays forever/returns to his land to find his homeland destroyed by Time or returns to his land bearing gifts from the Otherworld. The fate of the hero varies from tale to tale. Although an *echtra* may contain elements of the *aíthed* narrative, they are distinct because the abduction motif factors more prominently in an *aithed* narrative, while an *echtra*'s focus is on the protagonist. Another term that arises often in my thesis is *geis*, which is essentially an oath or taboo set by the Otherworld. Just as the *geis* concept factors prominently in Celtic mythology, the female *leanan sidhe* character in Celtic mythology is also important as she represents a supernatural femme fatale in many stories.

Ch. 1 *Sir Orfeo*: A Tale of Spiritual Redemption

Although its namesake recalls the Classical tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, the Breton lai *Sir Orfeo* shares only the skin rather than the pith of its Classical counterpart. One of the earliest references to the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is in Book Four of Vergil's *The Georgics* written around 29 BC.[3] In this Classical tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, Eurydice (the beloved wife of Orpheus) flees from Aristaeus and dies from a serpent's bite. Desperate to regain her, Orpheus descends into the Underworld and plays tragically beautiful music to Hades and Persephone, who relent and allow the couple to return on the condition that Orpheus does not glance backwards until they have both reached the upper world. On the cusp of reaching the upper worlds, Orpheus becomes overwhelmed by a desire to see Eurydice and glances backwards, causing her to vanish instantly. In the Classical tale, Orpheus' backwards glance permanently dooms Eurydice to the world of the dead. For some critics, Orpheus' loss of Eurydice signifies a capitulation to temptation and lust because Orpheus' desire to embrace his wife overcomes his compliance to Hades' conditions. The Breton lai *Sir Orfeo*'s adaptation of the myth diverges on two defining points: 1) Where Orpheus loses his wife, Orfeo reclaims his 2) Where the Greco-Roman Underworld functions separately from the human realm, the Celtic-Otherworld of *Sir Orfeo* operates in tandem with the human world.

Despite their differences, these two stories illustrate the emotional climate of untimely loss. Both tales necessitate an Otherworldly presence to act as an access point to their departed beloved spouses. Using the Otherworld to retrieve what is lost remains a prevalent theme in Celtic tales where young women and children are often taken by the fey world. The storytelling

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[3] Gale, Monica R. "Poetry and the Bakcward Glance in Virgil's 'Georgics' and 'Aeneid.' *Transactions fo the American Philological Association*, Vol. 133, No. 2: 245

tradition of "untimely loss" snatching away those people who embody youth (children) and beauty (women) forces the supernatural world into a force that is neither good nor bad, but operates on a level that mortals cannot fathom.

The lai of *Sir Orfeo* is dated from between the late 13th or early 14th century and is preserved in three manuscripts. The oldest manuscript is known as the Auchinleck Manuscript and is currently housed in the National Library of Scotland. Each version of the *Sir Orfeo* story synthesizes Greek and Celtic mythology. Sir *Orfeo* begins with the depiction of a blissfully married couple, King Orfeo and Dame Heurodis. Unlike many Breton lais which feature a bachelor knight who eventually weds a maiden from one of his adventures, the established marital bliss of Sir Orfeo and his wife suggests that Orfeo and his wife have already attained individuation from the sheer happiness of their marriage and their want for nothing else. Dame Heurodis is a "quen of priis" and the "fairest levedi, for the nones/That might gon on bodi and bones/Ful of love and godenisse/Ac no man may telle hir fairnise" (51-56)[4]. One midsummer afternoon, Heurodis takes an ill-timed nap beneath an "ympe-tre," commonly translated as a grafted tree, where she encounters the fey who demand that she leave with them. Distraught and bewildered, Heurodis goes mad as she informs Orfeo that she will be separated from him. In a tender exchange between husband and wife, Orfeo asks "Whider wiltow go, and to wham?/Whider thou gost, ichil with the,/And whider y go, thou schalt with me" (128-130). In spite of his best efforts, the fairies snatch Heurodis under the watchful eye of Orfeo and a hundred of his best knights.

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[4] This and all subsequent citations are lines from *Sir Orfeo* taken from Laskaya, Anne, and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton lays*. Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS (the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages) in association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995. Print.

Distressed at the thought of losing Heurodis, Orfeo renounces his crown to his loyal steward and decides to live in the wilderness because "ichave mi queen y-lore/The fairest levedi that ever was bore/Never eft y nil no woman se/Into wilderness ichil go/And live ther evermore/With wild bestes in holtes hore" (210-214). Orfeo's sudden departure to the wilderness parallels the anchoritic life of early Christian monastic living where monks would withdraw into nature for religious reasons. Some critics have examined Orfeo's withdrawal into asceticism through a Christian lens and have suggested that his solitude makes him Christ-like, but I disagree. The emotional atmosphere of *Sir Orfeo* is spiritually charged, but not exclusively Christian. When he opts only for "a sclavin," or a pilgrim's mantle, to wear in the wilderness, this detail places Orfeo on the same ascetic tradition of famous hermits from Hindu scripture to canonized saints in Christianity and does not exclusively make his actions "Christian" (l. 228). After ten years of wandering in the wilderness with only his harping to break the harshness of the forest, Orfeo sees Heurodis among the fairy folk riding a palfrey. Even though Orfeo appears drastically altered, Heurodis recognizes him and weeps because she cannot speak to him. The fairy retinue hurries her away from Orfeo, but he chases after them to the Celtic Otherworld after finding an entrance "in at a roche [where] the levedis rideth" (347).

After wandering through a macabre scene where Orfeo sees a version of Heurodis lying asleep beneath the "ympe-tre," Orfeo comes to the court of the fairy king. I realize the discrepancy of Heurodis appearing in two places at once, but within the Celtic model of the Otherworld, one's identity can take on multiple forms — a unique motif that will later inform our discussion of the characters' psychological development. This scene bears the strongest resemblance to the Classical Orpheus myth because Orfeo plays so beautifully that the fairy king grants him a boon. Although we will return to the motif of harping and music later in my

discussion, minstrelsy and music remains important to our discussion because the music replaces words as the communication between the fairy king and Orfeo. In the wilderness, the sound of Orfeo's harping calmed the beasts and caused them to gather "for joie … to here his harping a-fine —/So miche melody was therin;/And when he his harping lete wold,/No best bi him abide nold" (274…280). Where Orfeo used music during his time in the wilderness to tame the beasts, this musical tradition indicates that song and verse transcend the human experience by acting as the audible manifestation of human joy or sorrow.

Just as Hades grants Eurydice to Orpheus, the unnamed fairy king's boon as reward for Orfeo's music gives Heurodis back to Orfeo. The Irish and Classical tradition of "gift giving" or "boon granting" is powerfully binding in the fairy realm and parallels the human courtly traditions of swearing an oath. When Orfeo asks for Heurodis as his boon, humility underscores his language. Note how Orfeo first responds with force when Heurodis is taken by the fey. By resorting first to military power, Orfeo relies on his own material might and commands the strength of "ten hundred knights of great priis" to surround Heurodis and protect her from the fairy abduction (220). Perhaps his time in the wilderness is meant to rid him of the arrogance that led him to lose Heurodis in the first place. Either way, Orfeo's attitude shifts drastically when he encounters the fairy king face to face because he uses humble and deferential language, which indicates that he has undergone a change in the wilderness.

In calm manner, Orfeo beseeches the king "thatow woldest give me/That ich levedi, bright on ble/That slepeth under the ympe tre" (455-456). Enraged at the idea of giving such a beautiful creature to a savage man, the king at first resists, but then reluctantly agrees to let them leave the Otherworld together. Perhaps the strongest difference between *Orfeo* and the Orpheus myth is the absence of a condition of return. Unlike Hades, whose release of Eurydice comes

with a caveat, there is no parallel injunction in *Sir Orfeo*. Rejoined, husband and wife reclaim their place of sovereignty from their loyal steward and live out their days in peace.

Although my topical summary of *Sir Orfeo* glosses over some of the more nuanced aspects of the lai, the summary was necessitated by the important differences and similarities between *Orfeo* and its Celtic source story, *The Wooing of Etain*. As I mentioned earlier, the importance of evaluating the lai in context of its source material allows us to evaluate the theme that both tales aim to express. Known originally as *Tochmarc Étaíne* (translates into the Wooing of Etain), the story was only partially preserved in the manuscript known as the *Lebor na hUidre* (or the Book of the Dun Cow) and dates to the 12th century. The *Lebor na hUidre* is currently held in the Royal Irish Academy and remains in poor condition with only 67 leaves remaining and many aspects of the text incomplete. The "Wooing of Etain" is fully preserved in the *Yellow Book of Lecan* published in 1401 although critics believe the language dates to the 8th or 9th century. The *Yellow Book of Lecan* is currently housed at Trinity College in Dublin.

The Irish myth, "The Wooing of Etain," follows a similar trajectory to *Sir Orfeo*, but most importantly shares specific similarities that demonstrate how the presence of the supernatural world justifies the loss of power and love seen in the human world. The Wooing of Etain" begins by presenting the fairy king Midir's two wives: Fuanmach, his first wife who is also a sorceress and Etain, Midir's second and more beloved wife. Embittered by her husband's affection for the second wife, Fuanmach abducts and changes Etain into a gnat whom the winds blow around for several years before she falls into the cup of an Irish queen. The Irish queen becomes pregnant after ingesting Etain in gnat form and gives birth to the reincarnated Etain. Etain, who has long since forgotten her ties to fairy, marries an Irish king by the name of Eochaid. After finally discovering the location and new form of his wife by forcing the truth

from Fuanmach, Midir reveals himself to her. Unable to remember Midir's identity, Etain refuses to join her former husband without her present husband's permission. To win back Etain, Midir engages Eochaid in a game of chess where he repeatedly allows Eochaid to win while making more incredulous bets until Eochaid's confidence overcomes his wariness. In the final game, Midir asks only for a kiss from Etain as his prize. Confident that he will win, Eochaid rashly grants this boon only to lose to Midir. The moment Midir embraces Etain, she remembers everything from her past life and together they change into swans and flee Eochaid's court.

The similarities and difference between the *Wooing of Etain* and *Sir Orfeo* are key to our discussion because they demonstrate how the presence of the supernatural can reverse tragic outcomes, such as the loss of a spouse. Although they may seem different, the two tales address the same theme of untimely loss through their shared motifs: established marital bliss, abduction, doubled forms and eventual reunion. In their first shared trait of established marital bliss, Midir and Etain parallel Orfeo and Heurodis. Just as a third party forcefully separates Orfeo from Heurodis, Fuanmach separates Midir from Etain.

Again, the fact that both couples are already married creates a psychological environment of completion where both spouses signify the other's half. Just as the male animus and female anima signify harmony, the married couple also suggests an image of solidarity and self with the marriage where their marriage acts as the anchor for this harmony. When the spouses are sundered from one another, they experience a loss of self. Just as Heurodis slips off to the fairy realm, Etain enters the human realm and once more they become two halves seeking to reclaim their counterparts. Both the male and female characters engage in a process of reclaiming self. Their struggle is only exacerbated by the supernatural presence, which can either aid or alienate the torn animus and anima aspects of the psyche. For example, in *Sir Orfeo*, the supernatural

presence hindered his attempts to keep his wife by taking away Heurodis and yet the supernatural presence also indirectly transforms him into the person who is worthy of bringing his wife back. The inverse relationship is seen in the relationship between Midir and Etain. Already supernatural, Midir regains his wife not by supernatural means, but by tricking Eochaid at a mortal game and operating within the human world.

Both Midir and Orfeo lose their wives in a similar way, with Etain lost by Fuanmach's deviation and Heurodis kidnapped by the fey. The shared *aíthed* (tales of abduction or kidnapping) characteristic between the two stories highlights the human experience of loss where grief from the spouse's separation mirrors abduction. Outside the context of the lai and its source material, "taken mortals" of the *aíthed* narratives is unique to Celtic folklore and provides an alternative lens for viewing death. Acting under the assumption that something or someone has merely been "taken" as opposed to permanently lost because of his or her death allows for the possibility — regardless of how remote — of reunion.

Fate plays an obscure role in the stories of Orfeo and Etain because both tales lack any hint of prophetic language suggesting that Etain or Heurodis are fated to be separated from their partners. Their untimely departure highlights the nature of tragedy, where both women characterize the "irrational and arbitrary nature of loss."[5] Baldwin's interpretation of loss parallels my own interpretation of how *Sir Orfeo* is a tale of vindicating grief. His explanations of fairy lore also help to explain why Heurodis may have been selected for abduction by the fairies. Regardless of how Etain and Heurodis are separated from Orfeo and Midir, the underlying theme of both tales creates an environment of helplessness.

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[5] Baldwin, Dean. "Fairy Lore and the Meaning of Sir Orfeo." *Southern Folklore Quarterly*. 1997. Pp: 129.

In some senses, the tales' respective characters experience inversions of what their character's counterpart undergoes. For example, Midir must operate in the human world whereas Orfeo operates in the supernatural realm. Their experience in a world alien to them represents another central concept between the two stories about "belonging." Each character belongs in one realm (human or fey), but when these boundaries are crossed in *Sir Orfeo* and *The Wooing of Etain*, Orfeo and Midir must traverse their known lands and enter the unknown in order to bring Heurodis and Etain back to their respective worlds. In the case of Heurodis, the fairy king argues that she does not belong with Orfeo because she is too beautiful for his savage countenance. I believe the fairy king makes more than an aesthetic appeal with his claim to Heurodis because her beauty represents the splendor of the fairy realm, while Orfeo's savage countenance symbolizes the chaos and pain of the outside world. When Midir finds Etain, he makes a case that she belongs with him in the fey realm rather than among the humans. In each tale, the sense of where one "belongs" opens up multiple interpretations concerning which identity or form Etain and Heurodis choose to embody. Etain clearly belongs in the fey realm because she is of fairy origin, but what about Heurodis? I will explore the idea of Heurodis' ambiguous nature later in my discussion.

There is a difference between internally belonging somewhere and externally being somewhere. While Heurodis and Etain may belong in the human and fey world, respectively, their form can exist in both places. Earlier I mentioned how Heurodis' is doubled because Orfeo both perceives her outside with the fey and amongst the tableau of the dead. Similarly, Etain exists both as the fairy wife of Midir and also as the mortal Irish princess. The women's twinned forms not only represent their split psyche, but also suggest that the women's split psyches allows them to inhabit a form between life and death. Etain has to die in her fairy form in order

to be reborn as an Irish princess just as Heurodis must be taken in one form by the fairies to exist in another form amongst the fairies. When we apply the notion of *chercher la femme* to *Sir Orfeo* and *The Wooing of Etain*, the text suggests that their femininity implicitly links them to the supernatural world more so than any other group of people. *Chercher la femme*, meaning "look to the women," suggests that the women are often the impetus behind an action. There is an implicit connection between women and the supernatural which makes them susceptible to supernatural advances (whether amorous or not) and also establishes their critical position as ones who, unlike men, are more frequently depicted as being able to exist between the two worlds. Because of their ties to the supernatural, the female characters of Breton lais and other romances can assume the fey-like doubled form. The doubled form in *Sir Orfeo* carries particular importance because of the location of Heurodis' doubled forms.

Upon entering the Otherworld, Orfeo wanders through the Celtic underworld in his search for Heurodis after he sees her riding on a palfrey in the middle of the forest. His experience in the underworld parallels many depictions of the underworld as a place filled with precious metals and jewels. But despite the underworld's natural beauty and vibrancy, he sees no living thing. The macabre nature of the underworld reaches its pinnacle when Orfeo comes across the tableau of the dead. These grotesque figures undermine the "taken" motif of Irish folklore, which suggests that those who are "taken" merely live amongst the fairies. Instead, the "taken" of *Sir Orfeo* are shown as part of the tableau of the dead violently frozen in the moments before their death:

> Sum stode withouten hade
> And sum non armes nade
> And sum thurth the bodi hadde wounde
> And sum lay wode, y-bounde
> And sum armed on hors sete

And sum astrangled as thai ete
Sum ded and sum awedde
And wonder fele ther lay besides
Right as slepe her undertides"
(l. 389-403)

Whereas Heurodis is taken by the fey while she sleeps, her experience represents the only non-violent entry into the fairy world. The others who have been taken are at the brink of madness or torture. The critical aspect of this tableau of the dead scene appears when Orfeo sees Heurodis amongst the frozen forms of the dead. The fact that Heurodis lies asleep among the tableau of the dead strengthens her connection to the Eurydice figure and suggests that there is little distinction between being a "taken" mortal and being dead. Heurodis appears just as she was before her capture: sleeping beneath the ympe-tre. Her posture of repose and unresponsiveness signifies that this is Heurodis' human form the moment when she slipped into the fairy world. This raises the question of which form of Heurodis is "real?" Is it the Heurodis asleep beneath the ympe-tre, or the Heurodis amongst the fairies? I believe Heurodis' real form is the one asleep the ympe-tre because Orfeo uses that identifier of Heurodis when he asks for the fairy king to grant his boon.

Doubles are an important concept both within Irish folklore and Breton lais because they suggest a continuation of presence that subverts chronology of story and time itself. In the act of splitting from her other half (Orfeo), Heurodis's lack of wholeness and imbalance after being torn from the mortal world allows her to assume multiple forms like split images of her soul. She retains two forms: one asleep beneath the "ympe tre" in the manner prior to her abduction and the other form frolicking with the fairy folk.

The presence of Heurodis's two forms allows her to function in the liminal world between the dead and the living. By her death-like state beneath the "ympe-tre" and her image

amongst the fairies, Heurodis appears reincarnated as one of the fairy folk herself. Reincarnations through the doubled form strongly factor into the "Wooing of Etain." Etain, the wife of Midir, also has two forms where she exists firstly as a fairy queen and secondly as the mortal daughter of a king. Through her death, which is more physical than spiritual, Etain gains access to the mortal world. Similarly, through Heurodis' "death" or abduction by the fairies, she gains access to the supernatural world. The ability of both female characters to traverse this time continuum — with Etain eventually remembering her past life and Heurodis leaving the world of the dead — suggests that they did not fully die, but rather that their death-like state is a result of being separated from the male counterparts of their soul: Midir and Orfeo.

The clearest distinction between Orfeo and the Classical Orpheus myth is the fact that husband and wife are reunited in the Breton lai whereas Orpheus and Eurydice are only reunited in death. In its final pages, *Sir Orfeo* reveals how Orfeo and Heurodis eventually return to normalcy and resume their positions as sovereigns in the human realm. Orfeo's experience in the wilderness and his reclamation of Heurodis exemplifies the trajectory of the psychological individuation process. As I defined earlier, the individuation process occurs when the "different experiences of a person's life and the different aspects and components of the immature psyche become integrated over time into a well-functioning whole." While I will go into more depth about Orfeo's psychological development throughout the lai, the important similarity between his character and the character of Midir is that they both develop into a "well-functioning whole" through reclaiming their wives. The restoration of the prior marital bliss removes the couples from the worlds of the split-psyche exemplified by their wives' doubled presence in both fairy and human form. In achieving individuation, the characters are no longer divided by worlds but joined in their respective realms. I believe that these characters' shared experience of grief and

joy reveals a larger message of dealing with untimely loss. Perhaps for the audience of both stories, accepting the idea of permanent grief through the loss of a spouse was more palatable under the guise that the spouse was simply whisked away from the world via supernatural elements as opposed to irretrievably lost.

Now that we have compared *Sir Orfeo* and its source material, the following chapter will examine the movement of the plot, the motives of characters and the recurring folkloric motifs in the lai to inform our understanding of what the fey presence offers the lai. By examining the characters' roles, we can then address the question of dominance between the fey and human worlds that each of the lais explore.

Ch. 2 Aíthed Narratives and The Fairy King's Motive

Heurodis's abduction follows the pattern of many "taken" stories in Irish mythology, which generally fall under the genre of *aíthed* narratives where a fairy abducts a mortal for a variety of motives and intentions. As we will see in *Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor*, a fairy's interest in a mortal may arise from romantic inclinations. Other motives found in folklore include human women serving as midwives to fairy births or using human mothers as wet nurses for fairy children. But when the fairy king abducts Heurodis, the fey offer no reason nor do we see any exact duty that Heurodis performs as part of the fairy retinue. As Orfeo later perceives in his journey to the Otherworld, the fairy king does not seem to desire Heurodis' presence out of a romantic attachment because he has his own "quen, fair and swete/Her crounes, her clothes schien so bright" (414-415). The absence of a clear romantic motivation to kidnap Heurodis leads me to the conclusion that Heurodis is actually fairy brought back to the realm where she belongs. Earlier in our discussion, I mentioned how the concept of "balance" factors into many of our discussions about the function of the fairy realm. In Heurodis's case, her existence amongst humans may represent an imbalance that only supernatural intervention can correct. Oftentimes, the fairy realm's association with the seasons and nature imbues the fey with this predisposition towards understanding natural order because they themselves are extensions of mutable nature. Perhaps in kidnapping Heurodis, the fairies have recognized something amiss with her presence in the human world and therefore choose Heurodis to come away with them.

When the fairies cross over into the human realm, there is always a reason even if that reason is not readily apparent. For example, when Orfeo encounters the fairy retinue in the forest, he notices that they are in the midst of hunting. The fairy king rides through the forest "with dim cri and bloweing,/And houndes also with him berking;/Ac no best thai no nome" (285-287). The line "ac no best thai no nome" is especially important because it reveals that the fairy

king is after something quite different than game. If he is not hunting game or scouring the land for beasts, then what is the fairy king's purpose? Earlier we saw how the fairy realm functions as a locus of both pleasure and pain, which suggests that the fairy king resides in the world of the dead. Therefore, the fairy king is the king of the dead.

While the fairy king's occupation as a ruler of the dead suggests a closer following to the Orpheus myth where the reigning chthonic deity is Hades, I believe the fairy king represents an important figure in Welsh fairy lore: Gwynn Ap Nudd, the Lord of the Dead. His home, Annwn, is both the dwelling of the dead and also the country of delight, therefore presenting a balance between the world of pain and pleasure. Most Welsh folklore shows him tracking down the souls of the newly dead with a pack of hounds and other fairies, which parallels the fairy king of *Sir Orfeo* on his mysterious hunt.[6] A reading of the fairy king as a Gwynn Ap Nudd figure may not immediately explain the motives behind abducting Heurodis because she does not seem like a lost soul. Although we see one form of her in a death-like trance beneath the "ympe-tre," she also appears amongst the fairies, which suggests that her spirit has not truly fled both worlds because otherwise she would not exist in the limbo of fairyland. I believe that by accessing the fairy realm through the ympe-tre (which we will discuss later), Heurodis has unknowingly split her psyche thus resulting in her abduction by the fairies as one of the lost souls whom Gwynn Ap Nudd retrieves.

Consider how none of the forms Orfeo sees in the tableau of the dead bear a resemblance to the beautiful fairy retinue, at least, no resemblance that the author makes explicit. This raises the questions of what happened to those people in the tableau of the dead? Who are they and where are they now? What makes Heurodis different and why is her form the only posture of

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[6] Spence, Lewis. *The Fairy Tradition in Britain*. London: Kessinger Publishing, 1995. Pp: 17

repose we see compared to the gruesome deaths of all the others? I believe her state of repose comes from a transitional form that may mirror death, but does not truly render the individual gone. The state of her split soul manifested in doubled forms suggests that in order to exist in either worlds, the soul must be contained in one form. Therefore, she can only die when she is fully mortal and her questionable background as fey figure or taken mortal thus obscures her status as one of the living or one of the dead.

The function of the fey in *Sir Orfeo* provides a complicated illustration of the fairy king who is neither a figure of exact good nor exact evil, but rather a figure of balance. None of his actions place him as an actual antagonist since he neither acknowledges Orfeo as some kind of enemy or invader in his realm nor does the fairy king actively try to thwart Orfeo's attempts to reclaim Heurodis. When Orfeo arrives in the fairy king's court, the king initially appears amused. Unaccustomed to anyone visiting the realm of the dead on their own volition, the king explains that he "fond never so folehardi man/That hider to ous durst wende/Bot that ic him wald ofsende" (426-428). In other words, only those who have been "summoned," or perhaps abducted such as in the case of Heurodis, have reason to come to his court. His interaction with Orfeo does not express any particular hostility that one might expect the antagonist to express. I believe his neutral address to Orfeo reinforces the idea that Heurodis was not abducted for romantic reasons; otherwise, the king should have immediately recognized Orfeo's presence and purpose. Therefore, there must be another reason for taking Heurodis. If the fairy king's focus lies in keeping the peace and maintaining the balance between the human and fairy world, then his actions suggest that Heurodis is a figure who does not truly belong in the realm of the living and thus the fairies select her for abduction.

Untouched by the years spent in the fairy realm, Heurodis retains her youthful appearance and cries for Orfeo's sake when she sees how time has physically altered him compared to his former self "that had ben so riche and so heighe" (326). Traditional ageing usually has no place in many medieval romances and oftentimes we see characters retain their youth and beauty after an impossible period of time. However, Orfeo undergoes a change and I believe this explicit physical change and direct mention of time elevates the lai from a simple romance to a story of psychological evolution. He takes on the countenance of a wild man with "his here of his berd, blac and rowe/To his girdle-stede was growe" (265-266). For Orfeo, physical change reflects a spiritual maturity because he no longer cares for the superficial influence of the material world. The aged and wild Orfeo starkly contrasts the ever-youthful Heurodis and lends credence to the theory that she comes from a fairy background. From the Irish tale of Etain, we can see that Etain's character remains closely linked to the fairy world even though she has no recollection of her past life as a fairy queen and perhaps Heurodis's mysterious abduction implies a similar past fairy life.

Upon their return to the kingdom, the author only mentions the longevity of their lives and nothing else. The author tells us that "King Orfeo newe coround is,/And his quen, Dame Heurodis,/And lived long afterward,/And sethen was king the steward" (593-595). The traditional fairy tale ending "and she bore him many sons," etc… is curiously absent from this Breton lai. The author also mentions how the steward became king after Orfeo, which suggests that he had no progeny. The lack of offspring is the one realistic detail we have of the time Orfeo and Heurodis spent apart, with him living in the wilderness and her residing in the world of the fairies. Even though Orfeo and Heurodis are restored to power, "the optimism of fairy tale is tempered but also made more credible by this element of realism" because their lost years render

them childless. [7] Spearing's explanation of Heurodis' perpetual youth and subsequent barenness represents a unique reading, one that I have yet to find in other scholarly material about *Sir Orfeo*. I find Spearing's argument quite compelling particularl because he points out the verbal lacunae of the story where important things that are unsaid are just as important as having said them.

"The Ympe Tre"

Accessing the fey world is just as critical as the time spent within the Otherworld. Given the fey's association with the natural world, it is fitting that the portal to and from both worlds are trees and caves or other natural landmarks. The moment when Heurodis falls asleep beneath the "ympe tre" marks an important turning point in the *Sir Orfeo* lai because she has inadvertently accessed the world of the fey. When she dreams of the fairy retinue, her partially conscious state beneath the "ympe-tre" acts as an access point between the fairy and human world. In the fairy world, Heurodis appears to have broken an important rule about sleeping when time is at its least defined stage. Twilight, dusk and noon traditionally represent the times when the veil between the fairy and human world weakens allowing for natural landmarks such as trees to function as portals. The "ympe tre" factors strongly into our discussion of motifs because it is the only natural object that has a doubled form. The tree exists in both the human world as a natural fixture in Orfeo's orchard, but also in the Celtic Otherworld beaneath which Heurodis lies asleep. The doubled form endows the tree with magical qualities and supports the Irish folkloric notion that "the most invariable characteristics of the unseen world in Celtic myths

[7] Spearing, A.C. Sir Orfeo: Madness and Gender. In Putter and Gilbert (Eds.), *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (83). London: Longman Publishing, 2000.

are that objects found there belong to the ordinary surroundings of every Irish dwelling of any rank." [8] Grimaldi's argument rings true with many ideas of folklore and myth particularly because she addresses how commonplace elements of the fey world are to humans who are unable to recognize how these commonplace objects are extensions of the Otherworld.

But the "ympe tre" also carries allegorical significance. If we accept 6th century philosopher Boethieus's understanding of the Orpheus myth as a dramatization of sin, then we must treat Orpheus and Eurydice as figurative precursors to sin. Eurydice represents the fall of man while Orpheus represents the sin of pride because he attempts to overrule Hades' condition of her return by imposing his own lusts and motives. If we apply this reading to the conceptualization of Heurodis' abduction, then the "ympe tre" is no ordinary portal to the fairy underworld but the tree of knowledge of good and evil. By falling asleep beneath the tree at a time when the supernatural can strike, Heurodis' abduction becomes an "allegorical dramatization of the effects of man's sins." [9] Spearing takes this interpretation of Heurodis' sin a step farther and suggests that her identifiable moral failing is the sin of sloth because she is indulging in her orchard and relaxing at a time when work should be done. [10] This religious reading consequently suggests that the same fairy retinue who appear to Heurodis at noontime is none other than the noonday demon of Psalm 90 and thus an associate of Satan himself.

> Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day.
> Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.
> -(King James Version of the Bible, Psalm 90:6)

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[8] Grimaldi, Patrizia. "Sir Orfeo as Celtic Folk-Hero, Christian Pilgrim and Medieval King." *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield, *Harvard English Studies* 9. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. Pp: 149.

[9] Ibid

[10] Spearing, A.C. Sir Orfeo: Madness and Gender. In Putter and Gilbert (Eds.), *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (90). London: Longman Publishing, 2000.

The word used for the "destruction that lays waste at noonday" is the Hebrew word *qeteb*, meaning a "cutting off" or "destruction" and signifies the demon Acedia, which describes a state of listlessness or not being able to perform the duties of one's life and therefore acting as a precursor to the sin of sloth, which Heurodis commits. [11] Although I find Spearing's argument frequently in scholarly texts of *Sir Orfeo*, I think his exclusively Christian reading of the text draws attention away from the fact that the text sends out a Religious and spiritual message that does not specifically target Christianity. If we interpret Orfeo's journey to the Otherworld and back from a religious standpoint where his journey mirrors the soul's struggle to find God, then Heurodis sleeping beneath the "ympe tre" represents a spiritual stupor. In her dreams beneath the ympe-tre, Heurodis forgets God. By severing her spiritual connection to God, she becomes susceptible to the demonic fairy king where her "mysterious transportation [to the fairy realm] and her loss of innocence under the tree also suggest a parallel to the Fall". [12] Even Coolidge reads quite far into the text to deduce this ultimately Biblical parallel between Heurodis and Eve. My interpretation and understanding of the text reflects solely the enigma of the Otherworld characters. By immediately trying to explain away Heurodis' experience through religion, Coolidge neglects the arguably more nuanced characters. However, their religious arguments do lend an explanation for their spiritual transformations even if I do not fully endorse them. If Heurodis's abduction by the fairies represents humankind's fall, then Orfeo's status as a pilgrim elevates him to become a Christ-like figure. His subsequent actions to retreat into the wilderness dressed in the garb of a pilgrim armed with "bot a sclavin" and his harp transform his wandering

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Coolidge, Sharon. "The Grafted Tree in *Sir Orfeo*: A Study in The Iconography of Redemption." Pp 12.

isolation into a necessary spiritual purification before he can descend into the underworld and redeem the fallen, i.e. Heurodis. Orfeo descends into the Otherworld to bring out Heurodis who has committed a moral transgression either because she displayed sloth by sleeping at noon beneath the "ympe tre" or because her innate fey nature subconsciously led to a spiritual stupor.

Wilderness, Otherworld And The Tableau of the Dead

Orfeo's decent into the Otherworld represents the culmination of Orfeo's spiritual and psychological journey. While Orfeo's journey fits neatly into the exile-return motif of the hero's adventure, his isolation in the woods and reunion with his wife parallels a psychological journey of self-individuation. Orfeo must contend with the shadow of his psyche manifested as the harsh wilderness to reclaim his wife from the fey and thus achieve wholeness. Orfeo's individuation process demands interaction with the "shadow" — or the wilderness of the mind — in order to reclaim Heurodis. The psychological shadow manifests as the wilderness that Orfeo resigns himself to as a result of the fairy king's kidnapping. The psychological transformation Orfeo undergoes becomes most apparent in the vastly diverging ways he approaches the fairy king before and after his time in the wilderness.

In his initial confrontation with the fairy king, Orfeo attempts to secure his wife by taking up arms "And wele ten hundred knightes with him … right unto that ympe tree" (186). But despite his physical force and watchful gaze, "the quen was oway y-twight/with fairi forth y-nome" (192-193). Only after Orfeo has "sufferd ten yere and more" and assimilates with the wilderness and by association the fey, can he finally "undernome … his owhen quen" (264, 320, 322). Where physical force and earthly strength failed him in protecting Heurodis, Orfeo turns to spiritual refuge in the wilderness armed with faith and "bot a sclavin," where the pilgrim garb

symbolizes asceticism (228). The ten years spent in the wilderness marks Orfeo's psychological descent into darkness where harsh life replaces his kingly position, yet throughout his ordeal, he never explicitly entertains idea of trying to find or reclaim Heurodis. Notice the language of his abdication when he leaves the throne and names the steward to rule in his absence:

> Never eft y nil no woman se.
> Into wildernes ichil te
> And live ther evermore
> With wilde bestes in holtes hore;
> And when ye understond that y be spent,
> Make you than a parlement,
> And chese you a newe king.
> Now doth your best with al mi thing. (l. 211-218)

While his words proclaim his fidelity to Heurodis, he makes no mention of trying to find her. When Orfeo spends time in the wilderness, the focus is on his appearance where the author laments how "he that hadde ben king with croun/Went so poverlich out of toun" (235-236). The narrative between Orfeo's abdication and his entrance into the underworld strictly details his hermetic struggle in the wilderness. If Orfeo's intention was to find his wife, then surely he would have gone after the fairy king after sighting him multiple times nearby in the wilderness. But the author makes no mention of Orfeo following the fairy king's retinue and instead the author discusses how Orfeo "never nist whider they become" (288). On another occasion "[Orfeo] might him se/As a great ost bi him te,/Wele atourned, ten hundred knightes" from the fairy court (289-291). Only when Orfeo sees Heurodis does he finally follow the fairy retinue, but otherwise, the text never suggests that reclaiming Heurodis was his main priority. Rather, his time spent in the wilderness required solace and asceticism. By wandering in the wilderness and abandoning all material notions of power and wealth, Orfeo discovers a spiritual wealth that overcomes the influence of the fey. Unlike his classical or Irish counterparts, deep humility

characterizes Orfeo's actions. "His acceptance of the inevitability of death coupled with his great love for his lost wife lead him to renounce the world and to take up the life of a hermit. He receives a gift of grace by having Heurodis returned to him." [13] Louis' argument rings true for me particularly because I believe he addresses the significance of Orfeo's perception if Heurodis, which acts as a reward for his penitence in the wilderness. Orfeo's reunion with Heurodis inverts the traditional fairytale ending because instead of Orfeo tracking down Heurodis and rescuing her, Heurodis makes herself known to the penitent and wandering Orfeo. Orfeo, drawn by the sound of the fairies on a hunting ride goes towards the group and immediately "beheld, and hath wele undernome,/And seth bi al thing that it is/Hiw ownhen quen, Dam Heurodis" (l. 320-322). The appearance of Heurodis validates Orfeo's asceticism by allowing him to perceive her for the first time since her abduction.

I believe that Orfeo's lack of a motive to find Heurodis necessitates spiritual cleansing. In order to access the fairy realm, he must do penance for the pride he displayed earlier in trying to prevent her capture by the fairy king. The theory that Orfeo must perform penance before perceiving Heurodis gains credence in the fact that he does not pursue the fairy retinue. Perhaps the only reason he does not go after the fairy king and his companions is because he only sees glimpses of them. The author does make clear that these sightings are infrequent and perhaps the gradual presence of the fairies making themselves known to Orfeo suggests that he is close to reaching the spiritual purity necessary to access the natural world of the fairies.

When he returns to his kingdom, his experience in the psychological wilderness erases the flaw of materialism he initially displayed. When he tests the loyalty of his steward, he does

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[13] Louis, Kenneth R. R. Gros. "The Significance of Sir Orfeo's Self-Exile." *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 18, No. 71 (Aug., 1967), pp. 250.

not don his former kingly attire and impose strength and material wealth upon the loyal steward, but rather remains in his pilgrim garb to test the character of his steward. This change in his perception of true power demonstrates spiritual growth because he pays more respect to the invaluable but intangible qualities of a person such as character and loyalty rather than the material might they seem to carry.

Entrance Into the Otherworld and the Realm of the Dead

When Orfeo enters the Underworld "in at a roche," he essentially descends into an Otherworld that traditionally resembles the Classical conception of the Underworld (347). The fairy Otherworld is characterized by beauty and immense wealth in precious stones and metals where even "the werst piler on to biholde/was al of burnist gold" (367-368). This beauty parallels the riches of the Greecian/Roman conception of the Underworld as evidenced by Pluto's name becaming synonymous with wealth. However, the natural beauty of the Underworld starkly contrasts with grotesque inhabitants. Alongside the youthful fey lie the tortured and twisted bodies that appear in the tableau of the dead. While the images of the dead appear grotesque and macabre, this scenery strongly resembles the Grecian conception of the underworld[14]. These figures in the Celtic Otherworld are frozen in the manner of their abduction, which parallels the stunted forms of the dead in the Greek Underworld. In the Greek Underworld, the psyche is frozen at the moment of death and renders the individual unable to alter his or her appearance posthumously. Consider the famous scene in Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid* where the horrendously

[14] Albinus, Lars (2000). The House of Hades: studies in ancient Greek eschatology. Aarhus University Press: Aarhus. pp. 67.

mutilated Deiphobus appears to Aeneas and recounts Helen's betrayal. Just like the members of the tableau of the dead, Deiphobus is frozen in the manner of his death. Unlike the dead in the Greek Underworld, Deiphobus can communicate with the living, which starkly contrasts with the mute and frozen forms of the dead in the Celtic Otherworld. I attribute their silence and stillness to the lack of a spirit. Whereas the Greek psyche — "self" — appears unchanged in the Underworld, the Celtic Otherworld literally claims the souls of the living, thus resulting in their frozen forms.

While the reason for their deaths remains unclear, the significance of the Celtic Otherworld's dealings lies in its presumably arbitrary nature. As a product of the unpredictable natural world, the fairy king's realm embodies nature's natural dichotomy where chaos lives alongside beauty. Perhaps the morbid bodies captured in the moment before their deaths symbolizes the consequences of disorderly nature where their removal from society reestablishes the balance that the fairy king maintains. Earlier I posited that Heurodis possesses a potentially fey nature where she does not fit into the neat duality between the material and spiritual worlds thus making her subject to the natural world's attempts to restore order through what appears like arbitrary abductions of human lives in the physical world.

Critics have interpreted *Sir Orfeo*'s tableau of the dead passage to conclude that "in both the Celtic and Christian cultures, the meaning of this passage is that death, however peaceful it may appear to be, is a work of violence — a cutting down. The myths do not mitigate the impact of death with soothing words; they present it in its grimmest brutality."[15] Grimaldi's interpretation of the tableau of the dead leaves something to be desired because she does not

[15] Grimaldi, Patrizia. "Sir Orfeo as Celtic Folk-Hero, Christian Pilgrim and Medieval King."*Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield, *Harvard English Studies* 9. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

address how this cutting down interpretation interacts with the vision of the sleeping Heurodis. The juxtaposition of Heurodis's relaxed sleep beneath the ympe-tre alongside images of pain reinforces how she is unique from them because she is not "cut down," but rather stuck in the fairy realm either by her own folly of sleeping at noontime or because of her inherent ties to the fey.

Even though Heurodis lies in the company of the grotesque figures, she remains separate from them just as Orfeo remains separate from his court. Heurodis and Orfeo's shared journey through the fairy realm represents a process of individuation where their experiences eventually reunite them as one whole. Unlike Breton lais with more pronounced Christian overtures, morality plays a minor role in *Sir Orfeo*. Instead, *Orfeo* depicts a battle against the unforeseen, such as the arbitrary violence of the supernatural and the cruel machinations of fate, which can separate people from their halves. Orfeo endures this test of character with grace and in return gains back his wife and his realm through wisdom and humility.

A psychological reading of *Orfeo* reinforces this Religious reading of Orfeo's reintegrated soul after his reunion with Heurodis. The weight of my psychological reading of the text stems from the moment where Orfeo encounters Heurodis in the woods. Throughout the lai, the author heightens Orfeo's loneliness by depicting the isolated experience of the male anima seeking reunion with the female anima in order to become a unified whole. A chance meeting with Heurodis rewards Orfeo's years of penance for the sin of imposing material might against the supernatural forces of the fairies. In an inversion of the Classical motif where Orpheus' "backwards glance" separates him from Eurydice, Heurodis is the one who makes the backwards glance at Orfeo before turning around to flee with the fairies. In the moments where the veil between the human and fey world eventually lifts and Orfeo catches sight of Heurodis, this silent

interaction indicates a paradigmatic shift from Orfeo's time as a passive pilgrim to a hero in action. Upon his second meeting with the fairy king, Orfeo neither challenges him with the physical strength and might that failed him the first time, nor does he claim Heurodis as rightfully his and attempt to whisk her away by escape. Instead, Orfeo chooses the intangible "melody so swete" as his leverage against the fairy king (l. 442). His music not only allows him to reclaim Heurodis, but the music captures the isolation and desolation of his time away from Heurodis where he wandered without hope and agenda of reclaiming her. Therefore, his interaction with the "shadow" of his subconscious, as characterized by the wilderness culminates in his reclamation of Heurodis and completes his individuation process.

From Orfeo's individuation process to the function of the fey, the discussion above informs our question of which group (fey or human) demonstrates dominance over the other group. Orfeo's shift in attitude and language in addition to the time spent in the wilderness distinguish the lai's conflict as an internal dilemma rather than an external dilemma. Orfeo must overcome something within himself in order to perceive Heurodis and therefore reclaim her. Although he operates with deference within the fairy world, Orfeo displays dominance over the Otherworld because he has one remarkable feature: the ability to change. The Celtic Otherworld of *Sir Orfeo* is marked with stasis. From the frozen tableau of the dead to the lifeless beauty of its palace, the Celtic Otherworld cannot experience change just as Heurodis cannot experience change because a part of her psyche remains in a stupor beneath the fairy ympe-tre. Orfeo's spiritual penance frees him by granting him the ability to perceive Heurodis among the fairies and reclaim her. He overcomes the supernatural force not through a display of force, but a display of internal strength as characterized by the beauty of his music.

The lai reveals that the fey world offers humans a chance to test their inner strength and only by working within the parameters of the fey world — retreating into the wilderness, descending into the Otherworld — can the human character find wholeness and spiritual definition. The fairy realm represents a stand in for any kind of disruption of natural order and may have appealed to its Medieval audience who perceived the macabre and unjust as casually as Orfeo perceives the tableau of the dead in his descent to the Underworld. But instead of showing this disruption and unkind fate in the form of a war or pillaging from a neighboring kingdom, the poet chooses to illuminate these truths in the form of a fairy realm because the fey world embodies the surreal and untimely.

As he finds himself through asceticism, he gains a new lens that allows him to see past the materialism he embraced earlier and see through the demarcation between the fey and human world thus enabling his reclamation of Heurodis. This cycle makes Orfeo psychologically whole through the union of male and female animus and anima, respectively. The lack of agenda to reclaim Heurodis evokes a dreamlike and wandering stage for Orfeo, but one that contains "a sensation of underlying meaningfulness" because the solitude gradually enables him to become whole and thus elevates his asceticism to a path of self-discovery. [16]

As a character, Orfeo represents more than just a Celtic folkhero. religious pilgrim or Medieval king; he represents each individual's personal struggle. Although his quest follows all the traditional forms of a heroic journey, his true struggle falls within the undefined margins of his spiritual quest. His resignation, piety and humility may characterize a Christian reading of the text, but interpreted in a more worldly sense, these are characters that represent each individual.

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[16] Weldhoem, Bart. "Psychology and the Middle English Romances: Preliminaries to Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo, and Sir Launfal." Companion to Middle English Romance. Ed. Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. MacDonald. Amsterdam: VU UP, 1990. 113

The fairy realm represents the random acts of human nature that we cannot control. By realizing this truth, Orfeo has ultimately set himself free.

Ch. 3 Introduction to *Sir Launfal* and the *Tale of Oísin*

While *Sir Orfeo* uniquely incorporates the supernatural into an interactive force that aids Orfeo's psychological development, *Sir Launfal* represents one of the many lais where interaction with the fey develops from a romantic attachment. Written by Thomas Chestre in the late 14th century, the lai of *Sir Launfal* survives in a single manuscript copy known as British Museum MS Cotton Caligula A.ii from the mid-15th century. Unlike the Otherworld of *Sir Orfeo*, Launfal's interaction with the Otherworld remains in the margins. Whereas the fey of *Sir Orfeo* are only distantly involved, but always present, the fairy of *Sir Launfal* remains intimately involved, but rarely depicted. The scope of the two lais is also radically different because *Sir Orfeo* primarily deals with one character whereas *Sir Launfal* addresses a range of characters. Unlike *Sir Orfeo* where the two worlds are simply the human realm and the natural realm, *Sir Launfal* situates the action between the courtly world and the fairy world. By adding the courtly element, the author forces Launfal into a hierarchical situation. With the addition of the supernatural world entering the courtly world that Launfal is a member of, conflict emerges between the two realms. Participating fully in both realms presents a dilemma to Launfal because he struggles to maintain fealty to both the king and his fairy mistress.

As a knight, he must serve God, the king and ladies. When these acts of deference overlap (in this case, king and mistress), the chosen pathway represents the path to self-individuation by affirming the beliefs that the protagonist subscribes to as opposed to acting

submissively to one authoritative force over another. Although Launfal is not split in the sense that Heurodis of *Sir Orfeo*e exists in two worlds, Launfal is torn between two ideas of morality and chivalry. Before meeting the fairy, Launfal is a character who exists in the margins of Arthur's court. As a distant son of a distant king, his foreign status in Arthur's realm parallels the Otherworldly nature of the fey and suggests that he does not truly belong. Interacting with the fairy gives him purpose and power and without her aid, Launfal would remain on the margins of the court. Unlike *Sir Orfeo* where the lai's message addressed resolving grief, *Sir Launfal* is a tale about self-actualization and the struggle for an identity. The lai demonstrates that the difficult choices one makes define him or her and through the singular presence of the Otherworld, Launfal is able to define himself and distinguish himself from the courtly realm and fairy realm. His character development creates a unique way of examining the dynamic of power between the fey and humans because of his romantic relationship with the fairy, Dame Tryamour. Tryamour insists that in order to continue their relationship, Launfal must swear to never reveal her existence to anyone. Launfal promises to uphold her condition, but as we will see, this promise complicates his life in the courtly realm.

With *Sir Launfal*'s focus on the balance between the courtly love and the actual court system, the lai heavily focuses on a system of justice that incorporates both human and fey influences. Instead of acting like the fairy king in *Sir Orfeo* as a regulator of the fairy-human realm duality, the fairy of *Sir Launfal* also maintains the justice of both the human and fey world's normative systems by dispensing justice in the human world as a fairy. The human court needs her to address the to "pre-existing problems or tensions within the central aristocratic society which it cannot resolve on its own…In this case, the otherworldly intervention is not a threat to be countered, but a catalyst that helps the central aristocratic society attain a new order

by provoking a process through which a problem in that world is resolved or a flaw in it is exposed."[17] The moral dilemma and complexity of this lai pivots around the concept of the *geis*, or a taboo set by the Otherworld. The *geis* of *Sir Launfal* affirms that even the Celtic Otherworld remains subject to a "normative system of its own, just like the mortal world." [18] Weldhoem's assessment of the Otherworld containing its own normative system will factor importantly into my discussion because it addresses the underlying significance of the *geis* and why it is addressed in the first place. This *geis* conflicts with the courtly traditions of the mortal world and thus forces Launfal to choose between violating the system of the Otherworld or the system of the courtly world.

While *Sir Orfeo*'s source story *The Wooing of Etain* addresses the tales' shared theme of resolving grief, *Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor*'s shared source story *The Tale of Oísin* address the traits of romantic interaction with a fairy, the *geis* (or fairy taboo) and consequences of breaking that *geis*. *The Tale of Oísin* comes to us from a monastic compilation of stories from the Fionn cycle of Irish mythology (a group of stories focusing on the hero Fionn mac Cumhaill) known as the *Acallam na Senórach*, or *Colloquy of the Ancients* from the 12th century. It is the longest surviving work of original medieval Irish literature and heavily focuses on the exploits of the main character: Oísin.[19] While the lais of *Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor* may seem similar at the skeletal level, the way that the poet fleshes out the content of *Sir Launfal* with questions of

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[17] Rider, Jeff. "The Other Worlds of Romance." In Roberta L. Krueger (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (115-131). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

[18] Weldhoem, Bart. "Psychology and the Middle English Romances: Preliminaries to Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo, and Sir Launfal." *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. MacDonald. Amsterdam: VU UP, 1990. 128

[19] Koch, John T. *Celtic culture: a historical encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2006. Print.

psychological, judicial and gender import starkly differs from the simplistic and almost entirely Celtic folkloric quality of *Guingamor*.

As the son of a king from a faraway land, Launfal lives far from his home and serves as steward to King Arthur. Characterized by his excessive generosity, Launfal shows his high status because he constantly "gaf gyfts largelyche/Gold and sylver and clothes ryche" (28-29).[20] When Arthur marries Guenivere, Launfal and the other well-bred knights "lykede her nought" because "sche hadde lemmannys under her lord,/So fele ther nas noon ende" (44, 47-48). On their wedding day, Guenivere makes an example of Launfal's disapproval of the marriage by leaving him out of the gift giving which "grevede hym many a sythe" (72). By rejecting Launfal, Guenivere effectively voids Launfal of his once important position among the knights of Arthur's court. With the Queen's displeasure undermining Launfal's loyalty to Arthur, Launfal leaves court. His spendthrift character drives him to destitution and when the knights who initially accompanied him return to court, Guenivere expresses a cruel desire for Launfal to endure "bothe day and nyght/In paynys mor and more" (179-180). Impoverished and alone, Launfal takes refuge in a forest where he falls asleep "in the schadwe under a tre" (227). While he sits alone, two fairy maidens visit him and lead him to their fairy mistress, Dame Tryamour.

Unlike the previously established marital love and harmony in Orfeo's relationship with Heurodis, Launfal's meeting with Tryamour recalls the nascent romantic relationships of other folktales because Launfal falls in love with her immediately. When Launfal follows the fairy women to Tryamour's pavilion, the author launches into an effictio similar to the descriptions of many beautiful women in literature where a head to toe illustration appraises her beauty and

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[20] This and all subsequent citations are lines from *Sir Launfal* taken from Laskaya, Anne, and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton lays*. Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS (the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages) in association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995. Print.

wealth. Tryamour epitomizes seduction because although she possesses rich and sumptuous raiment, she wears the minimal amount of clothing. With her body practically uncovered to expose her unearthly beauty, all Launfal needs is one look before "all hys love yn her was lyghth" (308).

Before Launfal has the chance to verbalize his affection, Tryamour initiates their romantic relationship by immediately addressing him as her lover. In many ways, Launfal appears to have hit the jackpot of luck with Tryamour unhesitatingly offering to restore his wealth and bestow her undying love all for the negligible price of his silence and fidelity. However, right before he returns to Arthur's court, Tryamour reminds him of the one condition of the relationship: the *geis* of concealed identity. The *geis* operates strongly in Celtic folklore as a powerful tool of bondage since breaking the *geis* leads to an immediate and irretrievable loss of the fairy's love, or worse. Tryamour delivers her gifts to Launfal with the warning to "make no bost of me/For no kennes mede/And yf thou doost, I warny the before/All my love thou hast forlore" (361-365). Set free of the societal confines of poverty, Launfal ventures back towards Caerleon and demonstrates his largesse to those who once shunned him for his lack of money. At this point, Launfal is a participant in both the human realm and the Otherworld. Invisible at his side and seen by no one but the fairy man-servant and Launfal, Tryamour spends time with Launfal. His service to her as a loyal lover and true knight begins to pose a complication of fealty. A knight's obligations fall under the main categories of honor to God, honor to his king and honor to women. Conflicts arise when characters find themselves in situations where one or more of the aforementioned tenets are mutually exclusive.

With his pride and power restored, Launfal once more becomes the steward of King Arthur's halls. Due to Launfal's elevated status and wealth, Guenivere's hatred quickly turns to

lust and she endeavors to make him her lover. After professing an undying love for him, Launfal rebuffs her and cites his loyalty to the king because he "nell be traytour day ne nyght/Be God, that all may stere" (683-684). Spurned, Guenivere's actions embody the Potiphar's wife motif because she twists Launfal's rejection. She berates him and claims that Launfal "lovyst no woman, ne no woman the —/Thou were worthy forlore" (689-690). Ashamed by these veiled accusations of homosexuality, Launfal must choose between breaking Tryamour's *geis* and losing her or defending himself from Guenivere's slander and defending Tryamour's honor. Launfal breaks Tryamour's *geis* by retorting to Guenivere that he not only loves a much more beautiful woman than the Queen, but also that his lady's "lothlokest mayde, wythoute wene/Myghte bet be a Quene" (697-698). Launfal's choice of Tryamour's honor against Guenivere's unjust accusations simultaneously deprives him of both power and love. Unbeknownst to Launfal, Guenivere spins his tale of rejection into an accusation of rape and tells Arthur that when she rejected Launfal's amorous advances, he insulted her beauty by saying that his lover's ugliest handmaid would rival her in beauty.

After confronting Guenivere, Launfal seeks out Tryamour "but sche was lore/As sche hadde warnede hym before" (730-731). The author highlights the theme of destitution and abandonment through descriptions of clothing. For example, Launfal returns to his room only to notice that not only are Tryamour's gifts gone, but also his armor that was once "whyt as flour,/hyt beocm of blak colour" (742-743). This color change signifies the finality of Tryamour's departure. Launfal collapses with despair at the same moment when Arthur's knights arrest him as a traitor. Arthur appears less upset at Launfal's alleged propositioning of Guenivere than that Launfal insulted her beauty. Although many of the knight's believe Launfal's innocence because of the Queen's infamous promiscuity, they cannot soften Arthur's decision

that Launfal should be killed on grounds of treason. After much persuasion, the court sets the condition that Launfal's sentence of death can be commuted provided that he "might hys lemman brynge" to court so that they may all judge the truth of whether her least attractive handmaid is more beautiful than Guenivere (796).

Guenivere scoffs at the charges and instructs the court to "put out my eeyn gray" if Launfal's claims are true (809). This proves to be a rather poor choice of words for Guenivere as the lai will later demonstrate. Guenivere's words exemplify the medieval concept of love, which was thought to be an act that happened to someone rather than a force that originates within the soul. By suggesting that the court put out her eyes if Launfal is correct, Guenivere is essentially promising to give up her own promiscuity: if she cannot see her potential lovers, then she cannot pursue them.

Time goes by and Launfal is less concerned with the death penalty and more troubled that he has lost his lover forever. He would gladly "hys lyf … forgon ….gladlyche he wold hys hed forgo" (823-825). Until the day of his trial, Launfal searches for Tryamour to no avail. No sooner is King Arthur about to demand Launfal's death when ten beautiful maidens materialize in his court and walk towards Launfal. The maidens are none other than the handmaidens of Dame Tryamour and the "lodlokest, without wene,/Har Quene than myghte be" (851-852). Assuming that one of the maidens is Launfal's mysterious lover, one of the knights assures Launfal that his fate is secure since his lover is clearly more beautiful than Guenivere. But Launfal, in keeping with the chivalric code he has upheld throughout the lai, protests even at the risk of losing his life that Tryamour is not among the maidens.

Fearful that Arthur will acquit Launfal, Guenivere attempts to rush the trial in her favor. But the moment she attempts to condemn Launfal, Tryamour rides into the court in all her glory.

The poet launches into a similar effictio of Tryamour that emphasizes her beauty, grace and fairness. Launfal identifies Tryamour as his lover and resigns himself as a passive figure by explaining that she "myghte me of my balys bete/Yef that lady wolde" (971-972). By endowing her with the power to alter his fate, Tryamour embodies the *deus ex machina* motif by functioning as his savior. Her appearance directly contradicts the tenets of her own *geis* and suggests that Launfal's situation is unique because Tryamour overcomes the *geis*' consequences to rescue him.

Once Tryamour appears before the court, she clears Launfal's name by dropping her mantle and letting her beauty overpower the court, which provides a clear comparison of her beauty versus the relative aesthetic dimness of Guenivere. Tryamour identifies herself as Launfal's liberator and restores Launfal's reputation by naming Guenivere as the perpetrator of the failed seduction. As a final sentence to Arthur's poor judgment in condemning Launfal, Tryamour "blew on [Guenivere] swych a breth/That never eft might sche se" (1007-1008). Bereft of her sight and with her poorly worded oath fulfilled, Tryamour cleanses Guenivere of her promiscuity by removing the route through which love can inflame the mind by taking out her "eeyn gray" (l.809). With justice restored, Tryamour leaps onto her palfrey and Launfal's fairy steed appears to escort him to the Otherworld. Without delay, Launfal and Tryamour "wente the way that sche hadde er gon/Wyth solas and wyth pryde" (1019-1020). While the story bears resemblance to the *aíthed* narratives that we discussed in *Sir Orfeo* since Tryamour takes Launfal away, Launfal's status as a "taken" mortal differs from Heurodis's status as a "taken" mortal because he chooses to leave.

While Launfal's trespass of the *geis* does not prevent him from losing Tryamour forever, many other mortal lovers of the fey are not as lucky. In the *Tale of Oísin*, the eponymous

character Oísin also engages in a romantic liaison with the fey and, like Launfal, breaks her *geis*. Yet, Oísin is not forgiven and he loses his life as a result. The two tales are important to evaluate in tandem because the manner in which both characters engage the fey and break the *geis* speaks to the characters' differing levels of complexity. Launfal's situation is more complex because he is balancing the demands of the courtly realm and his obligations to Tryamour. Oísin, on the other hand, does not face a similar position and his trespass of the *geis* is neither conscious nor deliberate. Oísin's trespass is purely accidental, yet this accidental trespass does not mitigate the power of the *geis*, which is absolute in the *Tale of Oísin*.

The female fairies of both stories are also of significant interest because they drastically differ from the fragile damsel in distress tropes of other romances. Many times the mortal female love interests of the protagonists are unnamed or merely known as "the beautiful maiden," but these strong-willed females of the Otherworld are distinct in that they have both names and titles. Their names endow them with power and identity and also suggest that their penchant for levying injunctions is not to be treated lightly by the mortals. The female fairies reverse the traditional gender roles as part of the Celtic motif of the "wooing woman" where the woman initiates courtship. Generally the "wooing woman" is a fairy maiden who perceives something noteworthy in the male hero and romantically pursues him. This represents an interesting shift in the male/female dynamic and suggests that the woman is not the male's subordinate. Just as Launfal attracts the love of a fairy woman from afar, Oisín attracts the attentions of the beautiful fairy woman Níamh Chinn Óir, or Niamh of the Golden Head. She takes him away to the fairy world where they settle happily. An interesting variant in the relationship between Oisín and Níamh versus Launfal and Tryamour is the presence of offspring. While we have stories that

discuss the heritage of a hero or heroine with fairy blood in them, rarely do we see a fairy woman rearing her children with the mortal alongside.

After what Oisín believes is three or four years, he decides to return to Ireland for a visit. Seeing her husband's unwavering will to return for a visit, Niamh relents. She informs Oisín that he must not touch the ground, otherwise the 300 years that have actually passed will catch up to him. For some time, Oisín wanders the Ireland he used to know. As he makes his way back to the Otherworld, a group of men who are trying to build a road ask for his help. Oisín, knowing that he cannot disembark from his horse, tries to bend out of his saddle to help the men, but the girth breaks and he falls to the ground and ages instantly. Some variations of the tale show St. Patrick visiting Oisín in his final moments, others simply conclude with Oisín's immediate death.

The *Tale of Oísin* predates *Sir Launfal* and I believe that the more malleable *geis* shown in *Sir Launfal* demonstrates a universal desire to eschew absolute concepts. While the narrative events of *Sir Orfeo* attempt to justify the concept of grief through the presence of the supernatural, the lai of *Sir Launfal* imparts a moral message where commitment to truth and chivalry in the face of imminent loss can reverse bad luck. The tale of Oisín has none of the supernatural forgiveness that we see in *Sir Launfal*. The rigidity of the *geis* in the tale of Oisín juxtaposed with the flexibility of the *geis* in *Sir Launfal* exhibits a natural human inclination to believe that absolute prohibitions or oaths still allow mercy for the genuinely accidental trespassers. In other words, there are exceptions to every rule. We see this clearly in *Sir Orfeo* where Orfeo reverses the abduction of Heurodis (a parallel scenario for the permanence of death) through penance and spiritual cleansing. *Sir Launfal* sends a similar message with the narrative events supporting a reading where his commitment to truth and chivalry overrules the fairy *geis*. The lais of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* both spin a tale where the endings of their source stories

(Orpheus and *Tale of Oísin*) are reversed based on the changes that the main character undergoes. Both of these lais exemplify the strength of the individual in spite of external forces against him regardless of whether those threats are supernatural or not (such as the fairy king in *Sir Orfeo*, or human, such as Guenivere in *Sir Launfal*).

Just as Celtic and Classical mythology influence *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor* also have roots in the Classical tradition because their love affair with the supernatural parallels the story of Cupid and Psyche originally from the Latin novel *Metamorphoses* written in the 2nd century by Apuleius.[21] The application of the Cupid-Psyche template to the *Sir Launfal* myth is important because it suggests the highly recyclable quality of storytelling in ancient tales. In this Greek myth, Psyche's beauty threatens Aphrodite and she conspires to make Cupid prick Psyche with one of his arrows and fall in love with a terrifying beast. When Cupid sees the sleeping Psyche, he accidentally pricks his finger on his own arrow and falls in love with her. With no offers of marriage, Psyche's parents consult an oracle who proclaim that she is destined to marry someone who even the gods are scared of. Psyche is then brought to her husband by the wind, but she does not know or see her new husband. Unwilling to allow Psyche to know his identity, Cupid imposes a condition (similar to Tryamour's *geis*), which prohibits Psyche from looking at him in the light. Psyche's curiosity overwhelms her and she secretly sees Cupid.

Enamored by his beauty, she bends over his sleeping form and in the act drops hot oil from her lamp onto his back. When Cupid awakens, he flees and Psyche is forced to perform a number of demeaning and nearly impossible tasks before Cupid relents and takes her back. Launfal and Tryamour follow the same pattern with Tryamour acting as the Cupid figure and

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[21] Daugherty, Evelyn N. "The Cupid-Psyche Myth in *Lanval, Graelent, Guingamor* and *Bisclavret*." *Thoth*, 16 (1976) 24.

Launfal acting as the Psyche figure. [22] Just as Cupid summons Psyche to him after falling in love with her, Tryamour summons Launfal to her pavilion ostensibly after falling in love with him from a distance. Both couples spend a certain amount of time in bliss until one of them breaks the *geis*. Cupid's *geis* prevented Psyche from seeing him in the daylight, while Tryamour imposes an injunction of silence. Eventually, the mortal lover undergoes a trial, which tests him or her. Aphrodite sets a number of tasks for Psyche while Tryamour subjects Launfal to the cruelty of isolation and abandonment. Finally, when it becomes clear that the mortal lover can suffer no more, the supernatural lover rescues the mortal at the very last moment and whisks them away to safety.

Whereas Psyche's trespass of the *geis* stems from an insatiable curiosity, Launfal's trespass of the *geis* emerges from a desire to protect Tryamour's honor and uphold chivalric standards. Temptation strongly factors into the Classical stories that may have influenced the Breton lais. From Orpheus' backward glance, Psyche's temptation and Pandora's curiosity, we are consistently presented with stories where the characters suffer an internal lapse of judgment. The difference between the Classical and Celtic stories and the Breton lais lies in the form of these threats. Just as Orfeo responds to an external threat (the fairy king's abduction of Heurodis), Launfal too responds to an external party (Guenivere's accusations). Where both Orfeo and Launfal's lapse in judgment comes not from a desire to sate a burning curiosity or lust, but a strong desire to protect the ones they love. In this sense, their "sin" magnifies their own virtue and makes them exceptions from the Otherworld's conditions. This virtue may explain why the lai of *Sir Orfeo* diverges from the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, but also suggests a

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[22] Reaney, Gilbert. "Concerning the Origins of the Medieval Lai." *Music & Letters*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct., 1958), pp. 346. Published by: Oxford University Press.

reason for why Tryamour returns to Launfal. Cupid is irrevocably in love with Psyche because he pricked his finger on his most potent arrow of love. His mistake embodies the Medieval conception of love where it is an act that happens to a person rather than an internal feeling. Tryamour, on the other hand, loves Launfal from afar and recognizes his merits where no one else does. The fairy woman's penchant to choose a mortal from a distance distinguishes the fey from the Classical gods by reflecting the belief that the "fairy chooses a man who has sometimes been described as alienated from society, in that he is prevented from participating fully in a society that does not recognize his merits." [23] This description illustrates Launfal's place in court because he faces exile through his disapproval of Guenivere and is socially ostracized when he becomes destitute as a result of his largesse. Tryamour uniquely recognizes his merits, deems him worthy as a lover and chooses him for her own.

Ch. 4 Entrance to the Otherworld and the Amorous Fairy Convention

As shown from *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*, interaction with the supernatural does not necessarily entail a descent into the Otherworld. However, what precedes a movement into the realm of supernatural interaction can encompass a wide variety of catalysts. From *Sir Orfeo*, we know that a movement into the Otherworld may be a result of fey heritage, an act of simply "not

[23] Saunders, Corinne. Erotic Magic: The Enchantress in Middle English Romance. In Hopkins and Rushton (Eds.), *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (42). London: D.S. Brewer, 2007.

belonging" in one realm, an act of reestablishing balance between the two worlds or even a combination of one or more of these reasons. For *Sir Launfal*, I discovered that each of the aforementioned explanations for passage into the fairy realm could be found in the lai. Launfal is unlike any of Arthur's knights; for one thing, he appears constantly on the margins and not entirely sure of his own place in Arthur's court. Just as Heurodis of *Sir Orfeo* potentially demonstrated traits of not belonging in the human realm, Launfal's status as a foreigner and inability to assimilate into Arthur's court may be one of the reasons why Tryamour is drawn to him.

In both Heurodis and Launfal's case, the first meeting of the fey is always preceded by a suspension of thought. In Heurodis's case, she falls asleep beneath the ympe-tre and this dream-like stupor serves as an access point to perceive the fey. For Launfal, his mentally freed state occurs because he wanders towards the forest with his heart and mind burdened with the knowledge of his own exile from Arthur's court and impoverished status. He enters the natural world just as his thoughts are burdened which parallels Heurodis's sleep beneath the ympe-tre. The details the author includes of the running brook, forest and the tree that Launfal falls asleep under, all represent portals into the Otherworld. Unlike the forced interaction Heurodis has with the fairy king, Launfal gives his consent. Consent carries a curious ceremonial importance among the fey of the Breton lais because consent at once validates their actions (whether amorous or otherwise), while also suggesting that the fairy realm follows its own laws of fairness. For example, the fairy king of *Sir Orfeo* grudgingly gives Heurodis back to Orfeo even though he maintains that Orfeo does not deserve someone as beautiful as Heurodis. The rash oath binds the fairy king to keep his word even though he was the instigator behind Heurodis leaving the human realm in the first place. The fairy king's absolute compliance to his rash oath may

initially appear at odds from Tryamour because she violates her own *geis* by rescuing Launfal at the last moment. While these two examples seem at odds with the concept of the fey subjecting themselves to oaths and taboos similar to the human world, this difference allows for a reading that the fairies operate in "fairness" and not by policies or laws. For instance, the fairy king of *Sir Orfeo* acknowledges that he offered Orfeo a boon; therefore, it is fair for him to demand Heurodis. In *Sir Launfal*, Tryamour sees how Launfal was wrongly accused and in "fairness," takes him away with her after exonerating him from a crime he did not commit.

The Amorous Fairy Convention

A dalliance with the fairy lover represents an age-old motif in Breton lais, one with roots stretching far into its Celtic history. The strength and dominance of female fairies distinguishes them from a number of female characters in Breton lais who often appear passive or weak or undergo little change in the course of the lai. The fairy realm goes against the "natural order" established by the human realm which values female submission over female dominance because fairy women are often queens or figures of authority in lais. *Sir Launfal*'s Tryamour represents one of the more thoughtful depictions of the fairy lover motif because she not only initiates the romance, but also takes on a number of roles in *Sir Launfal*: lover, patroness, deus ex machina and justice dispenser. Tryamour's power and influence rivals the fairy king of *Sir Orfeo* by acting as a figure who operates above the human realm.

While Tryamour explicitly calls herself a fairy, I believe her presence in the lai signifies an adapted version of the *leanan sidhe* figure in Celtic mythology. The *leanan sidhe* is akin to the fairy mistress motif of folklores. Tryamour follows the *leanan sidhe* pattern of romance by seeking out her lover and initiating courtship. Just as the *leanan sidhe* are known to place a *geis*

on their chosen mortals, Tryamour places a *geis* on Launfal. The implications of the *geis* invariably hedged the union of fey and mortal with the strictest of penalties. In some stories regarding the *leanan sidhe*, the *geis* may encompass a number of injunctions such as not viewing them at a certain time or not watching the fairy bathe. Tryamour's *geis* prohibits Launfal from revealing her identity or the nature of their relationship and closely follows the taboo of name-revealing wherein "one's name is regarded as being in a very emphatic sense a part of one's self, and as such it must be guarded with the greatest care lest it become known to an enemy, who may use it to the detriment of the owner" (39). [24] Inclusion of the *geis* reflects the lai's narrative ties to its Celtic history and diverges from lais such as *Sir Orfeo* where a spiritual theme and not just a Celtic motif influences the narrative. Romantically engaging a fey does not just put the mortal lover at risk for bodily harm. According to some critics, a human lover "risked his immortal soul in making such a [romantic] connection." [25] Unlike the spiritually charged atmosphere of *Sir Orfeo*, matters of the psyche factor little into the relationship between Launfal and Tryamour because their bond is less about matters of the soul and more about matters of identity. The extent to which the soul matters in *Sir Launfal* exists only to fulfill Launfal's sense of self. Just as interaction with the Otherworld aids *Sir Orfeo* on his pathway to individuation, Tryamour's evolution into a *deus ex machina* who exonerates Launfal from a broken promise validates his sense of self because her return endorses his maintenance of chivalric codes even at the risk of losing Tryamour.

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[24] Cross, Tom Peete. "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of 'Lanval' and 'Graelent.'" *Modern Philology*, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Apr., 1915), pp. 644. Published by: The University of Chicago Press.

[25] Ibid

As the spendthrift knight, the archetypal dynamic of fairy lover and mortal between Tryamour and Launfal facilitates Launfal's individuation process by not only restoring his honor but also releasing him from the feudal hierarchy of Arthur's court. As his benefactress, Tryamour's riches allow Launfal to "helde ryche festes/Fyfty fedde povere guests" (421-422). Her love reverses his destitute position and empowers him to receive Arthur's nomination as "stward of halle/For to agye hys gestes alle,/For cowthe of largesse" (622-624). As her name suggests, Tryamour tests Launfal's love by forbidding him to speak of her, which conflicts with Launfal's fealty to the chivalric code that requires him to defend his knightly honor against falsehoods. The moment he reveals Tryamour's existence to Guenivere to defend himself and honor Tryamour, he loses her. In choosing to honor chivalric love to Tryamour rather than honor her one rule to the relationship, Launfal affirms his identity as a true knight who will maintain chivalric code despite the fey injunction.

The Women of *Sir Launfal*

Unlike the human women of the Breton lais who are largely restricted to subservient positions, Tryamour signifies unearthly force and power. Her mannerisms are rather masculine and she aggressively procures what she wants, which fit her squarely within the aforementioned motif of the "wooing woman." When Launfal first meets Tryamour, she already knows his name as if he has been chosen from a distance to become her lover. As Tom Peete Cross describes the independent fairy woman, "she is … never coerced into becoming the mistress of anyone and when she joins her fortunes to those of a mortal, she proposes her own conditions which must be fulfilled to the letter if her lover is to enjoy her favor."[26] Tryamour's independence goes against

[26] Cross, Tom Peete. "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of 'Lanval' and 'Graelent.'" *Modern*

the general depiction of women as passive and weak characters based on the presumption that "men admire powerful women but do not want to marry them." [27]

The women of *Sir Launfal* fall under the general types of the shrewish and lascivious woman — Queen Guenivere — and the virtuous and Otherworldly woman, Dame Tryamour. Launfal's relationship with both women ultimately places the application of courtly love and courtly hierarchy into opposing spheres. When Launfal spurns Guenivere's love, he demonstrates allegiance to Tryamour even though he breaks his allegiance to her by revealing her identity. When Tryamour exposes how Guenivere was the one who sexually propositions Launfal, the author emphasizes an important difference between freedom of the mortal woman and the fairy woman because the fairy woman may love freely while the promiscuity of the mortal woman never goes unpunished. As punishment, Tryamour breathes into Guenivere's eyes and renders her blind. Even though Guenivere lies and manipulates, there is something sympathetic about her character because her sexuality may be the only way she can assert herself within the confined social sphere that the masculine-dominated society allows her. [28]

Despite Guenivere's sympathetic situation, Tryamour does not empathize with her. Functioning as a *deus ex machina* character, Tryamour saves Launfal who then, "anoon, without any lettynge/wyth his lemman away to ryde" and vanishes to the "jolyf isle" of Olyroun (1016-1017, 1023). The success he enjoys as a result of upholding his chivalric code proves that their

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Philology, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Apr., 1915), pp. 612.

[27] Finke Laurie A. and Shichtman, Martin B. "Magical Mistress Tour: Patronage, Intellectual Property, and the Dissemination of Wealth in the 'Lais' of Marie de France." *Signs*,Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2000), pp. 483.

[28] Bliss, A.J. (1958), "Thomas Chestre; A Speculation," *Litera*, Vol. 5, pg 5

love is not simply a romantic dalliance, but a source of civilized social behavior where Tryamour rewards his actions by restoring order to the court and exposing Guenivere as the instigator. [29] The fact that Guenivere receives her punishment at the hands of the free and powerful Tryamour suggests that the sexually independent woman has no place in the patriarchal world. Tryamour removes Guenivere's sexuality by blinding her and thus placing a barrier through which love enters the body (in the Medieval tradition at least). Tryamour seems to affirm the mortal woman's place by removing the vestiges of independence and free choice that Guenivere possesses through her promiscuity. Since the independent woman has no place in the human realm, Tryamour leaves immediately for the Otherworld with Launfal in tow. This model of the fairy woman staying only temporarily in the mortal world is often repeated. In the tale *The Wedding of Dame Ragnell of Sir Gawain*, a similar construction appears. Ragnell, under the guise of the loathly lady motif, reveals her true beauty once Gawain gives her sovereignty in her decision. Yet, she only stays with Gawain for a couple years before leaving him. While some texts suggest that Ragnell dies and others say that she abandons him, I believe that the fairy woman must leave because she cannot operate within the world of patriarchal confines. Guenivere's punishment debunks the myth of a sexual and authoritative woman getting her way because the fairy woman restores the balance of the human world that remains male dominant. It is ironic that the woman ultimately redefines the woman's place as subservient to men in the human realm. Yet, Tryamour does not act as any ordinary fairy mistress and her presence throughout the lai strongly suggests that she is more "other" than most "otherworldly" women. The female fairy's inability to operate in the male world also extends to our reading of Oisín. In

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[29] Finke Laurie A. and Shichtman, Martin B. "Magical Mistress Tour: Patronage, Intellectual Property, and the Dissemination of Wealth in the 'Lais' of Marie de France." *Signs*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2000), pp.482.

the *Tale of Oisín*, Niamh demonstrates power and force by first wooing Oisín, leading him to the fairy realm and convincing him to stay for a number of years. However, the moment he leaves the fairy realm, her power ends. Unlike Tryamour who safely maneuvers Launfal out of the human realm, Niamh's abandonment of Oisín suggests that she can no longer access the human world or control the effects of her *geis* once he leaves the fairy realm. In the tale of Oisín, the concept of "fairness" is absent from the story and its rigidity in interpreting the fey's *geis* suggests the Celtic Otherworld's inherent weakness compared to the human realm because there is only so much the fey can do in the human world except woo a mortal.

While Tryamour is at most a supporting, albeit strongly influential, character in *Sir Launfal*, she wears many masks: fairy mistress, lover, sovereignty figure and deus ex machina. The sheer clout she carries throughout the lai suggests that the amount of power and independence allocated to her elevates Tryamour beyond the fairy mistress model. Even fairy lovers, despite their ability to bestow great quantities of wealth and power, cannot ignore the injunctions of their own *geis*. And yet, Tryamour does. While the author does not make clear whether it is Tryamour's love for Launfal that wins out in the end or merely a whimsical decision to whisk him away from Arthur's court, Tryamour's actions are unique given the Celtic Otherworldly tradition.

Although we have compared Tryamour to other women from Breton lais and beyond, I would like to point out that Tryamour is the rare enchantress who exhibits solely positive traits. Where female agency may famously represent themselves as powerful and menacing evocations of the Otherworld, Tryamour represents the opposite because of her mercy and fairness. While ambiguous motives and actions may characterize other enchantresses, Tryamour represents the positive enchantress because the Otherworld she represents does not hold the human realm in

contempt, but rather in a cool indifference. The perfection of the fairy otherworld functions as a locus of pleasure, and the product of that pleasure is Tryamour. While she may appear as the ideal woman, magic sets her apart and allows her to move seamlessly between the two worlds. Although magic empowers her actions and places her at the level of a regent, she remains subject to the constraints of gender. While she may choose Launfal from afar as her lover and exercise her individual will to rescue him from the confines of Arthur's court, her role as the instigator of their romance endows her with the aggressiveness of a man and the infatuation of a woman. Launfal, as the object of her affection and desire, moves her actions and bends her ultimately to his will even as she asserts her dominance and superiority in the human realm.[30] While the lai upholds chivalric values and rewards largesse, the true reward is Tryamour. Tryamour's final function as a reward for Launfal's chivalry returns us to the larger question of dominance and its role in the lai of *Sir Launfal*. While Launfal's innate goodness and chivalry may render him deserving of Tryamour's love, the fact remains that he holds sway over her because she returns for him.

While I maintain that Launfal remains the dominant force compared to Tryamour, I think that her status as a fairy is a limited interpretation of her own significance and symbolism. Some critics have suggested that Tryamour is no fairy at all, but rather a depiction of the Gaulish horse goddess, Epona, who later was identified as Rhiannon from the Welsh mythological corpus of the *Mabinogin*.[31] The subtle suggestion of Tryamour as the equivalent of Epona rests in her choice of gifts, the foremost of which is a beautiful white steed called Blancheflour. When most

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[30] Saunders, Corinne. Erotic Magic: The Enchantress in Middle English Romance. In Hopkins and Rushton (Eds.), *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (42). London: D.S. Brewer, 2007: 22

[31] Rouse, Robert Allen. The Medieval Eroticism of Heat. In Hopkins and Rushton (Eds.), *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (71). London: D.S. Brewer, 2007.

poets launch into an effictio of a beautiful fairy woman, their descriptions generally focus on her physiognomy. But with Tryamour, we get a very in-depth description of her wealth. Her pavilion, sumptuous golds and medals describe cult-objects of Epona and strengthen the connection between Epona and Tryamour. Even her position as a sovereign within the fairy realm gains credence from this interpretation. Most literary constructions of the Otherworld aimed to create a utopia based on the inverted standards of their own central aristocratic society. The fact that women were predominantly in positions of sovereignty reveals a biased expectation of gender in the human realm that they have displaced onto the fictional aristocracy of the fey realm. [32] Although this gender bias may suggest an unsettling truth about male preconceptions, Tryamour's sheer prowess and significance throughout the lai evokes a feminine ideal that is neither weak nor innately passive to the male fantasy, but rather human in her own "weakness" as a woman in love. Even ancient Celtic gods and goddesses and Classical portrayals of deities did not represent an ideal man or woman. Instead, the emblems of the divine were mere representations of their thoughts, prejudices, fears and desires magnified into legend.

If we assume that Tryamour is in fact the representation of a primitive horse goddess and not just a fairy, then the elevation of Launfal's character appears justified. After Launfal journeys to the Otherworld, the author notes that he makes a yearly return to the Otherworld to joust against his challengers. By association with the horse goddess, Launfal transforms into a folk hero and his yearly return marks a subtle apotheosis for Launfal whose individuation suggests that over time he becomes elevated to the immortal, legendary status of the fey. Launfal achieves individuation via his commitment to the truth and honor in the face of death. Such commitment

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[32] Solopova Elizabeth, Lee Stuart D., *Palgrave Key Concepts in Medieval Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 228.

to truth elevates his concerns from fear of death without Tryamour to fear of life without truth. During the procession of the fairy handmaidens of Tryamour, Launfal repeatedly tells the truth when his companions ask whether the next maiden that appears is Tryamour. If he lied, then his life would be immediately spared. Yet, his concern is no longer about his life, but rather about upholding the truth. This freedom from desire — in this case, the desire to live from a lie — allows Launfal to access the fey world by severing his ties from the materialism and greed that characterize the human world. Orfeo undergoes a similar yet more arduous process than Launfal by spending ten years in the wilderness and thereby freeing himself from the materialism and arrogance that initially characterized his defense of Heurodis.

Arthur's Degenerate Court vs. The Perfect Realm

Even though the Otherworld court of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* parallels the human realm with their titles and domains, the Otherworld court has what the human realm lacks: perfection. Uncluttered by materialism, *Sir Launfal*'s Otherworld realm represents clarity in judgment versus the morally ambiguous human court of Arthur. When Tryamour comes to Launfal's rescue despite the fact that he has breached the conditions of the *geis*, her generosity shows that the dispensation of justice from the Otherworldly perspective pivots around merit (Launfals' well-intended actions) rather than malice (Guenivere's false accusations). The Arthurian world thus becomes a locus of danger where lives hang in the balance based on the malicious motives of others, such as Guenivere's agenda against Launfal for spurning her affections. By choosing Tryamour's honor over Guenviere's promiscuity, Launfal effectively rejects the misplaced values of the Arthurian court for the more streamlined and honorable values of the Otherworldly court. Tryamour demonstrates the superiority of the Otherworldly court when she sweeps in to

rescue Lanval from certain death, thus inculcating a message that superficial justice causes an imbalance of nature. As a figure of natural order and balance, the Otherworldly presence of Tryamour confirms that both worlds have complementary functions. The presence of the Otherworld "defines the central aristocratic world by valorizing certain of its elements or aspects and offering visions of what it is not, and providing representations of its materially or morally unrealizable aspirations." [33] Tryamour defines justice by exonerating Launfal and offers true judgment in lieu of the misplaced actions of Arthur when she removes Guenivere's eyesight. She brings morality where the Arthurian court failed in its dispensation of justice. The dynamic between Tryamour and Guenivere demonstrates how Tryamour acts as the agent of justice, while Guenivere acts as an agent of discord. By blinding Guenivere, the blindness reflects her sexual transgressions and her inferiority to the fairy court. For Arthur, his overshadowing by Tryamour exposes his inferiority because she oversteps Arthur's authority by dispensing more judicious and merciful judgment than Arthur. Where Arthur's court should have inspired fealty and loyalty in Launfal, Launfal chooses Tryamour's idealistic court where his pledge of undying love to her represents a vassal's plight of servitude to a lord. [34]

The presence of the Otherworld fulfills different roles in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*. For Orfeo, the Otherworld provides a moral backdrop and a pathway of individuation that ultimately leads him towards spiritual completion. For *Sir Launfal*, the presence of the Otherworld highlights the

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[33] Rider, Jeff. "The Other Worlds of Romance." In Roberta L. Krueger (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (131). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 46

[34] 'The Outsider at Court, or What is so Strange about the Stranger?', *The Court and Cultural Diversity*. *Selected Papers from the Eighty Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. Evelyn Mullally and John Thompson (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 357.

imperfections of the human world and proves that the ideals of love and honor are universal and not relegated to the confines of the court. In each of these lais, the Otherworld acts as a tool of definition. For *Sir Launfal*, the Otherworld redefined the application of the courtly love tradition and demonstrated that sovereignty is not inherently masculine because Tryamour wields just as much authority as Arthur. For *Sir Orfeo*, the Otherworld endowed Orfeo with a chance to distinguish his spiritual identity from the materialism of the human world.

But by far the most important feature we have seen with the Otherworldly element of the Breton lais is a commitment to the restoration of natural balance. In both lais, the fairy characters may not present themselves as wholly good or evil, but they are all manifestations of a nature that seeks to correct and balance. From these lais, the fairy world appears to operate beyond human comprehension and only seeks to interact with humans when a disruption in the human world requires correction. The same pattern emerges in *Sir Launfal* because Launfal does not belong in a world that does not recognize his merits.

While the Otherworld's multiple functions informs our understanding of their role in both lais, the dynamic between fairy and mortal also remains the same from *Sir Orfeo* to *Sir Launfal*. In *Sir Orfeo*, Orfeo's ability to change versus the stasis of the fairy realm makes him a more dominant force than the fairies. Similarly, Launfal's establishment of identity despite the fairy injunction establishes his dominance while Tryamour's rescue of Launfal validates his *geis*-defying actions. Establishing an identity and standing true to one's individual conception of truth unleashes the individual from the confines of another's authority. At its core, *Sir Launfal*'s message rewards individuality. By framing Launfal by the most stringent conditions of the hierarchical world of the court and the equally rigid prohibitions of the fairy *geis*, the author rewards his individuality. Launfal synthesizes the conditions of both the human and Otherworld

by upholding the human realm's standards of chivalry and honoring Tryamour's love by defending her honor in spite of the *geis*.

Ch. 5 *Guingamor*, The Lai of Stunted Growth and Minimal Complexity

Guingamor represents an older tale that mimics the *echtrae* genre of Old Irish literature that recounts a hero's adventure in an Otherworldly setting. The trope of the *echtrae* generally

follow this pattern: hero is invited to the Otherworld by a beautiful maiden, hero either stays forever/returns to his land to find his homeland destroyed by Time or returns to his land bearing gifts from the Otherworld. The fate of the hero varies from tale to tale. With *Guingamor*, the lai neatly parallels the *echtra* of *Oisín*. Although anonymous, many attribute *Guingamor*'s authorship to Marie de France, a poet from the late 12th century. As expressed at the beginning of this thesis, my discussion analyzes the lais on a descending level of character complexity. As the last lai, Guingamor's character may be the least developed, but the lai also holds true to many of the themes we have already explored, such as the "wooing woman" motif and the Otherworld. While Guingamor's lack of development creates an uncluttered reading of a lai predominantly influenced by its Celtic source story, the lack of psychological development informs our understanding of the fey's motives. If we apply the notion of *chercher la femme* (look to the woman) to *Guingamor*, the lai shares the similarly authoritative and sexually aggressive female character of *Sir Launfal*. But unlike the presence Tryamour commands through her name and identity, the unnamed fairy mistress of Guingamor appears just as undeveloped as her paramour. Perhaps her lack of identity precludes her from proclaiming a *geis* to their relationship that involves an injunction against revealing identities because she has no specific identity. The fairy mistress of *Guingamor* is emblematic of the Otherworld, rather than a defining force within that realm in the same way that fairy king operates a court in *Sir Orfeo* or how Tryamour passes judgment in both fairy and human realm.

As a comparative piece with *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*, *Guingamor*'s intriguing qualities stem from what the lai does not identify or make clear as opposed to the connections in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* where reasons for the characters' ties to the supernatural world are more lucid. While *Guingamor* and *Sir Launfal* share the same source story, their radically different

adaptations of the *geis* concept and the function of the female fairy demonstrate how *Guingamor* represents a more generalized focus on adapting a Celtic fairytale rather than developing a unique predicament for the protagonist inspired by the source material.

The Potiphar's Wife motif seen in *Sir Launfal* (Launfal's rejection of Guenivere's love results in her rape-accusations against him) resurfaces in *Guingamor* and serves as the impetus for Guingamor's adventure. As the nephew of the king, Guingamor displays acts of valor and chivalry to all. One day he abstains from participating in a hunt because of a previous illness and chooses instead to play chess with the seneschal. As he plays, the Queen sees him illuminated by the sunlight and "so long did the Queen look at him that her thoughts about him changed completely:/Because of his handsomeness and noble air,/She was overcome with love for him" (l. 53-55). When she attempts to seduce him with talk about an unparalleled woman who loves him (herself), Guingamor's response reveals a youthful attitude towards romance. Despite his knightly airs, he expresses that he does not "wish to fall in love right now" (l. 86). His rejection, therefore, is not premised on morality but rather mood. When he learns what "kind of love she was seeking;/He felt great shame, blushing deeply" and escapes from the room (l. 109).

Guingamor manages to escape the Queen with his chastity intact, but not before she seizes his cloak in his haste to exit the room. This is almost a direct reference to the scene with Potiphar's wife, yet the author does not extend the image further[35]. The cloak does not factor into the story at all because the Queen quietly returns the cloak to Guingamor without him noticing. By avoiding the Potiphar's wife setup, the author establishes a setting for Guingamor's adventure where he does not have to prove or redeem himself in light of an accusation. Unlike Launfal or

[35] Barton, John, and John Muddiman. *The Oxford Bible commentary*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

Orfeo, Guingamor's absence of conflict foreshadows his stunted character development. In *Sir Orfeo*, Orfeo's conflict with the fairy king prompts him to renounce his throne and seek refuge in the wilderness. By doing so, he accesses the Otherworld through his anchoritic lifestyle and develops independent of the material world. In Launfal's case, the defects of the materialistic world of Arthur's court drives him to Tryamour and thus allow him to establish his identity in his defense of truth. For Orfeo and Launfal, accessing the Otherworld (or interacting with one of its representatives) represents an important step in their development because they both recognize how the Otherworld can help them. Orfeo capitalizes on the fairy king's rash boon by demanding Heurodis's return while Launfal utilizes his access to Tryamour to reverse his disgraced status in court.

By voiding the need to redeem one's fallen reputation or fallen status, *Guingamor*'s narrative pattern presents a superficial journey filled with heroic tropes (beautiful maiden, luxurious castle, rare hunting game) rather than darker themes that fuel spiritual development (desolation, isolation, exile). Guingamor begins his journey soon after the king (his uncle) returns from the hunting trip that Guingamor did not attend. The Queen, worried that Guingamor will expose her failed seduction, drives him out of court by proposing that whichever knight captures the elusive and mythical white boar will receive wondrous acclaim. Guingamor realizes that this quest challenge is addressed to him and decides to embark on the hunt even though the king has lost many knights after they failed to return from their quest for the white boar. Once aware of the queen's motives, Guingamor tricks the king into granting his approval to embark on the quest. Although Guingamor's willingness to embark on an impossible quest suggests the same pattern of self-exile seen in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*, Guingamor's motivation develops from an insatiable curiosity rather than an over-developed sense of morality. While characters

such as Orfeo and Launfal have something to prove, youth and curiosity define Guingamor's adventures. His foray into the supernatural world represents a childlike fantasy entertained by a slew of authors who wrote about the Otherworld as a fabulous escapist tale. Unlike the self-exile pattern of Orfeo and Launfal who undergo a change throughout the lai's progression, Guingamor remains a one-dimensional character.

Accompanied by the king's hunting hounds and his best horse, Guingamor sets off in pursuit of the white boar. In the middle of his chase, he sees a splendid castle. But when he enters, he finds nothing and no one. The motif of the luxuriously empty palace appears often in Breton lais that showcase a supernatural bent because the image of the empty castle introduces the locus of the Otherworld. The reason for its apparent emptiness lies in the mortal's inability to perceive the Otherworld because only when the mortal can perceive the Otherworld is he or she able to perceive the supernatural world. Through Guingamor's pursuit of the white boar, the author introduces the conventional Journey to the Otherworld. Guingamor's conventional journey begins via a double visual experience (seeing something only halfway) wherein from one angle or phase of the journey, the mortal experiences the Otherworld, but only from its margins. The double visual experience most clearly resonates with Guingamor's encounter with the empty castle, a motif which is present in some Arthurian legends and most clearly bears a tie with Celtic folklore because the scene addresses the nuances of perception.

In order to perceive the Otherworld, the mortal usually requires some kind of unguent or perhaps a supernatural being to spit in his or her eye — as is the case with some Welsh myths involving human midwives assisting fairy births. The difference in perception characterizes interaction with the supernatural. In *Sir Launfal*, Tryamour makes herself known only to Launfal while in *Guingamor*, Guingamor can only experience the Otherworld at its margins because he

sees the façade of the luxurious castle but cannot perceive its inhabitants. Oftentimes, literature where a character can perceive the fairy is known as possessing the "sight," sometimes stylized as Sight. Fairy incidents generally revolve around perception or seeing something through a different lens. For *Sir Orfeo*, ten years of penance in the wilderness endows him with the psychological lens to perceive the Otherworld and therefore retrieve Heurodis. For *Sir Launfal*, breaking Tryamour's injunction necessitates the removal of Sight wherein he can no longer perceive her until she chooses that he see her. With *Guingamor*, the text clarifies that the fairy mistress also determines when a mortal can perceive the fairy castle because its inhabitants only become apparent to Guingamor when he returns to the castle with his fairy lover.

As Guingamor adds distance between himself and the human realm, the Otherworld begins to reveal itself in small measures. Angry that he has lost time from tracking the white boar after exploring the enchanted castle, Guingamor sets off in eager pursuit only to encounter a beautiful maiden bathing in a nearby pool. In keeping with the literary tradition, the poet launches into an effictio of the maiden who has "beautiful limbs, long and smooth," adding that "there was nothing in the world so beautiful/Neither the lily nor the rose/As the maiden who was naked there" (l. 430-432). Overcome by affection, Guingamor hides her clothes in an oak tree, presumably to prevent the maiden from leaving the pool. Hiding the clothes of an Otherworld maiden produces a number of ramifications. In fairy tales that span multiple cultures, hiding the "skin" or "clothing" of the maiden may force her to become the wife of the mortal who stole her clothes. When she eventually finds her clothes or skin, she flees the mortal world, generally abandoning her half-mortal offspring as well. Hiding the clothes also allows unlimited access to the Otherworld character by removing the natural barriers that may prevent the mortal from perceiving the maiden fully. In Irish mythology, the concept of hiding clothes gains the most

attention in the tale of the selkie, otherwise known as the seal-people. On occasion, selkie-women would remove their sealskin to sunbathe on the rocks. If a fisherman was lucky, he could sneak up to her, hide her skin and claim the beautiful selkie-woman as his own. Oftentimes, these unions are usually brief. When the fairy woman discovers her missing clothing or missing skin, she never returns to her mortal husband.

While oftentimes the mortal can exercise dominance over the fairy woman by stealing her clothing, this missing clothing-dominance pattern does not factor into *Guingamor*. Just as Guingamor is about to hide the maiden's clothing, she calls him out by name and chastises him for his less than chivalrous intentions. When Guingamor returns her clothes, she invites him to live indefinitely with her as her lover. The reversal of the dominance patterns where the fairy woman controls both when and where she allows the mortal to become her lover highlights how fairy interaction is often premeditated. The fairy maiden's knowledge of Guingamor's name, her positioning at the pool and open display of nudity suggests a carefully planned seduction. We have seen throughout the lais of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* that interaction with the supernatural is never coincidental or random, no matter how accidental their meeting may initially seem. The fairy figure always remains in control of the situation and oftentimes before the mortal has fallen in love with the fairy, she already loves him and only lures him toward her. When Guingamor explains his quest of the white boar to the fairy maiden, she reveals that the white boar answers to her call. With this revelation that the fairy maiden has in fact controlled his entire journey, Guingamor abandons his quest and accompanies her to the Otherworld. The lovers arrive at the abandoned castle Guingamor saw earlier only to discover that the palace is filled with handsomely dressed men and women including the knights from the palace who disappeared in

their pursuit of the white boar (presumably falling victim to the same seduction pattern that ensnared Guingamor earlier).

On the third day in the fairy's company, Guingamor resolves to return to his uncle's kingdom with the boar's head and prove his valor before returning to his fairy mistress. But, as we have seen before, time in the fairy world functions differently than time in the human world and he "had been [in the Otherworld] for three hundred years/The king was dead, as was his retinue/and all those of his lineage/the cities which he had known/were destroyed and in ruins" (l. 540-544). In many Irish stories, the protagonist only realizes the extraordinary lapse of time at the end of the tale when he visits his land and notices that nothing remains the same. However, Guingamor breaks from this plot twist because he visits his homeland with the knowledge that 300 years have passed. Before he embarks on his voyage, the fairy mistress informs him that his return would be futile as "there is no man old enough/to be able to tell you anything/no matter how many times you ask him" (l. 558). In spite of this truth, Guingamor believes otherwise and presses forward with his desire to see his homeland while assuring her of his desire to return to the fey land.

As most romantic entanglements with the fey go, Guingamor's fairy mistress places a *geis* on him and warns him that in order to return to the fairy world he is "neither to drink nor eat,/No matter how hungry you may be,/Until you have returned here;/You would soon come to grief" (l. 570). This implication of the *geis* mirrors Tryamour's rhetoric to Launfal in *Sir Launfal*. Even though I believe that both *Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor* share the tale of Oísin as their source story, the consequences of the *geis* and the varying complexities of their characters differentiate one lai from the other. Niamh, Oísin's fairy wife, allows him to return to his homeland, thus mirroring Guingamor's mistress who lets him return and warns him of the elapsed time. Unlike

Guingamor, who doubts the veracity of the fairy's claim, Oisín understands the warning fully. Niamh informs Oisín that he must not touch the ground, otherwise the 300 years that have actually passed will catch up to him. In spite of this knowledge, Oisín breaks Niamh's *geis* ostensibly by accident when the girth of his saddle breaks and he falls to the ground.

As Guingamor explores his homeland, he begins to see the truth of his mistress's statements because the land has changed dramatically. He goes to the edge of the forest where he sees an old woodsman and he inquires where his uncle — the King – resides. The woodsman replies that the king in question died more than 300 years ago and that there are "certain elderly folks who often tell tales/About this king and about his nephew,/In whom he had a wonderfully brave relative;/He went hunting in this forest,/But never again returned" (l. 603-608). After learning that his memory has been relegated to the stuff of legends, Guingamor falls into despair. Unlike Oisín who is content with viewing the changes around him before returning, Guingamor appears possessed by the desire to prevent his eventual fading from human memory into a fairytale. He recounts his travels and adventures to the woodcutter and presents the head of the white boar that first instigated his quest. With nothing left to show or see, Guingamor decides to leave and hands the head of the white boar to the woodsman in order for him to recount his story to the rest of the world. By this time, Guingamor has grown mad with hunger. In the forest, he finds a wild apple tree and picks three ripe apples. But the moment he disobeys the fairy's injunction, "he became feeble and old,/And so weakened of body/That he could not help falling from his horse/He could move neither hand nor foot" (l. 646-649). The woodsman, who had seen the whole episode, is sure that the knight would not live to see the day's end. Before he could go to him, two maidens came forward and admonish Guingamor for disobeying the command.

"Carefully and gently they lifted him/And set him on a horse; They took him to the river, and/In a boat they transported him to the other side/With his dog and his hunting horse" (l. 663-667).

From our readings of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*, where the Otherworld rewarded these characters for their perseverance (Orfeo wandering in the woods for 10 years) or their commitment to honor (Launfal defending Tryamour), Guingamor's ability to return to the Otherworld in spite of his deliberate breach of the fairy maiden's *geis* seems wrong. Judging from the static nature of his character and defining traits of stubbornness and impulsive behavior, his actions do not merit a return to the Otherworld. Guingamor's conscious disobedience to the fairy's injunction and his return to fairyland juxtaposed with Oisín's accidental disobedience to Niamh's injunction and resultant death presents vastly different consequences of breaking a *geis*.

After looking through *Guingamor* translator Russell Weingarten's notes, I noticed that Guingamor's return to the Otherworld is not explicitly illustrated in the original text. Weingarten notes that the "text does not in fact say that Guingamor was taken across the river, but that 'in a boat they transported to the other side/ his setter and his hunting horse.' I have assumed that they took Guingamor at the same time, and, by the editorial addition of the word 'him,' have guarded against any possibility of his abandonment" (p. 90).

I believe Weingarten's editorial addition changes the entire meaning of the story and in keeping with the strictness of the language will maintain that Guingamor was, in fact, not transported back to the Otherworld. By not reentering the fairy realm, the fairy mistress has expressed her abandonment of Guingamor for breaking the *geis*. Preventing the possibility of Guingamor's return to the Otherworld aligns the lai with the narrative pattern of its Celtic source material — from which it hardly strays. Although other lais have shown that on occasion a fairy will breach her own *geis*, this only occurs in stories where the characters are more complex than

the one-dimensional Guingamor. For example, Tryamour's abandonment of her own *geis* speaks to the high character of Launfal and justifies his reasons for being saved. Through his own acts of internal and external valor, Launfal displays complete fidelity to her and the means through which he disobeyed her injunction were passive and not active. He did not reveal her identity for the express purpose of bragging rights; instead he revealed his relationship to her in a chivalric defense of her honor. However, chivalry alone does not excuse one from the ramifications of the *geis*. For Oisín, we see that he shares the trait of chivalry with Launfal and yet suffers a different outcome. Oisín dooms himself through chivalry when he attempts to help workers on the side of a road before aging instantly when he falls to the ground. The chivalric manner in which he broke Niamh's injunction parallels Launfal's trespass of the *geis*. Although Oisín is fated to die on Irish soil rather than live with Niamh in the Otherworld, fate does not hold much place in our discussion of *Guingamor*.

Guingamor represents a lai that is uncluttered with spiritual resolutions or psychological transformations. The story is simple with the fey acting as its most nuanced character and Guingamor's trespass demonstrating his failure to resist temptation. Throughout the lai, Guingamor's character justifies his abandonment and the reproach he receives at the end by the fairy maidens confirms that he has been judged unworthy of returning to the Otherworld. At the beginning of the lai, Guingamor displayed bravery. But bravery without forethought or goals provides a shell of a character who is then emasculated by time and left to die after he fails the trial.

Ch. 6: Biblical Motifs in *Guingamor*

Although the Potiphar's wife motif is mentioned earlier, I return to the subject to show how the author gives hints from the very beginning of the lai that Guingamor will remain a static character. *Guingamor* contains a number of Biblical references, the chief example being the representation of the Queen acting within the Potiphar's wife motif. Throughout *Guingamor* are certain references to Biblical characters. At the forefront, the chief example becomes the parallel representations of the Queen acting within the confines of the Potiphar's wife motif. Just as Potiphar's wife makes advances on Joseph, the Queen attempts to seduce Guingamor. With both the Biblical story and within *Guingamor*, there is an odd attention focused on the evidence of the cloak. While Joseph's cloak — snatched by Potiphar's wife — becomes evidence against him, the Queen of *Guingamor* quietly returns to the cloak he left behind. There is no doubt that this reference to Potiphar's wife is consciously established; however, the return of the cloak presents an interesting twist because it never factors into the lai after the cloak has been introduced. I believe the reasons behind the return of the cloak pivots around the character of Guingamor. Perhaps hesitant to elevate him to the status of Joseph, whose exoneration represents a form of spiritual cleansing, the author consciously bypasses this outcome to suggest that Guingamor remains a character empty of grace. Essentially, Guingamor's trial of character will not be one where he defends his chivalric responsibilities. By shifting the focus from courtly love and chivalric notions of duty to the more equivocal tests of self-worth, the author shifts agency for salvation from external influences to Guingamor himself. By removing the motif of wrongful accusations, the reader is automatically informed that Guingamor's trials will be based solely on his own decisions and will serve as the only bearing for whether or not he remains chosen by the

fey to live among them. The removal of the exoneration motif informs the lack of emotional and psychological development in *Guingamor* that prominently factored in our discussions of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* because Guingamor's defining characteristic is his arrogance and impetuous attitude.

The Hunt for the White Boar

What follows from Guingamor's initial display of stubbornness is the hunt for the boar. The hunt for a white animal generally represents a stock motif within lais and other folktales. The coloring of the boar also suggests its ties to the fairy realm mainly because it is an aberration of a naturally occurring color on a beast. The Medieval fixation on white animals, such as the white boar or white hart, reflects an almost oracular trait about the animals where the white coloring not only indicates purity but also power. Particularly in Irish mythology, preoccupation with the hunted animal may lead to a multiplicity of story endings. In the tale of Oísin, the white deer factors heavily in the development of the tale. Firstly, Oísin's name literally translates into "young deer" and he is born of a deer when his mother is transformed into a hart. By chance, the king Fionn caught her but did not slay her and as a result she became a woman. Only when she becomes pregnant does she revert to her deer form and later give birth to Oísin, whose story provides the source material for the lai of *Guingamor*. The poet establishes the white boar's ties to the Otherworld when *Guingamor*'s fairy mistress reveals that the white boar is under her control. Not only does this information reveal that she has intentionally drawn Guingamor into the outskirts of the Otherworld, but this plot device also parallels the ensnaring of the hero in the Welsh tale of Pyrderi. Pyrderi and his stepfather Manawydan hunt a white boar until they come

to an enchanted castle. Through the machinations of an enchanter, each item Pryderi touches within the castle sticks to his body and he becomes immobilized. In a way, Guingamor encounters a similar fate where interaction with the supernatural precludes him from returning to the life he used to know. The fairy detains him under the guise of hospitality, only to keep him there until no one from his homeland remains alive to expect his return.

Guingamor's refusal to acknowledge the function of Time in the Otherworld presents the idea that his stubborn pursuit of the boar has ultimately been rewarded with a fairy lover. In effect, the ends — romancing a fairy — justified the means — disobeying his uncle, forcibly extracting a rash oath, ignoring his original quest and purpose. Guingamor's extraction of a rash oath differs significantly from the lai of *Sir Orfeo* where it is the fairy king and not Orfeo who proffers the rash boon. The switch of agency suggests that there is a more refined and rewarding quality to Orfeo's reclamation of his wife versus Guingamor's conscientious deceit of his uncle, which leads to his meeting the fairy lover. Even when we examine the events leading to Launfal's meeting with Tryamour, his honesty and largesse are the deciding factors, not his active deliberations. The idea that gaining a fairy mistress rewards Guingamor's trickery of his uncle seems incongruous, but ultimately serves as the foundation for the larger trial of his character. In the other lais we have discussed, the hero must always demonstrate that he merits the reward. Even Guingamor's excuse that he does not realize how Time functions in the Other world does not make him any more noteworthy as a character because he lacks something that Orfeo and Launfal have: urgency.

Orfeo recognizes that his failure to protect Heurodis led to her abduction by the fairy king. Rather than move on and accept failure, he immediately seeks refuge in the forest to empty his soul. His sequence of actions (attempt to protect Heurodis, fail to protect Heurodis, delegate

leadership to steward and renounce the throne) speaks to the internal drive of his character. Launfal also possesses a similar urgency in his actions: serve Arthur, honor Tryamour, scorn Guinevere and protect Tryamour's dignity. Both characters do not hesitate. But Guingamor does. Perhaps the reason behind his slow-paced actions lies in the fact that he has nothing to lose. Unlike Guenivere, the Queen who attempted to seduce Guingamor does not publicly accuse him and therefore does not force him to fill a vacuum of shame and exoneration the way Launfal does. Nor does Guingamor lose anyone the way Orfeo loses Heurodis. In effect, without a catalyst leading him towards self-individuation and spiritual renewal, Guingamor maintains the same stagnant characterization throughout the lai. Without any impetus driving him towards glory, he becomes emblematic of the horde of passive mortals who enter and exit the fairy realm having gained nothing from the experience.

The Fairy Mistress of *Guingamor*

Although Guingamor represents a significantly less developed character than any of his contemporaries (Orfeo and Launfal) or predecessors (Psyche and Oísin), I do not blame his lack of character entirely on his own decisions. The forces that challenge the psychological status quo come from the outside, such as with the fairy king or Dame Tryamour. For Guingamor, the external force (his fairy mistress) offers little to the tale in terms of providing a mechanism for Guingamor to develop as a character. Up until this point, I have described each of the fairy characters as figures of balance. The fairy king of *Sir Orfeo* appears to be a psychopomp for the dead who merely scavenges the world for souls who either do not belong in the human world or who perhaps throw off the natural balance. With *Sir Launfal*, Tryamour acts as a figure of

balance in the way she represents fair judgment in the framed case against Launfal. But the fairy lover of *Guingamor* hardly stretches beyond the superficial construction of the Celtic wooing woman and the dominant fairy queen. [36] Skeels's presentation of the fairy mistress in *Guingamor* as a rather flat representation of the fairy mistress motif rings true and parallels my own argument that the lack of change and character complexity in *Guingamor* ultimately dooms him. As a representation of the fairy mistress motif, she acts as the conventional fey lover. She travels across time and immeasurable distance "solely to carry back the hero whom she loves." [37] I think Schofield's characterization of the fairy woman's motives is suspect because she does more than just lust after the main hero. In short, there must be something worthwhile and compelling to justify her interest in the first place and Schofield ignores this in his criticism. At the same time she represents the "proud supernatural mistress whose commands, when not followed to the letter, bring sorrow to him whose life even is in her hands." [38] Yet beyond these general descriptions of all fairy mistresses, the fey of *Guingamor* appears hopelessly bland. Her qualities are forgetful, her actions ambiguous and her intentions one-dimensional. She does not seek to elevate Guingamor from his downtrodden state the way Tryamour uplifts Launfal's dejected social standing, nor does she aim to improve Guingamor. If anything, the fairy mistress' choice in keeping him as her unwitting prisoner only perpetuates Guingamor's stagnant character.

Part of her forgetfulness stems from her lack of a defining trait. The fairy king, even without a name, appears imposing from the mere fact that he commands a realm and defies

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[36] Skeels, Dell R. "Guingamor and Guerrehés: Psychological Symbolism in a Medieval Romance." *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 79, No. 311, The Anthropologist Looks at Myth (Jan. - Marc., 1966). Published by: American Folklore Society, 73

[37] Schofield, W.H. "The Lay of *Guingamor*." *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, Vol. 5 (1896), 231.

[38] Ibid

Orfeo's army. Tryamour's purpose is revealed in her name — testing love — and she similarly commands attention by appearing in Arthur's realm and exercising judgment that undermines his rule. Guingamor's mistress performs neither a commanding function nor does her injunction aim to test anything other than Guingamor's self-control. For example, Tryamour's injunction of silence potentially symbolizes an extension of her power where knowing someone's name can allow an external party to manipulate him/her. The injunction of Guingamor's lover (to refrain from eating mortal food) represents the division of the fairy realm and the human realm and reflects nothing about her.

Guingamor, for all its flaws, is an acceptable story regardless of which way one reads the ending. While translators such as Weingarten have editorialized the ending to protect Guingamor from abandonment and others have allowed for the possibility that Guingamor is truly abandoned, this simple story does not elevate its characters to any kind of spiritual realization. All of the motifs of *Guingamor* essentially reinforce the patterns we have seen in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*. But while the motifs of the latter lais serve as backdrops or avenues through which the character can activate a psychological journey, these similar motifs only serve as stock fillers in an average fairy tale. The reason I chose to discuss *Guingamor* alongside its more developed contemporaries was to demonstrate how these traits are only endowed with power when the author sees fit to elevate them beyond their stock features in fairytales.

One of the overarching questions of my research centers around the question of dominance between mortal and fey. With Guingamor, the question of dominance between the mortal and fairy becomes easier to discern because his fairy mistress falls into the ranks of the "offended fee" motif wherein supernatural lovers punish their mortal lovers for disobedience.[39]

[39] Cross, Tom Peete. "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of 'Lanval' and 'Graelent.'" *Modern*

Of the scholars I have read, Cross's arguments ring the most true with my own interpretation of the fairy motif and the interaction of Celtic mythology with these lais. I admire his coining of the phrase "offended fee" because I think it reflects how the protagonists that capture our imagination such as Orfeo and Launfal both commit something to the supernatural, whether that's a condemnation or betrayal. This crossing of the fey sets the scene for their own change. Unlike other "offended fey" such as Tryamour or even the fairy king of *Sir Orfeo*, there is no punishment from the fey with *Guingamor*. The fairy king of *Orfeo* submits to the rash oath and allows Heurodis to leave with Orfeo. The fairy queen Tryamour surrenders to her romantic feelings for Launfal and oversteps her own *geis*. But with *Guingamor*, the fairy makes no final concessions and abandons him for his carelessness. *Guingamor* is unique amongst the lais of this thesis because this is the only lai where the fairy exercises true dominance over the mortal. Through the parameters of her injunction, the fay determines Guingamor's fate. In spite of Guingamor's lack of character complexity, this dominance pattern (mortal submitting to fairy) distinguishes the lai by cementing my contention that only through spiritual complexity can one exercise any true dominance over a chaotic force, such as the supernatural. For Orfeo and Launfal, dominance over the fey not only results from their spiritual trials but also from their reaction to another's action. For example, Orfeo initiates his spiritual journey as a response to the fairy king's abduction of Heurodis, which he could not control. Launfal embarks on his spiritual development because of his chivalric response to the malicious intents of Guenivere, which he cannot control. Unlike Orfeo or Launfal, Guingamor reacts poorly to a situation he *can* control (refraining to eat any food of the human world). His lapse stems from an almost primitive response and suggests that this lack of development justifies his abandonment by the Otherworld.

Philology, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Apr., 1915), pp. 600.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I sought to determine not only what necessitated the presence of Otherworldly figures, but also what the dynamic of power was between the fey and mortals of the lais of *Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal* and *Guingamor*. In each of these lais, emotionally charged episodes of grief, disillusionment and adventure necessitated the presence of these Otherworldly figures. For *Sir Orfeo*, the fairy king's realm provided a means to reclaim his lost wife. In *Sir Launfal*, the fairy lover allowed him to uplift his station in life. For *Guingamor*, the fairy mistress inspired his imagination. In each lai, the need for something other than the status quo birthed these fairy tales and allowed people to fantasize about escape routes from the monotony, grief or degraded social status that mires everyday life. The form that these escape avenues took as fairies rather than as gods or demigods distinguishes the Breton lai tradition from mythological tales. Where mythology concerning gods and goddesses seeks to explain the world around them, the fairies of Breton lais seek to justify acts that appear random in nature.

From their appearance as humans endowed with mysterious qualities in realms that operate parallel to the human world, the fairy presence in literature aims to provide reason for the uncontrollable actions of individuals. As opposed to explaining broad phenomena such as the weather or the change of seasons, the presence of fairies justifies the more intimate and intangible phenomena of the human heart. From *Sir Orfeo* we have seen how the fairies' close association with the dead provided a lens for addressing grief while in *Sir Launfal*, the fairies ability to operate as arbiters of justice yielded a way to redress grievances. In *Guingamor*, the

fairy presence (and more importantly the fairy *geis*) offered an escape from the machinations of courtly life.

I have frequently returned to the idea of dominance between mortal and fairy because the relationship is fraught with complexities. Despite (ostensibly) being written by humans, the poets of these lais vacillate between which force exercises dominance over the other. I believe this complexity lies in how one perceives fate and the idea of fixed events. The more developed characters (Launfal and Orfeo), defy tradition of mortal submissiveness to the supernatural because of their ability to change and develop. By accessing a spiritual and psychological transformation, Launfal and Orfeo are the true wielders of dominance because they have risen above their human inclinations of materiality and superficial power (*Sir Orfeo*) and social standing and feudal hierarchy (*Sir Launfal*). Guingamor's inability to change affirms how psychological flexibility endows the individual with dominance simply because he cannot exercise that same psychological flexibility of Orfeo or Launfal that allows them to overcome the supernatural threat.

Fairies, for all their *geis* taboos and unfathomable motives, endow the lais with a sense of freedom. Unlike the restrictions of mythology, which are couched in prophecies, fates and dooms, the fairies' power does not stretch into the future. As figures of the Otherworld, their existence alongside humans suggests that regardless of a mortal's ability to exercise dominance over the fairy counterpart, humans depend on fairies to offer escape and perspective when they cannot fulfill their goals alone.

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