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The topos of the bower in Middle English verse romance

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1. Introduction

The space of the lady's bower is at the very heart of romance. It is in this emotional, most private of spaces that love, the main ingredient of the genre, finds its expression. This study will focus on the ways in which the bower is depicted in Middle English verse romances. It will concentrate on the typical romance topoi connected to this space, particularly in relation to the different facets of love as portrayed in the works of this genre. Inevitably, other related themes will be brought into the discussion; the role of the lady in romance is the most important of these. At the same time, the work will attempt to assess the place of the lady's bower in relation to the public, male sphere of the castle: the hall.

Examples from Old English texts have been included in order to emphasize the contrast between Middle English romances and, in particular, to show the different contexts in which private space is to be found in the epic and romance genres. Rather than an exhaustive survey, it is selective in its scope, concentrating on a textual analysis of the romances in which both the typical scenes connected with the topic can be traced, together with those that are characteristic of the Middle English romances only. The work will focus in greater detail on two particular romances. The first of them, *King Horn*, is a romance inspired by legendary stories from the Viking era; the other, *Bevis of Hampton*, has its roots in the French tradition of the *chansons de geste*.

It is in epic, from which the genre of romance originates, that I would like to begin searching for the first traces of the theme of the bower. The first chapter will focus on the ways epic treats private space since it is in the realm of the private that the most palpable differences between the two genres can be found. Nevertheless, as the ensuing discussion of the Middle English texts aims to show, romance often elaborates on the motifs already existing in epic. Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of epic and romance texts, I would first like to compare both genres from a broader perspective.

The epic world significantly differs from the one to be encountered later in romance. Here, the hero proves his valour when necessity calls. He faces danger in perilous combats because he is usually bound by an obligation to keep at bay the unknown evils that may attack the seats of men at any time. When fighting the enemy, it is not only his life or fame that matters. At the same time, he fulfils the oath of loyalty sworn to his liege lord that binds him to secure his safety in a time of need. With regard to this important aspect of the epic world, it can be concluded that a hero proves his valour for more than practical reasons: he fights the enemy in order to protect his lord who encompasses the whole tribe or nation in his person.

The very opposite is true about the romance world which is, as Erich Auerbach points out, “specifically created and designed to give the knight opportunity to prove himself”.¹ In romance, it is no longer the world full of danger that rules the fates of men. Here, the typical romance hero – a knight errant – willingly rides out *to seek* adventure since heroic feats play an important role in the process of his self-perfection. The romance hero proves his excellence in the sequence of tests that fortune rather than the epic fate lays in his way. While in epic the fight against evil may easily claim the hero’s life, in romance such a thing rarely happens, for here the hero emerges from the battle hardened and prepared to face another adventure in order to test some other aspect of his personality. Rather than being governed by anxiety, the romance world is rich in opportunities that allow the hero to perfect himself.

By performing valiant deeds, the romance hero also aims at establishing his identity in the knightly world defined by the rituals of courtesy. On an allegorical level, as Sarah Kay pointed out,² the quests the romance hero undertakes may also be read as reflecting universal life experience – that is, as attempts of every (noble) man to become a better Christian. Thus, romance, as well as being a form of entertainment, may

¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis, The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 2003) p. 136.

² Sarah Kay, “Who was Chrétien de Troyes?” *Arthurian Literature*, XV (1997), p. 27.

also be considered to have educational purposes in that it offers guidelines for an exemplary life. Viewed from this perspective, romance almost stands for a kind of a secular analogue of a saint's life based on the introspection and personal growth of an individual.³

In the romance genre, a knight's heroic pursuits are not so much inspired by loyalty to his liege lord, as is the case with epic, as by the love he feels for a fair lady. Ideal love then plays an indispensable part in a hero's public and private growth. Love in romance usually ennoble the knight who thence shuns all baseness and, moving from one adventure to another, proves both his physical and moral endurance in order to become worthy of the lady of his heart. Not that emotionality is entirely lacking in epic. However, here love of a lady, if present, is normally overshadowed by the affection that binds the lord to the bravest of his vassals.⁴ C. S. Lewis remarks on this topic: "The deepest of worldly emotions in this period is the love of man for man, the mutual love of warriors who die together fighting against odds, and the affection between vassal and lord."⁵ In romance, by contrast, the love a knight feels for the lady of his heart stands at the centre of the genre; moreover, it proves useful in providing a motive for the hero's concern for self-perfection since he often undertakes adventures for the purpose of becoming worthy of his lady.⁶ Hand in hand with an interest in love goes the shift of focus from heroism that finds its full appreciation in public to the sphere of human feelings and emotions. The romance poets gladly spill much ink over the depiction of the sentiments of those enamoured and, particularly in French romances of Chrétien de Troyes, such

³ R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, 1961), pp. 219-257.

⁴ I am speaking now especially with *The Song of Roland* on my mind. Here, Roland's relationship with his fiancée Aude is given only a little space in comparison to the bond of love between the king and the best of his retainers that unites Roland and Charlemagne.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York, 1958), p. 9.

⁶ Auerbach, op. cit., p. 141.

descriptions become an important part of the artistic skill of the poet as they are counted among the valued embellishments of the story.⁷

To proceed now to the actual theme of this work, the more intimate character of romance narration may find similar expression in the way the poets treat space. With regard to the representation of space in epic, the contrast between the outside and the inside is stressed. Here, the outside world full of peril is set against that of safety, represented by the guarded strongholds of men. Apart from this opposition, romance distinguishes between public and private space within the realm of the inside.⁸ As secrecy is the essential feature of romance love, it is chiefly in relation to emotions that the tension between the public and private is the most palpable. Lovers invariably prefer to ponder on their feelings in the privacy provided by chambers and bowers where their anxiety resulting from love is well protected from the evil workings of wicked tongues. The lady's bower is also where courteous conversation develops as one of the important rituals of the courtly world. Besides the obvious theme of love, the deeds of courage the knight accomplishes in the name of his beloved are also discussed in its privacy. With regard to such scenes, it may seem easy to generalize that the bower evokes a space that provides shelter for the fragile love that may easily be jeopardized, especially by its untimely public exposure. However, as will become clear from the texts examined, the space of the bower may also show its other, less favourable face. Love, apart from the pure emotion without which the process of a knight's inner perfection would be unthinkable, may likewise pose a serious threat to his spiritual growth. This may happen when the sensuous aspect of love prevails. The bower then turns into a trap whose function is, similarly to the

⁷ I chose to refer to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes as to the masterpieces of the genre which at the same time stand for its classical, to a certain extent even normative, examples.

Possible inspiration for the heightened interest in sensibility is generally considered to have its roots in the poetry of the Provençal troubadours. For the beginnings of courtly love, typical of love lyrics but whose influence can be discerned also in romances, see Bernard O'Donoghue, *The Courtly Love Tradition* (Manchester, 1982).

⁸ A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 15.

adventures outside the castle, to test the hero's integrity, this time, the moral aspect of his personality. In relation to love being portrayed in romance as pure or sensuous, the bower can either represent a place that may inspire a knight in his growth in the public sphere of courtly life or it may become its direct opposite. That is, a space which potentially hinders the knight from his public accomplishments. These are the two basic aspects of the bower that this study will focus on. However, before proceeding to the way romance treats the theme of the bower, first it will deal with the representation of private space in epic.

2. "Dā cyning gewāt ūt of healle": the epic "būr"

Generally, epic seldom allows for including private space in its narration, nevertheless, there are examples in which references to it can be found. This chapter will focus on the epic texts of English provenience in which private space plays a significant role. With the aid of textual analysis, it will attempt to examine which contexts are typical of private space in epic, particularly when drawing a comparison with the public space of the mead-hall.

The space of the bower can be found mentioned several times in the Old English heroic epic *Beowulf*.⁹ In the majority of its occurrences, it refers to the space antithetical to that of the mead-hall which stands at the centre of heroic life. The following extract begins with the Geatish hero formally pledging loyalty to the aged king Hrothgar. Outside the mead-hall dusk is falling and the approaching night betokens the attack of the grim fiend Grendel, against whom the king has so far been tragically helpless.

Beowulf mabelode, bearn Ecgþeowes:
'Ic þæt hogode, þa ic on holm gestah,
sæbat gesæt mid minra secga gedriht,
þæt ic anunga eowra leoda

⁹ It cannot be stated with certainty when this English national epos was composed. Generally, it is assumed to be a work from the tenth century, however, some scholars date it back already to the times before the Viking attacks, that is, the eighth century.

willan geworhte, oþðe on wæl crunge
 feondgrapum fæst. Ic gefremman sceal
 eorlic ellen, oþðe endedæg
 on þisse meoduhealle minne gebidan!"
 Ðam wife þa word wel licodon,
 gilpcwide Geates; eode goldhroden,
 freolicu folccwen to hire frean sittan.
 Þa wæs eft swa ær inne on healle
 þryðword sprecen, ðeod on sælum,
 sigefolca sweg, oþ þæt semninga
 sunu Healfdenes secean wolde
 æfenræste; wiste þæm ahlæcan
 to þæm heahsele hilde gepinged,
 siððan hie sunnan leoht geseon meahton,
 oð þe nipende niht ofer ealle,
 scaduhelma gesceapu scriðan cwoman
 wan under wolcnum. Werod eall aras.
 Gegrette þa guma oþerne,
 Hroðgar Beowulf, ond him hæl abead,
 winærnes geweald, ond þæt word acwæð:
 `Næfre ic ænegum men ær alyfde,
 siþðan ic hond ond rond hebban mihte,
 ðryþærn Dena buton þe nu ða.
 Hafa nu ond geheald husa selest,
 gemyne mærpō, mægenellen cyð,
 waca wiþ wrapum! Ne bið þe wilna gad,
 gif þu þæt ellenweorc aldre gedigest.
 Ða him Hroþgar gewat mid his hæleþa gedryht,
 eodur Scyldinga ut of healle;
 wolde wigfruma Wealhþeo secan,
 cwen to gebeddan.¹⁰

(Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow, "I resolved – when I set out to the sea, entered the sea-vessel with the company of my warriors – that I should completely fulfil the wish of your people or else fall slain in the fast grasp of an enemy. I shall accomplish the deeds of courage or suffer the last of my days in this mead-hall." These words, the boasting speech of the Geat pleased the lady well. Gold-adorned, this noble queen of her people went to sit by her lord. Then again as before the brave words resounded in the hall, the happiness of the victorious people, until all at once the son of Healfdane /Hrothgar/ wished to seek a night's rest. He knew that fierce assailant planned battle in this lofty hall after they could /not/ see the light of the sun /anymore/ and when, night covering all with darkness, the murky shadows came stalking, dark under the heavens. The company rose, each man greeted the other, Hrothgar wished Beowulf success, gave him control over the banquet hall and uttered these words, "Never before, since I could heave up hand and shield, have I entrusted this mighty hall of the Danes to any man but to you now. Have now and guard the best of houses, be mindful of fame, show courage and watch against the

¹⁰ George Jack (ed.), *Beowulf, A Student Edition* (Oxford, 1994), ll. 631-665A. This translation and all subsequent ones are mine.

hostile ones! If you come out of this courageous deed alive you shall not lack what you desire.” Then Hrothgar departed with his band of warriors, the protector of the Shieldings went out of the hall. The war leader wished to seek Wealhtheow, the queen for his bedfellow...)

The extract quoted above is in many ways typical of the epic genre. By uttering his ceremonial speech in which he lays his strength and courage at the feet of the king, Beowulf formally becomes one of the king’s retainers. His public troth sworn in the hall in the presence of the assembled lot establishes the bond central to epic - that between the lord and the hero, which is based on mutual love and loyalty. His fight against the ravaging monster is - like any epic fight - undertaken for practical reasons. Instead of King Hrothgar, whom feebleness of old age forbids to protect those under his care, Beowulf takes upon himself the role of the defender of the harassed people. By acting thus, he fulfils the vocation of an epic hero as proclaimed in his speech that is also a boast of courage. His words suggest that his mind is firmly set on performing *eorlic ellen*, the deeds of courage, through which he aims to join the valiant company of the renowned heroes whose brave deeds are praised in the songs. The epic hero has only two options – either glory or death (if not both).

Turning our attention now to the significance of the space where Beowulf utters his ceremonial speech, its setting is provided by the magnificent mead-hall Heorot, the symbol of Hrothgar’s power and his status of a king. Adorned with gold, this stronghold of mankind towers proudly in the gloomy hostile land where unknown horrors and monsters lurk in the misty darkness. In contrast to the danger ever present in the outside world, the hall signifies, as Kathryn Hume remarks, “order, social pleasure and security”.¹¹ In Old English literature, the hall is primarily associated with ceremonies in which heroic life rituals are performed. Here, the bonds between the lord and his retainers are established and renewed each night in the act of

¹¹ Kathryn Hume, “The concept of Hall in Old English Poetry”, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1947), p. 66.

bestowing golden jewels as well as swords hardened by many a battle upon the loyal ones. Here, the *scop* makes his harp resound when singing about the heroes of old, thus providing pleasant entertainment at the feasts. The mead-hall then becomes the space where the past and present meet, uniting the dead heroes with those living when the stories of fortitude become myth. Although the foremost function of Heorot should be to offer protection against the evils of the outside world, this is not the case here. Each night it suffers attacks from the fierce monster Grendel who has been harrasing the king's people for too long, without them being able to defend themselves. Having no other choice, Hrothgar is forced to entrust the task of guarding the mead-hall to Beowulf's capable hands. It is destined to happen on this night, when Beowulf watches over the hall, that the power of the monster will be broken. The presence of the king in the golden hall is then exchanged for his (similarly important) absence when he accompanies his queen into her quarters where he can take his well-earned rest. The "būr", the dwelling of the queen which stands apart from the insecure hall, then takes upon itself the function of the hall as a space of safety since it is out of reach of Grendel's ferocious attacks. Safe though it may be, the "būr" is fated to remain an unheroic space. According to the epic code of honour, all those able to carry a weapon are expected to stay in the hall and guard it against any danger. King Hrothgar's departure into the queen's bower is therefore somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it apparently suits the king to share a bed with his spouse – as the word "gebedda"¹² used when referring to Wealhtheow suggests. On the other hand, it is somewhat questionable whether this would be the proper conduct face to face with the imminent danger of merciless slaughter wrought each night by Grendel. Hrothgar leaves the hall because he can no longer count

¹² Similarly to the widespread OE word *gefera*, "a companion", the prefix *ge-* carries the collective meaning here. The word as a whole refers thus to the "bed-fellow" which has connotations that suggest the "būr" to represent a space of peaceful rest side by side with one's beloved and honoured spouse.

himself among the ranks of those able to defend his own people, and at this moment the “būr” becomes the shelter of his aged body.

In the text, the “būr” is described as the private quarters of the noble queen Wealhtheow. From the way the poem depicts her, it may seem as if it were her presence that mainly contributes to the safety of this space. In the quoted passage, the queen’s role is above all protective. When Beowulf finishes his speech of courage, we witness first the response of the queen, who, almost like one of the treasures in the hall, appears adorned with gold, gracious and noble, by her husband’s side. Her reaction is that of relief since she is aware of her husband’s infirmities and glad that the task of defending the hall has been appointed to the young hero.

From what has been said above, it is evident that in this context the bower stands for the space that can be characterized, among other things, by the soothing presence of the lady. Moreover, it is able to ensure protection to those who dwell inside also because it is not a space typical of fighting. However, the very nature of epic that is primarily concerned with events performed (or related) in public gives rise to the fact that the “būr” remains on the margin of the story in that it is never entered. As mentioned briefly above, it is only such compounds as “healsgebedda”¹³ that might seem to offer short glimpses of the intimate nature of the scenes taking place inside.

Before proceeding further, it should be pointed out that there is yet another instance in Old English literature in which the bower – though in a slightly different context – appears. The text that merits our attention is the well-known story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard described in the annal 755 of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Although the main concern of this narrative lies with the lofty themes of revenge and

¹³ The compound *healsgebedda* appears earlier on in the text when referring to an unnamed queen married to the Swedish king Onela (ll. 63B). Bosworth-Toller’s OE Dictionary glosses the word as “*consort around whose neck the arms are thrown, /hence/ one dearly loved.*” See *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary based on the manuscript collections of Joseph Bosworth*, ed. T. Northcote Toller (Oxford, 1898), p. 520.

loyalty typical of heroic epic, the “būr” as a private space plays here a significant, yet somewhat unclear, role of its own. The entry begins with King Cynewulf deposing Sigebyrt for his “unryhtum dædum”, that is, his “wrong deeds”. Years later, Sigebyrt’s brother, Prince Cyneheard, who was banished by Cynewulf, learns that the king is staying with a certain lady in Merton.¹⁴ With the band of his followers, he ambushes the king while still in the lady’s bower, easily outnumbered his retinue and finally succeeds in killing both the king and the entire group of his retainers who, despite of being offered service under a new master, bravely remain loyal to Cynewulf to the very end.

The Old English noun “wifcyþpe”¹⁵ that refers to the action of visiting the lady poses questions about her identity. While some of the critics were trying to prove the king was entangled in a relationship with the lady of a questionable reputation, the voices against this theory argued – more in favour of the lady – for her being his lawful wife.¹⁶ In contrast to the difficulties which the lady’s identity gives rise to, it is the meaning of the “bur” mentioned which suits more the purpose of my theme. What can be pinpointed is that the king rides to Merton “litle werode” (“with a small retinue”) because he does not expect to come upon any danger on his journey, the end of which is supposed to be a pleasant encounter with a lady. Therefore, his lack of caution later proves to be a fatal mistake. It is easy for Cyneheard, who strives to get his lost kingdom back as well as to avenge his banished brother, to catch

¹⁴ The actual sentence as preserved in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is as follows: “þa geascode he þone cyning lytle werode on wifcyþpe on Merantune.” (See *Two of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford, 1892), I, p. 47.)

¹⁵ Dictionaries tend to gloss this compound either neutrally as “a visit to a woman” or in the Biblical sense of the verb “to know /a woman/.” For a more in-depth study of the meaning of the compound see D. S. Scragg, “*Wifcyþpe* and the Morality of the Cynewulf and Cyneheard Episode in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle”, in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Jane Roberts, Janet L. Nelson and Malcolm Godden (Cambridge, 1997), p. 179-185.

¹⁶ For a more comprehensive discussion of this topic from a feminist point of view see Nina Rulon-Miller, “‘Cynewulf and Cyneheard’: A Woman Screams”, *Philological Quarterly*, 76 (1997), pp. 113-132.

Cynewulf in the lady's bower off guard, totally unprepared, and (possibly, though not necessarily) *in flagrante*. Similarly to *Beowulf*, yet this time more palpably, the space implies to be the very opposite to what a heroic space should be like. Moreover, in accord with the epic tradition, love becomes the weakness of the hero that finally leads to his destruction.

The action that takes place inside the “būr” provokes the imagination even more because it is hidden from our sight. What happens inside the bower together with the reason why the king visited the bower in Merton, remains hidden in the hazy depths of time, also because it was possibly not in the foremost interest of the chronicler. If the lady was not indeed Cynewulf's wife and the king was driven to her bower by blind desire, then his defeat might be, according to one interpretation, read as a punishment for his unbridled, not kingly behaviour. Yet still one hesitates if it is just to take at this stage the reference to the lady's “būr” for “morally weakening” as some critics have suggested¹⁷ or if it is better to dismiss this possible moral message and view it merely as a reference to circumstances under which the king is killed. That is, as a place not properly guarded against Cyneheard's sudden attack. That Cyneheard chose of all the possible moments the one in which the king was the most vulnerable only makes his attack to appear more unjust and cowardly. Viewed from a different angle, the hopelessness of the situation only accentuates the bravery of Cynewulf and, in particular, that of his company that face to face with certain death remains true to their rightful (though at that time already dead) king. Such understanding would be in favour of reading this episode as part of the larger context (shaped by heroic Germanic tradition)¹⁸ in which stress lies on such themes as revenge, loyalty and brave fight. Be it the

¹⁷ See Karen Ferro, “The King in the Doorway: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, AD 755”, *Acta*, 11 (1986), pp. 17-30; or Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, “Heroic values and Christian Ethics”, in *Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 111.

¹⁸ Such a view is supported, among others, by D. G. Scragg (Op. cit., p. 184).

punishment of the king's lustful behaviour or not, the bower in this case entirely loses its attribute of safety when a hostile force can break in thus easily. Its security on which Cynewulf by mistake relies is in the end dearly paid with his own life.

Speaking already with romance in mind, the texts of the genre will often prove what cannot be stated with certainty in this Old English example. In romance, the luring to visit a lady in her bower may signify a possible menace to the moral integrity of those who enter it.

The purpose of this lengthy excursion into Old English literature was to prepare the ground for the discussion of the bower as it is portrayed in romance. This genre will modify the themes already existing in epic and, in accord with the changed context of the romance world, it will enrich them with new meanings similarly to the way in which the Anglo-Saxon "būr" will be transformed into the lavish bower of the medieval castle.

3. The bower and the hall: a brief summary

The Old English "būr" has at first sight little in common with the romance "bower" since both reflect a different cultural milieu as well as architectural tradition. However, this work understands the romance "bower" as being associated with its Old English predecessor by means of its basic function of a private space whose shape as well as function changed as the society itself altered in time. Perhaps it would not be entirely vain to try to introduce the space in its historical as well as architectural and linguistic context first. However, such a summary (needless to say a very brief and simplified one) would not be complete without including the space of the hall, too.

As apparent from the Old English literary works, the ritual centre of heroic life was the hall. Germanic in its origin, it reflected the power of the lord who inside its walls entertained his loyal vassals while strengthening the bonds of community by feasting, giving out treasures

and listening to the words of a *scop* accompanied by the sound of a harp. Apart from the king whose habit it was to leave the hall for the quarters of the queen, the king's company of noble retainers usually remained sleeping in the hall which points at the more or less universal use of the hall where its public and private function mingle. The small detached buildings known as the "būr" which were scattered around the hall¹⁹ had (as archaeologists relying on the written sources believe) the function of a private dwelling for those of high rank, together with their counsellors and servants.²⁰ Although in the early medieval times "būr" stood in some distance from the hall, it was gradually incorporated into the body of the hall, first by a connecting passage; later, in post-Conquest manors, the chamber was usually situated on the first floor.²¹ Its presence was useful as well as indispensable as it created a welcomed space of privacy in contrast to the hall where public affairs and ceremonies took place. While bower at first pointed at a high social distinction of its owner, later, in the course of time, what was primarily the privilege of the wealthiest and the most powerful ones, was gradually absorbed into the universal model of a house.²²

To pause for a while at the linguistic history of the word "bower", it is interesting to realize how its meaning narrowed and specified in relation to the changes in the society. The word is derived from the Old English verb "būan", meaning simply "to live or dwell". In the beginning, its primary sense is the most general one as it refers to "a dwelling" or "a hut".²³ Later it starts to reflect the nature of the Anglo-Saxon settlements and is it used to express, as mentioned above, a

¹⁹ R. I. Page, *Life in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1970), p. 138.

²⁰ Anthony Quiney, "Hall or Chamber? That is the Question. The Use of Rooms in Post-Conquest Houses", *Architectural History: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain*, 42 (1999), p. 27.

²¹ John Blair, "Hall and Chamber: English Domestic Planning 1000-1250", in *Anglo-Norman castle*, ed. Robert Liddiard (Wodbridge, 2003), p. 316.

²² Quiney (Op.cit., p. 28) draws attention to Chaucer's Nun's Priest Tale in which a certain poor widow is referred to as having "hir bour and eek hir halle" very sooty. This reference leads him to the conclusion that in the 14th century the hall as well as the bower in a house became an everyday affair.

²³ *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 133-134.

private, inner space which is some distance from the mead-hall. Yet it is romance some two hundred years later which testifies to its meaning being fixed as that of an intimate space within the structure of a castle.²⁴

When reading Middle English romances, the word “chamber” can be often found being used instead of “bower”. Concerning this point, John Blair remarks:

By 1100 there was already a literary convention of defining any substantial residence in terms of two main components: one communal, public and official, used for activities such as holding of courts and the eating of formal meals, and the other private and residential: in Latin *aula* and *camera*, in Old English *heall* and *bur*, in modern English *hall* and *chamber*.²⁵

Since their main difference is in their etymology, the words “chamber” and “bower” seem perfectly interchangeable and in many cases they indeed are. However, they differ somewhat in their connotations. “Bower” is in the majority of cases used when talking about the private space, usually (though not necessarily) linked with the presence of a lady. “Chamber”, apart from the same function, may also refer to the king’s council chamber where legal matters are solved in public.

From what has been said above it may seem as if the character of the space of the hall and the bower was more or less unequivocal.

²⁴ However, the sense of the word “būr” referring to “a house” can be met surviving in the formulaic expression “bur and halle”, meaning “everywhere”, which makes it possible to see the “bower and hall” of the poor widow from the note 22 in a different light. Analysis of its first component is not as straightforward as it might seem. It can denote either an inner room which makes the collocation stand upon the public-private contrast or it might also refer to “a house, or cottage”, an idea that seem to stretch back to the Anglo-Saxon “būr”, signifying a separate house standing apart from the hall. Yet here, rather a building of a poorer character is meant. If it is understood in this way, it is the opposition between high and low (that is, house vs. mansion) that is crucial for the meaning of this expression.

²⁵ John Blair, op.cit., p. 308. See also Frank Liebermann, “Altenglands Kammer und Halle”, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 143 (1922), p. 248.

However, a deeper analysis of the romance texts will show that under certain circumstances these functions may overlap.

4. The bower in Middle English romance

When romance springs into life in the twelfth century France, it has courtly society for its theme whose manners and ceremonies it on the one hand copies but on the other hand also helps to fix and establish. The nucleus of courtly society is constituted by its magnificent emblem – the castle. Inside its walls, everyday life is delineated by constant practice of courtly rituals which make the castle stand as a symbol of organized culture against the uncultivated wilderness of the outside world in which a hero faces perilous adventures and tests.²⁶

The life in a castle moves between the places public and private – between the hall and the bower. In the hall, similarly to that of the Old English poetry, feasts and various entertainments take place. Although ladies are often present, they are taken for its mere adornments rather than for equal partners of their male counterparts. As A. C. Spearing points out their role is that of a “public icon rather than /that of/ a private agent”.²⁷ The women are in most cases excluded from the knightly world of chivalry which is exclusively a male affair. In the like manner the hall, the very centre of knighthood, is essentially defined as a space of male power.”²⁸

The hall reflects the power of the lord, be it openly displayed in the splendour of its decoration and abundance of food, or in its public exercise when the hall is turned into a law-court where the lord hears the cases brought under his justice. Thus the hall is, as in the Anglo-Saxon culture, associated with “power, ritual, wealth and hospitality”. By

²⁶ Jacques le Goff, *Středověká imaginace*, trans. Irena Murasová (Praha, 1998) p. 144.

²⁷ See A. C. Spearing, “Public and Private Spaces in *SGGK*”, *Arthuriana*, 4 (1994), p. 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

contrast, the bower (or chamber) gains the attribute of a feminine space²⁹ which signifies the realm of the private and intimate”.³⁰

The basic division of the two places according to the gender is often reflected in the romance formulas in which Middle English texts abound. One of the most frequently used attributes of the damsel in the castle is a “lady bright in bower”.³¹ By contrast, the lord is traditionally assigned a place in the hall. A classical example can be found in *Havelok the Dane*. Here, the scene in which the just king of England dies is described as follows: “And mikel sorwe haveden alle / Leveydyes in boure, knictes in halle...”³²

As shown in the Old English examples of *Beowulf* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the references to a private sphere of human feelings and emotions here remain on the margin of the story. If mentioned, they are merely briefly hinted at as they do not stand in the focus of an author. Concerning this matter, romance proves to be its direct opposite. It relishes in the descriptions of the intimate and makes of the scenes that take place behind the hasped door of the lady’s bower its prime subject. Unlike the epic hero, who first of all strives to win renown among his companions in the hall, the romance knight may undertake various tests and perilous adventures so as to become worthy of entering his lady’s bower where love shared (when well deserved) will be his reward. Moreover, the visits in the bower of the beautiful

²⁹ Though women had their place in the hall, there were occasions when they were bidden to retreat to their chamber. The reason for them leaving the hall could often become the too boisterous merriment in the hall. See Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House – A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1978), p. 45.

³⁰ More about the habits of life in a medieval castle can be found in Mark Girouard’s discussion of the arrangement of the medieval house. See *ibid.*, chap. 3, pp. 30-88.

³¹ Chaucer in an unforgettable way parodies this overused phrase in his *Sir Thopas*: “Ful many a maide, briht in bour / They moorne for hym paramour / Whan hem were bet to slepe...” (“So many maidens, bright in their bower, enamoured, they pine for him when they should better go to sleep”, ll. 741-744.)

³² “They all were very sorrowful, both the ladies in their bower and the knights in the hall”. *Havelok the Dane* quoted here and subseuently from *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1999), ll. 239-240.

castle maiden form an important part of the courtly ritual of fair welcome in which the highly ritualized amorous dalliance between a knight and a lady plays its crucial role.

With regard to the romance plot, the bower scenes usually constitute the counterpart to the adventures which reflect the public side of the hero's growth. The true motivation of the romance knight is in his ideal love to the lady which he treasures deep within his heart like a precious gem. He draws his strength and inspiration from the encounters with the object of his desire who gracefully receives him in her bower. Such would be the most general characterisation of this space, yet there is more to this theme that needs to be explored.

First, love portrayed in romance may often assume a significantly darker (that is, sensuous) character, and therefore the lady's bower can be presented in a considerably more negative light. Second, the English romances differ in many ways from the sophisticated French romances of Chrétien de Troyes, most palpably in the portrayal of courtly love which is seldom given so much space. It should be remarked that love in Middle English romance (that in the majority of cases follows the popular tastes of its audience) is often presented in a far cruder way. As John Finlayson remarks, its role may sometimes be "peripheral or decorative, rather than central"³³ while it is the adventures of a hero that matter above all. The following part will therefore – with the aid of textual analysis – focus on the representation of the topos of the bower (as well as love since they are closely intertwined) as presented in Middle English verse romance. Moreover, it will trace the characteristics of the hall and the bower from the perspective of their interaction and mutual permeability.

³³ John Finlayson, "Definitions of Middle English Romance", *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1980-81), p. 71.

4.1 Entering the bower

For the topos of the lady's bower it is typical that the knight is hardly ever allowed to enter it of his own accord. Such a conduct would hardly agree with the principles of *courtoisie* – the patterns of courtesy practised at court – which every romance hero is bound to obey if he shuns to be called a churl.

Figuratively speaking, to enter the bower is in most cases possible only through the hall, that is, on the direct invitation of the lord of the castle himself. One example for all can be found in the fourteenth century romance of *Bevis of Hampton* where its hero, a banished son of the lord of Hampton, is sold to the Saracens. Because of his noble bearing and brave conduct, he is accepted at the court of the Saracen king whose fair daughter Josiane falls in love with the handsome Christian. After Bevis accomplishes a particularly brave deed of arms, the king, unaware – as Bevis is – of his daughter's love, bids her to receive the knight in her bower.

“Josian, the faire maide,
Unarme Beves, he wer at mete,
And serve thee self him ther-ate!”
Tho nolde that maide never blinne,
Til she com to hire inne,
Thar she lai hire selve anight:
Thar she sette that gentil knight,
Hire self yaf him water to hond
And sette before him al is sonde.
Tho Beves hadde wel i-ete
And on the maiden's bed isete...³⁴

(“Fair maid Josiane, unarm Bevis for he will dine and serve him at his meal yourself.” That maiden had not stopped until she reached her lodgings where she herself lay down at night. There she seated that gentle knight and offered him water to wash his hands and then placed various dishes before him. When Bevis had eaten well whilst having sat on the bed of this maiden...)

³⁴ The romance of *Bevis of Hampton* here and subsequently quoted from *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1999), ll. 1081-1091.

To be invited into the lady's chamber is one of the greatest honours a knight may achieve. Such invitations are usually reserved, as part of the courtly ritual of fair welcome, for especially important guests. In French romances, such a guest would often be Gawain, the paragon of courtesy incarnate. An invitation like this might also become a reward for an outstanding bravery as in the case of the quoted example. Besides the enjoyable company of a lady, the bower also offers a more comfortable alternative to the meal served in the hall.³⁵ As a space much smaller than the hall, it has the air of cosiness which is even more enhanced by the way it is furnished. The bower is richly decorated with sumptuous tapestries on the walls and with luxurious carpets spread on the floor. Warmth which the fireplace emits together with the bright candlelight only adds to the comforts a knight enjoys inside.³⁶ The atmosphere of such encounters is intimate, many a time amorous, even. In the quoted passage, the author, although he does not especially relish in the description of the space, does not forget to mention that the knight enters the most private of spaces where the lady herself rests at night. Such a detail cleverly heightens the sense of delicacy of the whole scene and makes it apparent in what a special position the invited knight finds himself.

The summons of the knight into the bower is, however, subjected to a courtly ritual. First, the lovely castle maiden unarms the knight³⁷

³⁵ In the reality of medieval life the habit of having meals in the chamber was at first practised only by those who were feeling unwell. Later also the ladies ate separately in their chambers and, finally, it was the king who first started retiring from the hall into his chamber in order to eat his supper in privacy far from the noise of the hall. The retiring of a lord to his private space also publicly demonstrated his power. (See Girourard, op. cit., p. 46). The example of king Hrothgar in *Beowulf* makes it clear that no such thing has its place in epic.

³⁶ See Marvin Alpheus Owings, *The Arts in the Middle English Romances* (New York, 1957). This work offers a detailed description of the furnishing of the castle as presented in romances according to the archaeological evidence.

³⁷ The maiden unarming the knight forms an interesting contrast to epic where the hero is bidden to leave his weapons outside the hall before he enters. By obeying this ritual, he makes it clear that he comes for no evil purpose and, at the same time, he expresses his belief he needs not fear any harm inside. Thus, the pact of friendship and mutual trust between the host and the guest is established. (I am indebted to Jan Čermák for this very useful comment).

and graciously seats him on her bed³⁸ and offers him water to wash his hands before the meal is served.³⁹ Thus attending to him, the lady performs a private parallel of the ceremonies which (meanwhile?) take place in the great hall in the presence of the lord.

The courteous conversation which often has love for its theme forms an indispensable part of the bower topos.⁴⁰ In the dainty world of refined courtly society as presented especially in the French romances⁴¹ such conversation may not immediately refer to the real emotion. Love-talk may be viewed as part of the ritual that has very little in common with true feelings. In fact, talking about love is recognized as one of the courtly plays⁴² which – like an elaborated ornament – further heightens the preciousness of the very moment. However, the border between the real emotion and courteous play may be easily transgressed. Behind the polished, elegant surface of courteous talk the real passion may lurk which may, if not restrained, easily break free. To a great horror of lords the fathers, the Gawain of the French tradition often proves not to be as virtuous a guest as they expected him to be when having him invited into the lady's bower.⁴³

The act of inviting a knight to one's own daughter's chamber supposes an unspoken pact of trust and loyalty between the lord and the knight. By leaving a knight in the company of his daughter, the lord openly expresses his trust in his excellence and moral flawlessness. In

³⁸ The bed is the most important (as well as sometimes the only) piece of furniture in the bower which also serves the function of a chair in private audiences.

³⁹ With regard to the romance tradition, Mark Girourard refers to the bower as a place where amorous meals are often served. (See Girourard, op.cit., p. 45.)

⁴⁰ In Middle English romance, however, the courtly conversation is seldom described in full, usually it is only hinted at and left up to the audience to imagine.

⁴¹ The best known example of such a conversation in Middle English romance is to be found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a romance which in its quality far surpasses the others.

⁴² Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love* (Manchester, 1977), p. 103.

⁴³ On the tradition of Gawain as lover in French romances, see Beate Schmolke Hasselman, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance – The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 104.

Gawain portrayed as a lady-killer can be found for example in one of the episodes of Chrétien's romance *Perceval*. [See Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. W. W. Kibler, C. W. Carroll (Penguin Books, 2004), p. 453].

such a way, the invitation into the bower is one of the highest honours a knight may achieve. The knight is in return bound not to fail the expectations of the lord.

If the knight cannot, for the abovementioned reasons, give vent to his desire, the lady of Middle English romance can and she indeed often seizes the opportunity to do so. Her father's bidding to accept in her bower the knight with whom she is – as it often happens – in love allows her to pursue her own interest. This frequently results in a courtly dalliance being substituted for something more important and real, but at the same time also more dangerous. The passage quoted from *Bevis of Hampton* continues as follows:

That mai, that was so bright of hiwe,
Thoughte she wolde hire consaile schewe,
And seide: "Beves, lemman, thin ore!
Ichave loved thee ful yore,
Sikerli can I no rede,
Boute thow me love, icham dede...
(ll. 1091-1098)

(That maiden whose complexion was so bright thought she would show her counsel and said, "Bevis, my darling, your mercy! I have loved thee so completely that truly I do not know what to do. Unless you love me, I shall die...")

Unexpectedly for the knight, the lady suddenly takes the initiative and through her outburst of feelings shatters the fragile balance between the encounter in the bower that is part of the ritual of courtesy and that which contains within itself the real threat of sin. The knight's reply to such an open demonstration of lady's favour is seldom that of acceptance. If he acquiesced to her advances, he would have lost his public face and betrayed his lord's trust. Therefore, the knight first of all aims at making their love acceptable in public. In most of the cases, the way to achieve this goal is to prove oneself worthy in the series of adventures or, to be more precise, when referring to the context of Middle English romance, in combats. After the knight wins recognition in the hall, it is possible for the secret love to be revealed and

consequently also confirmed publicly in an act of marriage. Leaving the aspect of the bower as a space of potential danger for later analysis, it is the lady inviting the knight she wishes to be espoused with I will be interested in on the next few pages.

Besides the invitation by a lord, in a number of Middle English romances which are mostly adaptations of an Anglo-Norman source,⁴⁴ the first impetus for private conversation in the bower comes from the lady herself. Stricken with love, it is her desire which urges her to summon to her presence the knight she has chosen for a future spouse. Surprisingly often, the knight is initially quite unaware of her love. A typical example of this is to be found in the first Middle English romance of *King Horn*. In this Middle English romance, written sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century, the king's passionate daughter called Rymenhild falls incurably in love with the beautiful exiled son of a king, bearing the name of Horn. It costs her an immense torture to deal with the desire she feels for him as she can often see him at her father's court the member of which he has become.

Luvede men Horn child,
And mest him luvede Rymenhild,
The kynges owene doghter.
He was mest in thoghte;
Heo luvede so Horn child
That negh heo gan wexe wild:
For heo ne mighte at borde
With him speke no worde,
Ne noght in the halle
Among the knightes alle,
Ne nowhar in non othere stede.
Of folk heo hadde drede:
Bi daie ne bi nighte
With him speke ne mighte.
Hire soreghe ne hire pine
Ne mighte nevre fine.
In heorte heo hadde wo,
And thus hire bithoghte tho:
Heo sende hire sonde
Athelbrus to honde,

⁴⁴ Romances with an Anglo-Norman source in which a forward heroine appears include above all such romances as *King Horn*, *Sir Bevis of Hampton* or *Sir Ferumbras*.

That he come hire to,
And also scholde Horn do,
Al in to bure...⁴⁵

(Young Horn was beloved by all yet it was Rymenhild, the king's own daughter, who loved him most. He was foremost in her thoughts. The love she felt for young Horn was so immense that she nearly went mad for she could not speak a word with him at the dais or in the hall where the knights were all assembled nor in any other place since of people she had fear. By day nor by night she could speak to him. Her sorrow and her torture were unceasing. Thus sorrowful in her heart, she thought that she would send a message to Althelbrus that he would come – and so Horn should do – into her bower...)

Rymenhild's passion is sudden and fierce. Smitten by Horn's lovely stature and delicate manners, she suffers from a dire need to reveal her feelings to the object of her desire, however, she is unable to do so anywhere else but in the privacy of her bower. As the quoted example clearly shows, the hall – as the public space where knights are assembled at ceremonies of the courtly world – is highly inconvenient for any kind of outbursts of feelings. It is the shame Rymenhild is afraid of, in case the ever present wicked tongues (here referred to as “folk”) would make her infatuation known. There is reason to fret since this kind of an untimely public display could easily mar the future of their love.

Her forward behaviour is in many ways unusual for that of the typical lady of the continental romances that generally do not favour such boldness in a lady.⁴⁶ The French romances, by contrast, focus on the knight who falls in love first and is afterwards burned by the intensity of his feelings.⁴⁷ For the style of the master of the French romance, Chrétien de Troyes, it is characteristic that he furnishes his audience with detailed descriptions of the knight's unspeakable torment

⁴⁵ The text of *King Horn* quoted here and subsequently from *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1999), ll. 251-274.

⁴⁶ Judith Weiss, “The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance”, in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, Carol M. Meale (Cambridge, 1991), p. 150.

⁴⁷ In Middle English romance such model is to be found for example in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*.

which is caused by uncertainty whether the lady whom his heart has chosen for its mistress would return his ardent feelings.⁴⁸ Although the lady may be tortured with similar agonies that have love for its cause, she remains inactive in the role of the passive object of the knight's desire since it is not fitting for a woman to be as bold as to reveal her feelings first.⁴⁹

Rymenhild clearly does not fit into this model, on the contrary, she significantly deviates from the pattern sketched above. After suffering intolerable pain caused by her helplessness, she resolves to speak with Horn in private. By taking upon herself the initiative of choosing a husband quite independently of the command of her father, she may, as Anna H. Reuters points out, "represent a reminiscence of the pre-Conquest marital law, which allowed the woman and the wife more independence and right of decision than post-Conquest law."⁵⁰

In spite of all the freedom of action on the lady's part, the summons of the knight into her bower must agree with certain rituals on which courtly life stands. First, it cannot be directly the woman herself who utters the invitation. It is true that the bower can be entered at the lady's behest but it is quite unthinkable for the lady to leave it so as to address the knight herself.⁵¹ The invitation is usually arranged through a messenger who, according to the ritual, announces (in the hall) to the

⁴⁸ A typical example of such pattern can be found, among others, in Chrétien's *Cligés*. Detailed as well as witty descriptions of the inner state of mind of the protagonists are viewed as one of the ornaments of the story. They allow Chrétien to show his skill as a poet while he believes such commentaries to enhance the stylistic virtuosity of his texts.

⁴⁹ According to Weiss, in contrast to the French romance, in *chansons de geste* a heroine who takes the initiative is nothing uncommon, moreover, she is even popular as the recurrent character of the energetic *bele Sarrasine* proves. She is distinguished from her Christian female counterparts by "greater freedom of action and talent for magic and healing." Although the period treatises on morality strongly disapprove of an exhortative behaviour in a woman, the *chansons de geste* generally see this character in a favourable light. After all, her boldness helps the hero win public recognition in the end. See Weiss, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

⁵⁰ Anna Hubertine Reuters, *Friendship and Love in the Middle English Metrical Romances* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), p.73.

See also Judith Weiss, "The Power and the Weakness of Women in Anglo-Norman Romance", in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ The theme of a lady leaving her bower will be discussed later on.

knight that the lady asks for his company. Generally speaking, the role of a messenger in romance bears special importance for he, a go-between, connects both the male and female spaces of the hall and the bower.

The interaction between this public and private space calls for further attention. By commanding Horn to come and accompany her in her chamber, the lady acts as the one in power. For this reason, her bower for a while takes upon itself the function of the hall in the sense that Rymenhild appropriates for herself the role of a lord. She seems then to have at her disposal the supreme power (apparent in her freedom to invite to her bower a man she is attracted to) in the space which is characteristic for her. At this moment, the space of the bower appears to be quite independent from that of the hall which is characterized by the power of the king and her father in one person.

However, in the act of sending a messenger, gender plays its important part. If it is the lord who thus sends for a knight, his summons becomes part of the public demonstration of his power. However, the situation differs if it is the lady who performs the ritual. Here, perhaps more than a sign of her power, her obeisance to the courtly rule of sending a messenger implies turning the secret of her bower public. By sending the messenger who at the same time serves the lord, her private wish becomes part of the space of the hall and as such her passion can be held within the limits of acceptability in the public world of male power surrounding her bower.⁵²

To return back to the text itself, it is interesting to realize that first, it is the lord who invites Horn to the hall. Because of this, the contrast between the lord's and the lady's summons which follows only

⁵² However, it would be unfortunate to force such conclusion on all romance texts as there are cases in which the role of a messenger is played by a woman. For example in Chrétien's romance *Yvain* there is a character of a faithful servant Laudine who acts as a mediator between her mistress and the eponymous hero of this romance. In similar examples, one can hardly think about revealing the lady's secret in public since all too often, the opinion of the lord is not even taken into consideration. Therefore, this conclusion more applies to Middle English verse romances where it is usually a steward of the lord who thus mediates between the bower and the hall.

shortly afterwards is the more sharp the more obvious becomes the different motivation of the public and the private invitation.

The kyng com into halle
Among his knightes alle;
Forth he clupede Athelbrus,
That was stiward of his hus.
"Stiward, tak nu here
My fundlyng for to lere
Of thine mestere,
Of wude and of rivere,
And tech him to harpe
With his nayles scharpe,
Bivore me to kerve,
And of the cupe serve.
Thu tech him of alle the liste
That thu evre of wiste,
And his feiren thou wise
In to othere servise.
Horn thu undervonge
And tech him of harpe and songe."
(ll. 227-244)

(The king came into the hall among all his knights and called forth Athelbrus who was the steward of his household. "Steward, take here this foundling of mine and teach him some of your skills of hunting and fishing, teach him to harp with his sharp nails, teach him how to carve /meat/ in front of me and how to serve from the cup. Teach him all you have ever been skilled at. Instruct his companions in other service but first of all take charge of Horn and teach him to play the harp and sing.)

Here, the king demands Horn's presence in order to have him educated in the skills indispensable for a king's servant as well as for a young and promising aspirant to knighthood. Because of Horn's natural talent and modest bearing, he commands him to be introduced into the world of courtesy where Horn has yet to win a place for himself by wreathing his name with fame that can be attained in brave deeds of arms. By contrast, the enamoured Rymenhild in her bower lures Horn away from all which the hall signifies. She acts chiefly for her own benefit and her uncontrolled desire that directs her deeds is potentially dangerous not only to her own reputation but also to the hero's public growth which should, according to the rules of the knightly world, precede the marriage. If Horn accepted her without fixing his public

position in the first place, the result of his action would be shame and public rejection.⁵³

The steward whom Rymenhild chooses for her messenger seems to share the opinion of the hall since he strongly disapproves of her conduct. Asked to carry her invitation into the hall, he disobeys her orders when instead of Horn he decides to send into her bower his close friend. By means of this harmless ruse, he hopes to cool her infatuation with Horn which, as he thinks, might easily lead her to foolish deeds. He refuses to act in accordance with her will precisely because he is afraid that “heo wolde Horn misrede” (“she would badly advise him”, l. 296). The steward’s reaction makes it clear that Rymenhild’s power is merely seeming. It is still the male space of the hall which controls the entire castle, including the lady’s private chamber. This becomes even more apparent further on in the text when Horn is discovered, by workings of evil tongues, in Rymenhild’s bower. The king’s reaction then is fierce and swift:

"Awey ut," he sede, "fule theof,
Ne wurstu me nevremore leof!
Wend ut of *my bure*
With muchel messaventure.

(ll. 710-714, *italics mine*)

(“Away! Out!” he raged, “you foul thief, you are no longer dear to me! Go away from my bower with much ill luck.”)

When the king claims his possession of the bower, he does not only demonstrate his control over the space, but he at the same time seems to be referring to his own daughter for whom the space at this moment metonymically stands.

The negative reaction of Athelbrus that expresses his critical approach to Rymenhild’s command is moreover in accordance with the

⁵³ A more in-depth analysis of the destructive influence of passionate love on the public pursuits of the romance hero can be found in Joan Ferrante, “The Conflict of Lyric Conventions and Romance Form”, in *In Pursuit of Perfection – Courtly Love in Medieval Literature*, ed. Joan Ferrante and George D. Economou (Port Washington, 1975), pp. 135-177.

general misogynistic view about women in which they are seen as “dangerous material, highly inflammable, with /their/ sensuality hardly under control”.⁵⁴ Power of a woman openly shown always presents a possible threat to man’s virtue: such is the opinion the grounds of which are first to be found in Eve. Yet there is another reason for the steward to be thus cautious and that is his loyalty to his lord and king. Besides protecting Horn from being “misreden”, one should not forget that Rymenhild is the daughter of the king in whose interest it is she does not marry below her status. Therefore, by not fulfilling her orders, Athelbrus openly shows to be acting rather on behalf of his lord (who wishes to have his daughter worthily married) than Rymenhild herself.

The lady’s first summons that should allow her to be able to shape her own future thus comes out unsuccessfully. However, she does not hesitate to exercise her power once more. After she finds out to have received and made advances to the wrong person, her rage cannot be appeased in any other way but that Athelbrus would submit to her orders.

When Horn finally enters the bower, Rymenhild can hardly breathe for joy she feels. At this moment in time, her happiness is touchingly likened to the bower suddenly brightened with candlelight. The author lets us know that “of his feire sighte / al the bur gan lighte”⁵⁵ (ll. 390-39). In this example, the bower again proves to be metonymically associated with the lady herself. Like a light brought into the darkness, it is Horn’s fair semblance which pleases Rymenhild above all things.

What might seem curious is that although a lot is said about Rymenhild’s passion almost nothing is revealed about Horn’s initial

⁵⁴ Weiss, *The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance*, op. cit., p. 150. Weiss here also includes a list of the moral treatises of the time the typical feature of which is misogyny.

⁵⁵ “His fair countenance made the whole bower shine with bright light.”

inclination towards the lady.⁵⁶ It is perhaps not before he enters her bower that he starts reflecting her presence. If she was on his mind already, we were not told so although it would be much more satisfying to hear it mentioned that the knight suffers from similar symptoms typical of the incurable illness of love. However, the affection must be mutual since Horn does not reject Rymenhild's love. It is Rymenhild's proposal which he politely refuses. If Horn acted according to her wish, he would have turned into the passive object of a woman's desire – a position certainly not suitable for the one⁵⁷ who has yet to establish his position at court – or better – to regain his lost identity of the king's son. Horn, who is possibly aware of the awkwardness of the situation he found himself in, remains perfectly courteous yet he tries to set things right by claiming his unworthiness and the insufficiency of his standing when reminding her that he is so far only her father's servant: "hit nere no fair wedding/ bitwexte a thral and a king"⁵⁸ (ll. 428-429). By making it clear he has to prove worthy of her favour first,⁵⁹ he saves the face of them both and shows that he is governed by reason, in contrast to Rymenhild's blind passion.⁶⁰ Instead of acquiescing to marry her and thus satisfying her private wish he, in hope of becoming a worthy suitor, uses his visits in her bower as the means of entering the public space of the hall – the centre of knighthood. However, this is another feature of the lady's chamber we will touch upon a few moments later.

⁵⁶ In *chansons de geste* the hero who is thus actively wooed by a lady is often portrayed as entirely indifferent to her love and has to be pushed into marriage by sundry means such as gifts or blandishments. See Weiss, op. cit., p. 151.

⁵⁷ At this point, a parallel can be drawn to one of Chrétien's romances, *Erec and Enide*. Erec, once the best knight of King Arthur's court, becomes completely oblivious of his obligation to perform the deeds of courage in the service of the king when he marries the beautiful Enide. He tarries all day long in his lady's bower instead, incapable to tear away from her loveliness. In the end, it is Enide herself who has to remind her husband of his public duty. Yet by acting so, she transgresses her role of an obedient wife who should stay in the privacy of her chamber and not meddle with public affairs. She is punished for her boldness by Erec who orders her to ride side by side with him to face the adventures.

⁵⁸ "It would not be a fair wedding between the king and the servant."

⁵⁹ "Mid spere I schal furst ride / and mi knighthood prove" (*King Horn*, ll. 549-550).

⁶⁰ Such a division between reason and passion in relation to the character of a man and a woman forms the gist of the medieval understanding of male and female nature.

A similar scene of a lady summoning a hero to her bower also appears in the romance of *Sir Percyvell of Galles*, a considerably free adaptation of Chrétien's *Perceval and The Quest for the Holy Grail*. Here, the lady Lufamor desires to speak with an able yet somewhat uncouth lad Perceval after he succeeds in defeating the enemies who besieged her city for a long time.

Scho calde appon hir chaymbirlayne,
Was called hende Hatlayne -
The curtasye of Wawayne
He weldis in wane;
Scho badd hym, "Wende and see
Yif yon man on lyfe be.
Bid hym com and speke with me,
And pray hym als thou kane."

Now to pray hym als he kane,
Undir the wallis he wane;
Warly wakend he that mane:
The horse stode still.
Als it was tolde unto me,
He knelid down on his kne;
Hendely hailed he that fre,
And sone said hym till,
"My lady, lele Lufamour,
Habyddis the in hir chambour,
Prayes the, for thyn honour,
To come, yif ye will."
So kyndly takes he that kyth
That up he rose and went hym wyth,
The man that was of myche pyth
Hir prayer to fulfill.⁶¹

(She called her chamberlain whose name was Hatlaine, the courteous, for he truly did not lack the courtesy of Gawain, she bade him, "Go and see if the man yonder is alive. Bid him come and speak with me, ask him using all your skills." To ask him using all his skills, he went under the wall and there he cautiously awakened that man. The horse stood still. As I heard it tell, he knelt down on his knee and courteously greeted that noble one and told him anon, "My lady, beautiful Lufamor, expects you in her chamber and, for your great honour, prays you to come if you please." His request was so courteous that he, /Perceval/ who was so strong, rose and went with him to fulfil what he asked for.)

⁶¹ *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*, ed. Mary Flowers Braswell (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1995), ll. 1261-1284.

Here, in contrast to *King Horn*, we see a perfectly compliant chamberlain (whose courtesy equals that of Gawain) perform the ritual of invitation with solemn sobriety. Without a word of protest, he ushers the young hero to his lady's chamber where the two can talk at their leisure. What is more, here the lady's invitation into her bower is perfectly justifiable. In the castle where the lady lives there is none left alive to rule in the hall since all fell by the cursed hand of a fierce Sultan who unleashed the war for the sole purpose of marrying Lufamor. When she receives Perceval in her bower, she first and foremost seeks protection from her rebuffed, because much hated, Saracen suitor.

This example reveals that the lady can assume the role of a sovereign also because of painful necessity. Here, the invitation into the bower, by which she expresses her favour, is far from pursuing a private interest only for thus she hopes to secure her safety. Besides a husband, she is in need of a lord who would grant protection to the people that have been left without their king.⁶²

A lady left without protection is to be found in *Havelok the Dane*, a rough contemporary of *King Horn*, composed sometime in the thirteenth century. Goldeburu, the daughter of an English king, is entrusted at his deathbed into the care of a nobleman called Godrich, who swears an oath to protect her and, when she grows up, to marry her to "the beste man that micthe live / The beste, fayreste, the strangest ok"⁶³ (ll. 199-200). The choice of the right husband for Goldeburu is of particular significance since the welfare of all people is involved. Thus, her future spouse must personify all virtues a good king should possess, for by his side she will rule the land. As Godrich tastes the power, he grows more and more reluctant, though, to return the government over the country to the rightful heiress of the late king. In order to usurp the kingdom for himself, he forces Goldeburu to marry a suitor who, in his

⁶² The lady of the French romance similarly seeks protection in Perceval's chamber. Yet here Perceval also proves himself to be free from sinful thoughts when they spend the night together lying arm in arm.

⁶³ "The best man alive, the best, the strongest and also the fairest one."

opinion, is a mere parody of the one her father had wished for her. Havelok is strong indeed yet his occupation of a servant boy who helps in the kitchen is most shameful for a future spouse of a princess. What Godrich does not know, of course, is that Havelok is a banished son of the King of Denmark.

When Godrich forces the marriage upon Goldeburu he uses in his speech the crude imagery of the bower and the bed. He silences her protests by threatening her life and bluntly concludes that “tomorwe ye sholen ben weddeth / and maugre thin togidere beddeth”⁶⁴ (ll. 1128-1130). Instead of caring for a worthy suitor of the princess whose guardian he was appointed, Godrich features here as the bad lord who strives to have Goldeburu’s line defamed by evident mismarriage. As it becomes apparent, also in this case the bower can be read as a metonymy of the woman’s body. The romance of *Havelok* thus offers a complete reversal of the topos of entering the bower as described above. Godrich’s evil purpose to marry the couple against the will of them both makes him not only transgress the oath sworn to the late king, but it also violates the act of marriage itself.⁶⁵

To share her bower with Havelok may have for Goldeburu, whose expected role is to bring forth a successor, both private as well as public (disastrous) consequences. Since there is no one to protect her status, she attempts to do it herself. She claims proudly:

That hire sholde noman wedde
Ne noman bringen hire to bedde
But he were king or kinges eyr,
Were he nevere man so fayr.
(ll. 1114-1117)

(That she would not marry nor take anyone to bed, no man could be as fair unless he were a king or a king’s heir.)

⁶⁴ “Tomorrow you will be married and in spite of /your protests/ put to one bed.”

⁶⁵ Such marriage would have been considered invalid since the Catholic church generally insisted on the consent of both parties involved as well as on mutual love between the spouses. See John F. Benton, “Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love”, in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. by F. X. Newman (Albany, 1968), p. 21.

Similarly to Rymenhild, she wishes to have the question of whom she will marry firmly in her own hands. Yet unlike Rymenhild, who is motivated in summoning Horn by her private desire, Goldeburu has her responsibility to her kingdom on mind. She acts as if from the perspective of a lord, whom she – because he is missing – tries to supplant. Yet in the end – precisely because of being a woman and at the same time an object of marriage – she does not succeed and is finally given in marriage to a man she dislikes. What she does not know yet is that the hated marriage can only be to her benefit since in her husband's veins the royal blood flows, but this will be the subject of the next chapter.

The following scene which takes place in the bower not only exemplifies a typical intimate assignation between the lovers, yet it also varies the topos in an interesting way. In the following extract from *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, a knight is forbidden to marry a king's daughter whom he has loved for a long time unless he accomplishes the tasks a lord (who is hostile to their love) bids him do. The tasks are wilfully dangerous and chosen so as to become the certain doom of the knight. As expected, the knight keeps surviving and one time, after returning from a particularly trying adventure, he succeeds in entering the bower of his beloved in spite of her father's will.

Afyr sowper, as I you tell,
He wendys to chaumbyr with Cristabell,
Ther were lampus brennyng bryght.
The lady was not to hyde,
Sche sette hym on here ryght syde
And seyde, "Wellcome, syr knyght!"
"Damsell," he seyde, "so have I spedde,
With the grace of God I shall you wedde."
Thereto here trowthes they plyght.
So gracyus he con here tell
A poynt of armes that hym befell

And there he dwelled all nyght.⁶⁶

(As I tell you after supper he went with Christabel to her chamber. There were lamps burning brightly, the lady could not hide. She seated him on her right side and said, "Welcome, sir knight!" "Damsel," he replied, "thus I have sped and with the grace of God I shall wed you." And thereupon they plighted their troths. Then graciously he related to her the deeds of arms that he encountered and there he dwelled all night.)

In a beautifully evocative way, the poet first draws attention to the brightness of the whole space which allows him to shift attention elegantly to the lady whose beauty shines the more in the soothing light of the lamps.⁶⁷ She cannot hide because the light is so bright and therefore, the knight, stricken with love, can watch her at his will with a loving gaze. The lady meanwhile performs the ritual of reception. Unlike the forward Rymenhild and her kind, she shuns passionate words. She bids the knight to sit on her bed, significantly by her right side,⁶⁸ and greets the knight by welcoming him in her bower. Although not a forward heroine at first sight, in her words a certain ambiguity can be discerned, if her welcome is understood in both its spatial as well as personal meaning. Unusually, in the light of what has been said so far, it is the knight now who takes the initiative. In spite of acting against the will of the lord, not only does he use the privacy of the bower for giving vent to his feelings, but when not able to marry his beloved with her father's blessing, he pledges his troth of love in a clandestine marriage.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, ed. Harriet Hudson. Published in *Four Middle English Romances* (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1996), ll. 661-672. All other quotations refer to this edition.

⁶⁷ Marvin Alpheus Owings argues that lamps, as well as candles, were commonly used for lighting in medieval castles. See Owings, *op.cit.*, p.115.

⁶⁸ Seating is of great importace in the courtly ritual. To be seated by the right side of a lady is an expression of special honour. See David Burnley, *Courtliness and literature in Medieval England* (London: Longman), 1998, p. 57. The practice of courtly rituals inside the lady's bower testifies to this sphere of emotionality being influenced by as well as subordinated to the public one, governed by reason and rules of courtly behaviour.

⁶⁹ Although in the Middle Ages the public ceremony prevailed, clandestine marriage, surprising though it may be, "had to remain valid in order for Church marital policy to be consistent." See John H. Perry, "Opening the Secret: Marriage, Narration, and Nascent Subjectivity in Middle English Romance", *Philological Quarterly*, 76 (1997), p.139.

This example testifies to it that privacy of the bower may also allow the lovers to seal their love in the ritual of marriage, even if it be only its secret version, with God as the only witness. Such private “troth-plight”, though, usually leads in the end to its public confirmation in the wedding ceremony performed in front of the whole court assembled.

From the extracts mentioned, it can be summed up that in Middle English verse romance the act of invitation into the lady’s bower is associated rather with more practical ends, such as marriage, than with the practice of courteous love-talk as it is characteristic of the French romances. Though a private place, its independence from the public space of the hall is mostly illusive as the bower remains at all times under the control of the lord’s power. There is a direct dependence of the one space on the other. This is evident in that the knight can usually enter the bower with the permission of the lord only. The privacy of the bower presents a certain danger which lies in the threat of giving vent to the unrestricted feelings that may turn love into a base emotion. Hence, marriage as one of the rituals offered or even arranged inside the bower becomes a way of legalizing desire in that it confirms the mutual love of the knight and his lady. In general, this emphasis on marriage could be understood as one of the distinguishing features of the Middle English romance in which “extra marital love is looked upon as sinful and corruptive of social order.”⁷⁰

4.2 The bower as the means of entering the hall

As already mentioned with regard to the character of romance, it is love to a lady which spurs the knight on to prove his mettle in the world of chivalry. What has not been stressed so far is that it is also the love the lady feels for her own knight which urges her to be at his aid whenever there is need. Therefore, the knight’s visits in the bower can

⁷⁰ Reuters, op.cit., p. 37.

also help him to establish, maintain or regain his public position in the hall. As a consequence of this, the bower in such cases usually gains the characteristic of a space of safety, which might perhaps distantly echo its function as described in the Old English epic *Beowulf*.

In order to demonstrate one of the ways in which the lady can help her knight to regain his public status, I shall for a start return to the romance of *Havelok*. Here, its eponymous hero strives for regaining his lost identity of a king's son. He is not alone in his efforts as it is likewise his wife who shares the same fate of being violently bereft of the claim to the kingdom. As mentioned briefly above, the evil guardian usurps the kingdom for himself by arranging the marriage with a man quite unsuitable for a princess. However, Godrich ends up hoisted by his own petard because the marriage, by which he hoped to ruin Goldeburu's chances of ever returning to the throne, turns in the end into her own benefit. As often the story goes, this seeming churl she was given to in a much lamented marriage turns out to be an heir of the kingdom of Denmark.

Havelok is an unusual romance in many ways. Besides its peculiar concern with practical, even down-to-earth things which may betray its middle-class audience, the hero's self-recognition is not so much achieved through the public feats of arms, as would be expected, as in the privacy of the bower. The following extract takes place in the chamber where the newly-wed lie. Havelok is fast asleep while Goldeburu bitterly regrets the injustice she suffers. Suddenly, her husband's true origin is revealed to her.

On the nith als Goldeboru lay,
Sory and sorwful was she ay,
For she wende she were biswike,
That she were yeven unkyndelike.
O nith saw she therinne a lith,
A swithe fayr, a swithe bryth -
Al so brith, all so shir
So it were a blase of fir.
She lokede noth and ek south,
And saw it comen ut of his mouth
That lay bi hire in the bed.

No ferlike thou she were adred!
 Thouthe she, "What may this bimene?
 He beth heyman yet, als I wene:
 He beth heyman er he be ded!"
 On hise shuldre, of gold red
 She saw a swithe noble croiz;
 Of an angel she herde a voyz:

"Goldeboru, lat thi sorwe be!
 For Havelok, that haveth spuset thee,
 He, kinges sone and kinges eyr,
 That bikenneth that croiz so fayr
 It bikenneth more - that he shal
 Denemark haven and Englonde al.
 He shal ben king strong and stark,
 Of Englonde and Denemark -
 That shal thu wit thin eyne seen,
 And tho shalt quen and levedi ben!"

Thanne she havede herd the stevene
 Of the angel uth of hevene,
 She was so fele sithes blithe
 That she ne mithe hire joie mythe,
 But Havelok sone anon she kiste,
 And he slep and nouth ne wiste
 Hwat that aungel havede seyd.

(ll. 1248-1283)

(During the night as Goldeburu lay in bed, sorry and sad she was ever for she thought she was betrayed when she was thus married below her status. Yet that night she saw a light inside, very bright and so shining as if it were a blaze of fire. She looked north and also south and saw it coming out of the mouth of the one who lay next to her in the bed. No wonder she was afraid! She thought, "What can this mean? By my troth, he is noble yet, he is noble ere he is dead!" On his shoulder she saw a very noble cross of red gold /and suddenly/ she heard the voice of an angel say, "Goldeburu, let your sorrow be! For Havelok who is espoused to you is a king's son and a king's heir – for this is what that fair cross betokens. Yet it means even more – he shall rule all Denmark and all England as well. He will be a strong and steadfast king of all England and Denmark – this you will see with your own eyes, and you will become a queen and a lady!" When she had heard this voice of the angel from heaven, she was so many times over glad that she could not hide her joy and presently she kissed Havelok but he slept and knew nothing of what the angel had said.)

Though Judith Weiss has argued for Goldeburu's character being bereft of some of its importance in this Middle English rendering of

Anglo-Norman source,⁷¹ she still retains a significant, one could almost say a crucial, role in the quoted scene where Havelok's identity is first revealed. Since married against her will to a man seemingly far below her status she refuses to accept Havelok as a husband which results in that his presence in her bower is merely suffered. By acting thus, she, a royal daughter, strives not to let her bloodline be defamed by the union with such a low-born knave as Havelok seems to be. Her attitude changes only when she realizes, with the help of God's signs, to have been married to a son of the king.

A brief comparison with the romance of *Sir Perceval of Galles* might help to emphasize the unusual nature of the crucial scene in which Havelok's origin is revealed. *Sir Perceval* shares with *Havelok* the theme of a lost identity that has to be regained. Similarly to Havelok, who is bereft of his royal origin and ends up as a mere servant of a cook, Perceval knows nothing of the knightly world of courtesy. Raised as he was in the forest by his mother in order to remain ignorant of the lures and dangers of chivalry, Perceval breaks free one day from the care of his mother in order to follow the pricking urge of becoming a knight. In quite an uncouth manner, he rushes inside the hall where King Arthur is seated and without further ado demands to be dubbed knight. King Arthur, the highest instance of the world of chivalry, preserves his calmness and courtesy in spite of the brazen nature of the lad's conduct. The reason for this benevolence is that he is able to recognize in his features those of a late knight of his whom he dearly loved. Thus the King assumes that it must be the dead knight's son who stands before him and, therefore, accepts Perceval into his service. The rash young lad successfully passes all adventures that await him and finally is – as he has long wished to be – knighted in the great hall by King Arthur himself. However, Perceval becomes a true member of knightly society only when the King Arthur himself, as part of the ceremony, bestows on

⁷¹ Judith Weiss, "Structure and Characterisation in *Havelok the Dane*", *Speculum*, 44 (1969), p. 254.

Perceval the lost name of his father. Only when his name is restored to him, is he also able to gain the public status of a knight.

In *Perceval of Galles*, the lost identity of the knight is won by brave deeds and is achieved solely in public. On the contrary, in *Havelok* it is first lady Goldeburu who, by means of interpreting the signs of his nobility, restores the public identity to her husband. All happens, quite unusually, off the public space of the hall – in the privacy of the bower. In the scene which strongly reminds one of the Annunciation, it is the angel who confirms Havelok's noble descent. Goldeburu, pleased beyond compare, gives a belated consent to their marriage which she seals by a kiss bestowed upon sleeping Havelok. At this very moment, it is the lady instead of a lord, who, by accepting Havelok as her equal (royal) partner, thus returns to him his lost identity, though only in private. The question why Goldeburu is playing such a privileged role might perhaps be explained as follows. Goldeburu as a royal daughter substitutes in the story for a just and honourable lord who is otherwise painfully missing: as fortune has it, the only paragons of the kingly virtues – Havelok's and Goldeburu's fathers – had died a long time ago and were both succeeded by a bad lord incarnate. Therefore, it befalls to her who, though deposed, still retains an air of a king's daughter and an heiress to the throne, to restore to Havelok his long denied noble origin.

Yet her role does not end with accepting Havelok as her lord and spouse. As a deposed princess and a woman she has only little influence outside her bower, though. Therefore, after their relationship is thus established in the secrecy of their bower, she supports and urges Havelok to pursue his lost identity also in public. She knows too well that only through him her own status will be secured and publicly acknowledged. Simultaneously with Goldeburu listening to the angel, Havelok is having a dream in which he becomes aware of his fated role of a Danish king with Goldeburu by his side as his queen. After he wakes up, Goldeburu – now his loving wife – helps to interpret his

dream and encourages him to follow his destiny (ll. 1315-1335) and thus further strengthens her importance for the future course of events.

The second revelation of Havelok's origin takes place in Denmark. Here he meets with Ubbe, a Danish earl, who offers him hospitality in his own house. As a consequence of Goldeburu having been nearly attacked by a crowd of ruffians of Ubbe's household, the earl offers them shelter in a bower whose absolute safety is guaranteed by its position right next to his own chamber. There again Ubbe witnesses an unnatural light brighter than daylight that comes out of Havelok's mouth as a sign of his noble origin.

He calde bothe arwe men and kene,
Knithes and serganz swithe sleie,
Mo than an hundred, withuten leye,
And bad hem alle comen and se
Hwat that selcuth mithe be.
Als the knithes were comen alle,
Ther Havelok lay ut of the halle...
(ll. 2115-2121)

(He called both the shy men and the bold ones, knights and very sly servants, more than a hundred without a lie, and bade them all come and see what this miracle may be. The knights all came where Havelok lay outside the hall...)

This time, it is to the public eye that his noble origin is revealed and, just like before, it happens in the bower without any effort on Havelok's part whatsoever. Just like before, he is not even aware of the public disclosure of his nobility since he is fast asleep in the arms of his fair wife. His origin is revealed indirectly and made known only when, figuratively speaking, the hall enters the bower. Ubbe and the summoned men of his court need to intrude the privacy of their chamber in order to see the secret signs of his lordship – the light which by God's mercy comes out of his mouth and a mark in the shape of a cross on his shoulder. When peering inside, they in a slightly voyeuristic manner witness the intimate scene of the royal couple resting together in bed which might easily remind us of the image created by the Old English word "healsgebedda" developed into a full scene.

And Havelok lay on his lift side,
In his armes his brithe bride:
Bi the pappes he leyen naked -
So faire two weren nevere maked
In a bed to lyen samen.
The knithes thouth of hem god gamen,
Hem for to shewe and loken to.
(ll. 2130-2136)

(Havelok lay on his left side embracing his radiant bride in his arms. Both were naked to the waist – such a beautiful couple was never made to lie together in bed. The knights thought it to be a good sport to look at them and see them thus.)

Havelok's noble bearing has been thus acknowledged by all the knights assembled, what is more, it is also his union with Goldeburu which is publicly confirmed by their prying gaze. Thus the public legitimacy of their marriage ceremony, up to this moment questionable because forced against the will of both parties, is finally validated.

However, such an importance of the bower in the process of the knight achieving (or regaining) his public status is not to be met in Middle English romance on a regular basis. In most romances, the knight usually does not achieve his public status through marriage itself. It is rather his hope of marrying the fair lady which motivates the knight in winning public merit which would allow him to claim her hand.

It is *King Horn* next I would like to return to. In the outline of its plot, Horn's public achievements go hand in hand with his relationship with Rymenhild being gradually revealed and confirmed in public. According to Perry, *King Horn* "presents marriage as the means through which its hero gains access to knighthood and ultimately regains a public persona that is consonant with the "true self".⁷² In my reading, marriage symbolizes for Horn first of all the impetus as well as the goal which inspires him to resume his lost place in the world of chivalry.

As seen in the previous example, entering the bower can grant the hero his place in the hall. In *King Horn*, the circumstances which

⁷² Perry, op.cit., p. 146.

lead to the hero achieving his kingship are in many ways different from those in *Havelok*. As has been already pointed out, Horn refuses to marry Rymenhild until he proves his valour and wins his lost kingdom back. Although he feels pity for the hopelessly enamoured Rymenhild, he cannot accept her proposal. Since he is still a mere servant, he does not want to expose her to the public shame caused by her marriage to him. There is only one way Rymenhild may aid him to become worthy of her hand, and that is to allow him to enter the world of knighthood. Thus Horn asks the crying Rymenhild:

Help me to knighte
Bi all thin mighte,
To my lord the king
That he me yive dubbing.
Thanne is mi thralhod
I went in to knighthod.
(ll. 440-444)

(By all your might help me to become a knight, /help me/ that my lord the king would dub me knight. Then my serfdom will be turned into a knighthood.)

Rymenhild would do anything in the name of her love and so, as soon as she comes around from a swoon, she does not hesitate to intervene on his behalf. Yet just like before in her summons of Horn, her power proves limited and restricted solely to the space of her bower. As she is not allowed to plead for Horn herself she once more has to rely on Athelbrus, the steward, to convey her plea to the hearing of the king in the hall. At this point the ritual character of a strictly hierarchical knightly society draws attention to itself. First the lady as its less privileged member sends Horn to carry her plea to the steward whose position at court is higher than his. Only then Athelbrus intercedes on Horn's behalf in front of the king. Moreover, the steward has to be bribed in order to make sure her plea would be granted a favourable answer.

Horn," quath heo, "wel sone
That schal beon idone.
Thu schalt beo dubbed knight
Are come seve night.
Have her this cuppe

And this ryng ther uppe
 To Aylbrus the stuard,
 And se he holde foreward.
 Seie ich him biseche,
 With loveliche speche,
 That he adun falle
 Bifore the king in halle,
 And bidde the king arighte
 Dubbe thee to knichte.
 With selver and with golde
 Hit wurth him wel iyolde.
 (ll. 450-465)

("Horn," she said, "this shall be done presently. Before seven days pass, you will be dubbed knight. Bring now this cup together with this ring to Athelbrus, the steward, and see to it that he keeps the agreement. Tell him that I beseech him with fair speech that he falls down in front of the king in the hall and asks him to dub you knight immediately. I will repay him for this deed with silver and gold.")

Although she thus makes way free for Horn's knightly pursuits, Rymenhild's reasons for aiding her knight have not changed, though. She does not help because she, like Goldeburu, would desire a husband more worthy of her standing; she rather gratifies his wish for the sole purpose of quickening their marriage. Concerning Rymenhild's character, Felicity Riddy points out: "Rymenhild does not envisage the world outside the 'bur', or recognize that there are things Horn has to achieve in the public world, such as status, esteem and the source of livelihood, before he can take a wife."⁷³ According to Riddy, her behaviour makes it clear she does not belong to the rational, male space of the hall, but to the sphere of emotionality and feelings.⁷⁴ This is also most likely the cause why her communication with the male-dominated space of the hall has to always happen indirectly, via a go-between.

Rymenhild's role of a lady who aids her knight in his public pursuits is not as clear-cut, though. Again, as can be easily guessed, it is her passionate, hardly controllable love which is to be held responsible. On the one hand, she helps Horn to be knighted, but on the other hand,

⁷³ Felicity, Riddy "Middle English romance: family, marriage, intimacy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Marriage*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge, 2000), p. 240.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. the same.

her bower stands for a space which at the same time potentially endangers his public achievements. As soon as he is knighted, Rymenhild demands to get married even though Horn has not yet won his fame in a battle. When Horn is summoned to her presence before he leaves her for heroic pursuits, he does not dare to enter her chamber (which, as he knows, is brimming with emotions) alone. Since he “*noelde nocht go one*” (ll.533) he takes his fellow with him in order to resist her imploring the better. His priorities are for the time being clear and his answer to Rymenhild’s second proposal resolute:

"Rymenhild," quath he, "beo stille!
Ich wulle don al thi wille,
Also hit mot bitide.
Mid spere I schal furst ride,
And mi knighthod prove,
Ar ich thee ginne to woghe.
We beth knightes yonge,
Of o dai al isprunge;
And of ure mestere
So is the manere:
With sume othere knighte
Wel for his lemman fighte
Or he eni wif take;
(ll. 546-558)

(Rymenhild, he said, be quiet! I will do whatever you command but only when the time is ripe. With spear I will first ride and thus I will prove my knighthood before I start to woo you. We are young knights sprung up of one day. The manner of our mastery is such: to fight in the lady’s name with some other knight before he /= a knight/ can take any wife.)

Rymenhild cannot delay Horn in her bower any longer or make him marry her since his mind is firmly set on proving his knighthood first. Only when his public status is established he can take the active part in wooing Rymenhild himself. The practise of chivalry, moreover, enables Horn to achieve a more honourable position for himself when summoned into her bower. Apart from the conversation which has love for its theme, he can act now like a true knight and give her an account

of his heroic exploits. By means of his outstanding bravery, he is able to turn into an apt suitor of a royal daughter.

Sometimes, it may be the lady herself who inside the bower tries to introduce her beloved into knighthood. This is the case with *The Squire of Low Degree*, a romance preserved in a sixteenth century manuscript (yet perhaps already written a century earlier) which is also known under the title *Undo Your Door*. Here, it is the hero for a change whom we first learn of as being desperately in love with the daughter of the king of Hungary. In spite of his low standing which is the only impediment to their mutual happiness, the lady gladly grants him her love. Yet unlike Rymenhild, who strives to have Horn solely for herself, here the heroine in her bower – aware of the public importance of the knightly pursuits – bids the hero to depart from her and accomplish heroic deeds in the name of her love. Not only does she describe in great detail how he should become a suitor worthy of her noble descent, but she goes as far as to giving him money for his exploits.

I shall you geve to your rydinge
A thousande ponde to your spendinge;
I shall you geve hors and armure,
A thousande ponde of my treasure,
Where through that ye may honoure wynn
And be the greatest of your kynne.
I pray to God and Our Lady
Sende you the whele of vycory,
That my father so fayne may be
That he wyll wede me unto thee,
And make thee king of this countré,
To have and holde in honesté,
Wyth welth and wyne to were the crowne,
And to be lorde of toure and towne.⁷⁵

(I will give you a thousand pounds to spend on your journey, I will give you a horse and armour, a thousand pounds of my treasure in order that you may gain honour and become the greatest of your kin. I pray to God and Our Lady to send you the laurel of victory so that it would please my father so much that he would marry me to you and make you the king of this country to wear the crown with wealth and prosperity and to be the lord of tower and town.)

⁷⁵ The romance of *The Squire of Low Degree* quoted here and subsequently from *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald Sands (Exeter, 1986), ll. 251-264.

What is even more striking (for it is quite unusual) is that the king himself does not perceive Squire's low standing as an obstacle to their marriage. On the contrary, in quite an "unknightly" manner, he sees the marriage to his daughter as the means through which the Squire may obtain public status. Moreover, he values more the moral flawlessness of the Squire than his knightly pursuits.

But yf he myght that lady wyne
In wedlocke to welde, withouten synne,
And yf she assent him tyll,
The squyer is worthy to have none yll,
For I have sene that many a page
Have become men by mariage.
(ll. 369-374)

(But if he, without sin, might win this lady in order to possess her in wedlock and if she gives her assent, the Squire deserves no ill, for I have seen many a page turn into a man through marriage.)

The lady is unaware of her father's affection for the man she loves. She differs from Rymenhild in that she understands exactly how important the knight's status of her future husband is and, therefore, she assumes in her bower the role of a sovereign.⁷⁶ It is with regard to the space of the hall as the centre of power and knightly rituals that the lady wishes to make their love acceptable in public. By controlling her feelings in such a way that it is herself who suggests their parting, the lady resists to be merely confined into the sphere of feelings. Although she operates within the walls of the space appointed to her – the bower – she shows a surprisingly high level of knowledge of the rules and customs typical of the knightly world. This becomes apparent when she

⁷⁶ A lady who assumes a superior position to the knight is one of the distinctive features of courtly love. The lady's suzerainty has its roots in the tradition of the Provençal troubadour poetry where she is often addressed by her lover as "midons", that is "my lord". (See C. S. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p.2.) Knight, who sees his lady as his sovereign, is obliged to obey her every wish, even if it is at the cost of his honour in the world of chivalry. Thus, Queen Guinevere, a typical example of such a lady, orders Lancelot to lose the tournament for her sake. Total submission of a knight to a lady may easily become the pitfall of courtly manners. If the lady disguises herself for a temptress, she may misuse the rules of courtly love for her own, not entirely innocent purposes. Moreover, the absolute service to a lady may imply the betrayal of the knight's lord, as is the case with adulterous love of Lancelot and Guinevere.

at great length starts giving examples of what the adventures of a perfect knight should be, including his journey to Jerusalem (ll. 171-278). Her initiative reveals that she imagines what the expected reaction of the king would be, and acts according to what she believes to be the rules of the courtly world.

However, in spite of her attempt to step into the lord's shoes for a while in order to make their love acceptable by trying to enhance the public status of her suitor, it proves in the end that it is in the hall and only with the king's permission that the Squire can act according to the lady's command in order to win her for his wife.

"Thou shalt have good leve to go.
I shall thee gyve both golde and fee,
And strength of men to wende with thee.
If thou be true in worde and dede,
I shall thee helpe in all thy nede."
(ll. 480-484)

(You shall have a good leave to go – I will give you gold and fee and /a company/ of strong men to go with you. If you are true in word and deed, I will help you whenever you need.)

Just like his daughter before, it is the king now who publicly grants to the Squire his wealth and support. As later the story itself will reveal, the role of the king finally proves to be the most important since he seems to wield the power to shape the fate of all protagonists.⁷⁷

From the above, it is clear that the bower once more proves to be a space of emotion where love is discussed and pledged. What is more, through its emotionality practical aims can also be pursued that extend into the public sphere of courtly life. Albeit mostly in an indirect way, since her power is restricted by the narrow walls of her bower, the lady is more or less successful in contributing to the public acknowledgement of her knight which allows him to become a worthy suitor of a royal daughter.

⁷⁷ For further discussion of the supreme role of the king in the plot of *The Squire of Low Degree*, see Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as a Voyeur*, op. cit., p. 191.

There is another facet of the bower topos, though, in which the lady's aid to the knight is utterly indispensable for his future existence: and this is when the bower becomes a space of healing. No other place in the castle seems more suitable for such a task. Far from the perils of the outside world as well as the bustle of the hall, it is the loving care of the lady inside the bower that rouses the knight into new life. The bower in such scenes signifies an enclosed space of safety which offers refuge to the knight until he is healed of his wounds and prepared to re-enter the hall. The characteristic feature of this motif is, however, that it happens, like so many things that concern the bower, at the direct behest of the lord.

The following extract from *Sir Eglamour of Artois* might serve as a typical example of the romance topos of a lady who in her bower attends to the bleeding wounds of an injured knight:

There sche saves hym fro the deed,
With here handys sche helys hys heed
A twelfmonyth in hyr bowre.

(ll. 757-759)

(There she saves him from death; with her own hands she has been healing his head for a year in her bower.)

It should be added that one of the significant features of the topos of healing is that it often overlaps with an act of gratitude. For example, in the quoted passage, it is in the king's interest to secure for the knight the best care possible since he is deeply indebted to him for saving the country from a fierce dragon.

Yet as the theme itself suggests, the strongest appeal of such scenes lies in the tenderness with which they usually resonate. In *Bevis of Hampton* Josiane cures Bevis of his wounds by means of healing baths (ll. 731-732). As noted before, all happens at the lord's request who, with great anxiety, entreats his daughter to save the young Christian from almost certain death:

"I nolde, Beves, that thow ded wore
For al the londes, that ichave;
Ich praie, doughter, that thow him save
And prove to hele, ase thow can,
The wondes of that doughti man!"

(ll. 726-730)

("Bevis, for all the lands that I own I will not let you die." "I pray you, daughter, save him and heal – as /best/ you can – the wounds of that doughty man.")

This time, however, it is not only in the lord's interest to have the knight restored to life. Bevis, who is the knight Josiane loves with all her might, is virtually reborn in her bower through the power of her immense love.⁷⁸ Perhaps one could argue that in this context the lady's bower comes close to the notion of the womb. The enclosed character of the space together with its impenetrable safety only supports the idea. In case of *Bevis*, the fluidity of the bath which restores the knight to new life only enhances this interpretation in that it further underscores the feminine character of the space. Moreover, such meaning of the word "bower" is common in the religious texts where it is used when referring to Virgin Mary's womb or body.⁷⁹ The topos of the bower as a space of healing then can be taken for another example in which the space comes close to the notion of woman's body.

4. 3 The bower and the ring

Another significant facet of the bower topos is associated with the scenes in which a knight takes leave of his lady before he sets off to perform the deeds of courage in the world of adventure. He seeks her company in her bower to bid her his final farewell and there he wishes to

⁷⁸ At this point it should be reminded that the power of miraculous healing is one of the typical features of the *belle Sarrasine*, the popular character in *chansons de geste* on which Josiane might be partly modeled.

⁷⁹ *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Sherman Kuhn, John Reidy (Michigan, 1970), p. 1096.

rejoice in her grace⁸⁰ and beauty so as to imprint her image into his heart before combats and perilous ensnares will become his daily bread.

Although the lovers themselves must part, the knight carries his lady's love with him at all times. Not only does he treasure it in his heart, but the lady may also bestow a token upon her beloved knight⁸¹ as a symbol of her affection.⁸² Since love is in its very nature inseparable from a wish of prosperity, on the one hand, a token inspires a knight to perform valiant deeds on his lady's behalf, on the other hand, it is often endowed with magic power to protect its bearer.⁸³

Thus Rymenhild gives Horn her ring which has her name engraved on it. As the story often goes, it proves immensely useful at times of dire need. As soon as he looks at her token and thinks of his lady, he feels imbued with fresh strength and courage:

He lokede on the ringe,
And thoghte on Rimenilde;
He slogh ther on haste
On hundred /Saracens/ bi the laste.
(ll. 618-621)

(He looked at the ring and thought of Rymenhild. And quickly he slew there at least one hundred Saracens.)

In the form of a token, the protective power of the lady's love accompanies the knight on his adventures. In a figurative sense, it could

⁸⁰ It is true, though, that grace does not so much apply to Rymenhild or other wooing, over-passionate women whose dignity is sometimes at stake. See below.

⁸¹ For more thorough discussion of the romance motif of tokens, see Richard F. Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Pennsylvania, 1999), pp. 264-82.

⁸² Objects suitable to be given as a pledge of love are mainly rings (in Middle English romances, the magic ring plays an important role, for example, in *Floris and Blancheflower*), however, other objects can be given such as dogs with magic bells (in Godfried von Strassbourg's *Tristan and Isolde*) or girdles (the notorious token in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*).

⁸³ The function of magic in relation to the tokens poses an interesting question. Helen Cooper justly remarks that the romance writers often use magic in significantly "non-magic" ways. That is, in *King Horn*, the magic power of the ring "is activated" only when the hero thinks of his beloved at the same time. In other romances, the apparent magic of a token is there rather to test the qualities of the heroes than for any other reason. See Helen Cooper, "The Supernatural", in *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 290-291.

be argued that by giving a knight a token of her love, the lady may be seen as transgressing the walls of her bower. In other words, love, responsible for most of the romance action, symbolically endows the ring with power to link the space of the outer world of adventure with that of the bower in which the knight strives to secure a legitimate place for himself by means of chivalry. Similarly to a messenger mediating between the hall and the bower, the ring presents a specifically female means of communication between the male space of chivalry and the female space of emotionality.

With the aid of the ring, the plot comes full circle in the end when, in the reunion of the lovers, these two disparate spaces coalesce in harmony. It is particularly in the scenes of recognition that a token plays its crucial part.⁸⁴ Bestowed in the bower, a token allows the knight to resume his place in it after long years of absence for it is often precisely through this symbol of the lady's love that the identity of the knight is confirmed.⁸⁵ Such is the case with Horn who, after he returns from his exploits, has to save Rymenhild from being married against her will. Disguised as a pilgrim, he throws the ring given to him by Rymenhild into her drinking horn (a pun on his name), which sets off a chain of events that lead to their reunion and, finally, to the desired public confirmation of their private "troth-plaint".

⁸⁴ Such function of a ring that allows the recognition between the two parted lovers is, besides *King Horn*, also common in the Middle English rendering of Chrétien's romance called *Ywain and Gawain* or in *Sir Percyvel of Galles*, where it significantly contributes to the reunion of the mother and son. More on the function of the token of recognition can be found in Ad Putter, "Story Line and Story Shape in *Sir Percyvell of Gales* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*," in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England – Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester, 2004), pp. 171-196.

⁸⁵ More detailed discussion of the significance of the token in relation to Horn's and Rymenhild's marriage can be found in John H. Perry, op.cit., p. 143.

4. 4 The bower as a space of danger

4.4.1 Danger in entering the bower

On the one hand, it is correct to assume that the lady's bower "closes round the dialogues of lovers like a protective shell."⁸⁶ On the other hand, the notion of its safety may often prove misleading. When drawing the attention back to the "bur" which plays such an unfortunate part in the Old English story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, the romance bower may, in a similarly unexpected and malicious manner, be penetrated by a hostile force from the outside. Yet while in the case of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the focus was shifted to the abrupt as well as unfair nature of the attack itself, romance, by contrast, stresses the consequences such a penetration has for the secret love nourished inside the bower. The privacy of the bower is usually breached according to the following scenario. It is usually the evil tongue of a rejected suitor that bears responsibility for the breach of the privacy of the bower. Driven by blind jealousy, he betrays to the lord his daughter's secret love and, as soon as the lovers are disclosed in the bower embracing, the king punishes them by banishing the knight from his realm. Such a demonstration of the king's power makes it well apparent in what position the bower is in relation to the hall: while the lady may leave her bower almost only indirectly, via a go-between, the penetrability of the bower by the public space of the male control is, by contrast, absolute. The reason for this must be sought in the character of the bower itself. From the point of view of the hall, its emotionality as well as its privacy gives it the air of a hardly predictable space which needs, therefore, to be controlled and well guarded.⁸⁷

The Squire of Low Degree is a romance in which danger inherent in entering the lady's bower forms a crucial part of its plot. Here, the

⁸⁶ Reuters, op.cit., p. 19.

⁸⁷ The bower as a space to be protected by the hall where reason prevails reflects the medieval attitude to women that are viewed as being governed by their passion.

bower utterly loses its attribute of safety since it can be penetrated both indirectly – by being spied upon – as well as directly – by being attacked. The romance begins with the scene in which the hero, seriously love-stricken, longingly gazes up into the open windows of an oriel which belongs to the bower where his lovely lady tarries. An amorous conversation ensues in which the lady's superior role⁸⁸ is further emphasized by the position assumed by the two; she addresses the squire from her window while he remains kneeling in the garden below. The lady finally grants her love to the blissful Squire yet she warns him to beware of the treacherous steward:

Beware of the stewarde, I you praye,
He wyll deceyve you and he maye.
For, if he wote of your woyng,
He wyl bewraye you unto the kyng.
Anone for me ye shall be take,
And put in pryson for my sake.
(ll. 161-166)

(Beware of the steward I pray you! He will deceive you if he wants to do so. For if he knew about your wooing, he would have betrayed you to the king. Then because of me you would be immediately seized and imprisoned.)

Just like treacherous Fikenhild in the romance of *King Horn*, the steward, who secretly loves the princess himself, represents the typical romance character of a rejected suitor and “wicked tongue” in one person. After having spied on the lovers, he fulfils his expected role when he makes haste to give the king his false report of what he has just overheard.

And thus they talked bothe in fere,
And I drewe me nere and nere.
Had I not come in, verayly,
The squyer had layne her by.
But whan he was ware of me
Full fast away can he fle.
(ll. 347 – 352)

⁸⁸ See note 76 on p. 44.

(And thus they talked together and I drew nearer and nearer. Had I not come inside then truly, the Squire would have laid with her. But as soon as he became aware of me, he flew quickly away.)

In spite of the steward's treacherous speech which describes the supposed encounter of the lovers in the bower as almost ending up in sinful embraces, the reaction of the king is unexpectedly benevolent. It is the king's dignified demeanor that clearly distinguishes him from other kings of the genre. Moreover, his behaviour shows that he relies solely on his own judgement. Thus his only precaution in this matter is to find out, with the "help" of the steward, whether the Squire's intentions towards his daughter are as chaste as he believes them to be. With regard to the future course of events (which space does not permit me to describe here) it is even possible that the steward is the one who is really tested here.⁸⁹ As bidden, with his company of armed men he waits in the vicinity of the lady's bower⁹⁰ and watches for the Squire to come. However, his jealousy blinds his reason to such an extent that he completely disobeys the king's order. Instead of waiting for the future course of events, he attacks the Squire before he is even able to reach the door of the bower. By his malevolent behaviour, the steward proves to be a bad servant to his lord. From the fierce buffet which ensues, the Squire desperately seeks delivery in his lady's bower. In the direst of needs whilst standing at her threshold, he beseeches her to "undo her door" in an impressive ballad-like speech:

Whan that he came her chambre to,
Anone he sayde: "Your dore undo!
Undo," he sayde, "nowe, fayre lady!
I am beset with many a spy.
Lady as whyte as whales bone,
There are thyrti agaynst me one.
Undo thy dore, my worthy wyfe,
I am besette with many a knyfe.
Undo your dore, my lady swete,
I am beset with enemyes great;

⁸⁹ Spearing, *Medieval Poet as a Voyeur*, op. cit., p. 186.

⁹⁰ The location of the lady's bower in the romance is not altogether clear. What can be deduced from the text is that it must have a private entrance opening into the garden which makes it possible for the steward to ambush it thus easily.

And, lady, but ye wyll aryse,
I shall be dead with myne enemyes.
Undo thy dore, my frely floure,
For ye are myne, and I am your."
(ll. 535-546)

(As soon as he came to her chamber he immediately said, "Open your door! Fair lady, open it now! I am surrounded by many a spy. Lady as white as whalebone, there are thirty against me alone. Open your door, my worthy wife. I am surrounded by many a knife. Open your door, my lady sweet, I am surrounded by my worst enemies. Lady, unless you rise, I shall be dead by the hand of my foes. Open your door, my lovely flower, for you are mine and I am yours.")

Although he addresses his lady in fear for his life, in his desperate words the beauty of the love lyrics shines through. In their anxiety mingled with fear, his words reflect the bower on the one hand as somewhere he instinctively seeks salvation, yet on the other hand, the bower never ceases to be a place dedicated to love where the lover seeks his lady's grace.

The tension in this passage is further prolonged when the lady at first fails to recognize her beloved and leaves her door fastened. Only the second time he pleads does she finally open to let him in. However, the Squire is able to enjoy its safety only for a fleeting moment which lasts precisely long enough to enable the lady to exhort the Squire once more to gain renown for the sake of her love. Then the steward succeeds in breaking in and their conversation is hence forcibly ended.

Without becoming further entangled in the complexities of this not entirely clear and undeniably bizarre plot, I shall conclude by saying that not only is the planned visit of the lady's bower the cause of the hero being attacked and almost murdered, but the space also fails to offer the safety sought inside. The unusual lyrical beauty of the passage in which the knight pleads his lady's acceptance calls for acknowledging the artistic skill of its author. The fact that this bower scene must have left a strong impression on its medieval audience is clear from its alternative title, *Undo Your Door*, which further testifies to the bower being viewed as standing at the very centre of all action.

The lady's bower spied and consecutively penetrated by the hall also features in *King Horn*. Here, the lovelorn suitor of Rymenhild named Fikenhild⁹¹ poisons the mind of the king by pouring into his ear the following words of hatred against Horn:

Aylmar, ich thee warne
Horn thee wule berne:
Ich herde whar he sede,
And his swerd forth leide,
To bringe thee of lyve,
And take Rymenhild to wyve.
He lith in bure
Under coverture
By Rymenhild thi doghter,
And so he doth wel ofte.
And thider thu go al right,
Ther thu him finde might.
(ll. 695-706)

("Ailmar, I warn you, Horn intends to kill you. I heard him saying – and meanwhile drawing his sword – that he will bereave you of your life and take Rymenhild for his wife. He is lying in the bower under the coverlet with Rymenhild your daughter. And he does so very often. If you go there straightaway you may find him there.")

When the couple is shortly afterwards found in bed, their secret love is viewed as equal to treason since it has been consummated without the blessing of the hall.⁹² The king's anger is all the greater since the wicked Fikenhild makes the king believe that Horn aims at bereaving him of his life as well as his kingdom. According to Fikenhild's distorted interpretation, the lady's bower becomes the place where Horn's treason begins. As soon as this space is "conquered", nothing may stop Horn from also assaulting the king's hall. The central idea with which Fikenhild manipulates the king is again that of the bower merging with the woman's body, more specifically her womb. What Fikenhild's speech implies is that Rymenhild, the king's daughter, may, through her encounters with Horn, beget a successor to the throne

⁹¹ His name is a descriptive one that immediately refers to his fickle nature. (ME "fikel" = fickle).

⁹² Although not in public, their love has been sealed before in the privacy of the bower in a clandestine troth-plight (ll. 679).

who might pose a serious danger to the present king. Thus, once more, the bower is presented as a space through which the knight can enter the hall, yet this time for an allegedly evil purpose.

King Horn thus makes it clear that the bower can be viewed as a dangerous space in more ways than one. The space itself not only proves to be unable to protect the secret lovers, but, from the view-point of the hall, the secret penetration of the bower by a knight may also threaten the king's position since it may lead to treason which would in turn end in the lord's downfall.

Such a threat of treason becomes reality in the romance of *Bevis of Hampton*, however, the circumstances which lead to it differ considerably. Here, the evil emanates directly from inside the bower itself since, in its secrecy, it is the lady now who contrives a murderous plot which aims to bereave her husband, the king, of his life.

In *Bevis of Hampton*, the luscious mother of the young prince Bev lives in a sore hatred of her much older husband, the king. The cause of her displeasure can be summed up in few lines:

"Me lord is olde and may nought werche,
Al dai him is lever at cherche,
Than in me bour.
(ll. 58-60)

(My lord is old and cannot work. It pleases him better to be all day in church than in my bower.)

With regard to the connotations which the above-mentioned Old English word "healsgebedda" has in relation to the meaning of the word "spouse", the bower, like the Old English "būr", plays the role here of a space of marital affection in which love between the married couple should be also consummated.⁹³ However, it is not the marital love that

⁹³ The response of the medieval theologians to the question of marital sex was in the majority of cases rather negative, that is, the act of intercourse between spouses was looked upon as a necessary evil justifiable solely by it leading to procreation. However, there were some, among them especially those of Hugh of St. Victor or Bernardus Silvestris, who argued that sexuality was a natural (even beneficial) part of marriage. However, it is always the spiritual bond of love between spouses which is preferable to carnal love. See Eric Kooper, "Loving the Unequal Equal: Medieval Theologians and Marital Affection", in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex &*

this episode focuses on. On the contrary, it is the passion⁹⁴ in a woman depicted as dangerous as well as potentially destructive which is in the foreground of the episode. There is perhaps little need to stress that the word “bower” is used in this example in its meaning of the womb once more. Since it is the lustful woman speaking, the sexual connotations of the “bower” are here far more explicit than in the previous cases where such an undertone could be discerned. For this reason, here this word already seems to resonate with its somewhat debased meaning which was to become common in sixteenth-century colloquial English and popular, bawdy ballads in which the bower, “strongly associated with femininity, and the normal setting for sexual relations, licit or illicit, is beginning to acquire a colloquial sense of a woman’s private parts or virginity”.⁹⁵

To return to the example quoted, the lady’s speech is significantly based on the opposition between the church and her bower. Partly, it is the old age of the lord that explains why he prefers to go to church than spend time in bed with his lady, yet the opposition of church and bower also seems to refer to the two sides of the medieval barricade as far as carnal love is concerned: on the one hand, the bower stands viewed from the perspective of the lady as a place where the pleasures of love are to be enjoyed, on the other hand, the Church looks upon carnal love with disapproval and preaches moderation even in marriage.

The episode that reveals the evil side of passion is based on the classical triangle of a woman caught between her old husband and her younger lover. Here, the covetous love the woman feels for her lover urges her to plot a murderous ruse with the aim of getting rid of her

Marriage in the Medieval World, ed. Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany, 1991), p. 46. See also Joan Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York, London, 1975), p. 31-32; or Georgie D. Economou, “The Two Venuses and Courtly Love”, in *In Pursuit of Perfection*, ed. Joan Ferrante, George Economou (Port Washington, N.Y., London, 1975), p. 17-50.

⁹⁴ The Middle Ages see passion as a punishment inflicted on mankind after the Fall. Thus even passion felt for one’s spouse is considered a sin. See C. S. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p.15.

⁹⁵ Spearing, *Medieval Poet as a Voyeur*, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

husband so that her lover, the ambitious king of Germany, might replace him both in the hall and especially in her bower.⁹⁶ Similarly to *King Horn*, the motif of sending a messenger becomes the important part of the episode. Yet, unlike Athelbrus who sees Rymenhild's passion as possibly dangerous, the messenger of the treacherous mother of Bevis is at the same time her devoted accomplice who allows her to execute her treacherous plan. In this episode, the topos of the lady's invitation into her bower is subverted by its significantly macabre undertones, as the way into her bower leads only over the dead body of her lawful lord. Similarly, the typical romance motif of a love token is here distorted since the affection between the two villainous lovers is sealed with the head of the lady's murdered husband whom the lover manages to kill in the end.

This, needless to say, misogynistic episode clearly reflects the medieval fear of an over-passionate woman by showing what evil ends lady's excessive passion may cause. Unlike in the previous examples, peril here arises from the very heart of the bower, that is, from the lady herself who uses the privacy of her chamber for an overtly evil purpose.

4.4.2 The bower as a scene of moral tests

In the fourteenth century, a French nobleman called Geoffroy de La Tour Landry wrote a compilation of moral stories, known as *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*,⁹⁷ for his two young daughters. Its purpose was to train them in virtuous behaviour as well as to protect them from the lures and dangers of the courtly world. One of the first stories tells of two sisters – one virtuous and religious, the other her very opposite – who are deeply in love with two brothers of noble bearing.

⁹⁶ A similar model can be found for example in a *lai* by Marie de France called *Equitan*. Here, the treacherous wife plots with her younger lover to murder her husband while the two men will be taking a bath together. In the end, however, the evil purpose turns against the two sinful lovers who contrived it since death is their punishment.

⁹⁷ The translation by William Caxton meant that this was an influential work in England as well.

Unable to restrain their love any longer, the young ladies arrange a nocturnal meeting in which they are to meet in the privacy of the ladies' bower. As soon as the night falls, the brothers seek the bed that the sisters share. Yet as soon as they approach, the one who loves the chaste sister is, as soon as he sees her, forced to leave the bower in utmost dread: he is frightened to death by the impression of a host of dead bodies which surround his beloved. No such thing happens in the case of the other, more worldly, sister. Yet one night of foolish pleasure to which their encounter leads is not without disastrous consequences. When the father of the young lady, the Emperor, finds out she is pregnant, he lets her be drowned and her lover is flayed alive without mercy.

Although the story pushes its ends perhaps too drastically, it clearly shows where the dangers of the bower may reside. The privacy of the bower is welcome on the one hand because it provides a place for a kind of emotionality which otherwise finds little understanding in the hall. On the other hand, its intimate character may, for the same reasons, prove equally dangerous. Leaving aside the problematic example of Lancelot,⁹⁸ there is a great deal of responsibility resting on the knight who enters the bower since love which is often uncorked in its privacy ought to be kept within the bounds of certain moral restrictions, which at the same time should be inherent in the courtly rituals themselves.⁹⁹ A. C. Spearing interestingly remarks that perhaps the true knighthood may in fact more than anything else consist of "the bearing of public values into private space".¹⁰⁰ That is, the intimate nature of the bower should not seduce the knight to sin as this would inevitably lead to a clash with

⁹⁸ Even Chrétien, from whose pen the story of Lancelot and Guinevere arose, felt uncomfortable with the theme of adultery which makes it impossible to bring into consonance both the public and private achievements of the knight. I have chosen to leave the theme of adulterous love aside since it is generally not favoured in the tradition of Middle English verse romance.

⁹⁹ As I will attempt to demonstrate later, the romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* may be interpreted as criticizing the courtly rituals – especially an amorous dalliance and the knight's absolute subordination to a lady – as those that can be misused by the lady for pushing the knight towards sin.

¹⁰⁰ Spearing, "The Public and Private Spaces in SGGK", op. cit., p. 143.

the obligations he has to the hall: among these, the loyalty sworn to the lord of the castle would be the most important one.

To tarry with a lady in her bower often requires a knight's reasonable reaction to the excess of passion which the lady shows. For this reason, the bower and the tests the knight has to pass in the world of adventure cannot be viewed as strict counterparts. The reason for this is that the bower itself may likewise turn into a test: one that is the more insidious the less it is expected to be encountered in this place. The adventures the knight faces outside the castle are more or less straightforward as here the adversaries, be they of human or supernatural shape, are easily recognizable. By contrast, the bower as a testing place works above all on the principle of false appearances since, in order to confuse the knight all the more, it usually masks itself as the space of safety in which the knight is exhorted to rest. In a similar manner, the lady who dwells within its walls and whose only desire is to stain the hero's moral reputation may assume the identity of a "damsel in distress" in order to seduce the knight more easily. Unlike the lady proper of the romance whose love becomes the guiding star to her knight, this kind of a lady is a quite different type of romance character.

As far as romance love is concerned, Flora Alexander remarks that "alongside the *fin'amors* that inspires a knight to perform nobly for the sake of his lady, an awareness of a dark and disruptive aspect of passion"¹⁰¹ gleams through the romance texts. As there are two kinds of love, there are also two diverse portrayals of women. In accordance with the teaching of the medieval theologians,¹⁰² the first is the pure love (*caritas*) that corresponds to an image of a lady without whose love the knight would scarcely be complete. The other, dark facet of love (*cupiditas*) is synonymous with fleshly lust and base desires. The woman

¹⁰¹ Flora Alexander, "Women as Lovers in Early English Romance", in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge, 1993), p. 25.

¹⁰² Hugh of St. Victor or, for example, Thomas Aquinas distinguish in their work between chaste love whose practice uplifts a man to God, and sinful love which leads to damnation.

who symbolizes this kind of love is usually portrayed as daughter of Eve¹⁰³ as hers is the role of a temptress. It is particularly in the continental romances where the temptresses slyly lure the hero into their bed.¹⁰⁴ By resisting her amorous advances, the knight has the opportunity either to prove his unshakeable faithfulness to his beloved or his moral integrity in general. According to the Biblical exegesis, the tempting, sinful woman is seen as the symbol of “the lower or weaker parts of the man, carnal desires, or inconstancy of mind.”¹⁰⁵ It is therefore by resisting the temptation of fleshly lust incarnated in the character of a temptress that the knight can confirm his excellence as well as his resistance to the excess of passion which, according to the opinion of the medieval theologians, governs a woman.

4.4.2.1 The passionate woman

In the Middle English verse romances already discussed, the heroines often prove to suffer from an over-passionate nature. Their outbursts of feelings may sometimes turn their bower into a place where the knight's moral principles are tested. It would be far fetched, however, to classify Rymenhild or Josiane as temptresses since it is true love that is responsible for their forward behaviour. What is more, they at the same personify the “lady proper” of the romance whose hand the hero strives to win in marriage and for whose sake he performs the valiant deeds of chivalry. By contrast, the full-fledged temptress never woos her prey because of the love she feels for the knight but her sole aim is to become the cause of the hero's moral fall.

¹⁰³ A more in-depth study of the Janus-faced nature of medieval love can be found in George D. Economou “The Two Venuses and Courtly Love”, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ An unforgettable figure of a temptress can be found in an Anglo-Norman romance called *Yder*. Such a woman also appears in one of the episodes of Chrétien's romance *Lancelot, The Knight of the Cart* where she tests the knight's unshakeable devotion to Guinevere.

¹⁰⁵ Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, op.cit., p. 1. (see also p. 19).

Although in the romance of *King Horn* the knight does not resist temptation in the real sense of the word, taming would perhaps be a fitter name for his reaction to the fits of passion that characterizes his lady. As noted above, Horn has to make a decision not to hear Rymenhild's pledges until his public position is established. Had he acquiesced to her wooing, his reputation would be subjected to shame while, from the point of view of the hall, it is hardly imaginable to attempt to marry a princess without being worthy of her hand first. Horn's resolute response to her passionate outcries shows him to be the one who knows moderation and does not let himself be seduced by an overflow of feelings that easily because he is always well aware of his public responsibility not to disturb the order of courtly society.¹⁰⁶ Generally speaking, it is the moral responsibility of the hero not to let the emotionality of the bower go against the principles of the hall.

I shall discuss now at greater length *Sir Bevis of Hampton* since there the bold Josiane provides another example of the heroine who suffers from an excess of emotion which puts the moral principles of the hero on trial. Moreover, there are scenes to be found where her behaviour may be reminiscent of that of a temptress.

In contrast to Rymenhild whose passionate nature might be assigned only to her being a woman who is unable to restrain her emotions, as far as Josiane is concerned, it is possible to claim that her pagan origin is responsible for this passionate nature of hers. Although Bevis might feel secret affection for her, it is her pagan belief which at first makes her bower the realm of an enemy rather than that of the lady of his heart. This is the reason why he refuses to enter it when asked, although Josiane's reasons for summoning him inside are at first more than chaste: she wants to cure him of his wounds and bring him before her father in order to win pardon for his violent slaughter of the Saracen soldiers. Bevis' answer to the summons is, however, clearly hostile. He repays the knights who are bidden to invite him inside the bower with an

¹⁰⁶ Ferrante, "The Conflict of Lyric Conventions and romance Form", op. cit., p. 135.

uncompromising answer: “She is an honde, also be ye / out of me chamber swithe ye fle!”¹⁰⁷ (ll. 693-694). Although it is true love that Josiane feels for Bevis, her religion poses a serious obstacle to their love and turns her into an unsuitable partner for a Christian prince. This in itself becomes an interesting variation on the motif of a knight who has to strive to become an acceptable partner for his lady.

The scene that puts Bevis into the position of a tempted knight takes place some time later after he at last enters Josiane’s bower at her father’s behest. As already mentioned, the lady then takes the advantage of having the object of her desire fully in her power and makes haste to reveal to him her love. By acting thus, she turns the bower – that was at first appointed by the hall to be part of courtly ritual¹⁰⁸ – back into an intimate, secret space governed by female desire. In her speech, quoted again here, she virtually lays her heart in front of Bevis’ feet:

Sikerli can I no rede,
 Boute thow me love, icham dede,
 And boute thow with me do thee wille."
 "For Gode," queth Beves, "that ich do nelle!
 (ll 1095-1098)

(“Truly I do not know what to do. Unless you love me and unless you do with me whatever you want I shall die.” “In God’s name,” quoth Bevis, “I will do no such thing.”)

Her fervent words reveal the passionate daring that makes the atmosphere in the bower grow thick. By inviting Bevis to “do whatever he wants” with her, she exchanges the safe shores of the courteous conversation for the uncertain waters of passionate confession which might, if Bevis acted according to her wishes, easily lead to sin. Still, her behaviour cannot be classified as tempting that easily. There is another feature in her speech which is not to be found in a real temptress, and that is her real desperation which springs out of her immense love for Bevis. Despite of her urgent words, her inviting speech does not lead to

¹⁰⁷ “She is a pagan and so are you, go quickly out of my chamber!”

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, even the court of the Saracen king seems to follow the same principles of courtesy as that of a Christian lord.

any desired ends since Bevis' reaction is that of a surprised horror and rejection. It is no accident that he has God's name first on his lips.¹⁰⁹ Thus, immediately, the attention is drawn to Josiane's pagan origin and her bower consequently becomes a place a Christian knight should beware of. Bevis quickly excuses himself in a courteous manner. The reasons he gives to explain his rejection of her amorous advances are typical in this context: he claims himself unworthy of her love and suggests that there is a host of suitors far better than him for her to choose from and marry.

In al this world nis ther man,
Prinse ne king ne soudan,
That thee to wive have nolde,
And he the hadde ones beholde!"
(ll. 1101-1104)

(In all this world there is not a man, prince or king or sultan, that would not wish to have you for a wife even if he looked at you only once!")

However, it soon becomes evident that the lady could easily do without marriage. For the second time, she expresses herself more clearly:

"Merci," she seide, "yet with than
Ichavede thee lever to me lemman,
Thee bodi in thee scherte naked,
Than al the gold, that Crist hath maked,
And thow wost with me do thee wille!"
"For Gode," queth Beves, "that I do nelle!"
(ll. 1105-1110)

("Pardon me," she said, "yet if it is so I would rather you were my lover. Your body in you shirt all naked /is better/ than all the gold that Christ has made if you do with me whatever you want!" "In God's name," quoth Bevis, "I will do no such thing.")

This time the lady's pleading is even more explicit and even more fully reveals her passion which is here clearly made the result of her pagan nature. Not only does she push Bevis into a sinful

¹⁰⁹ At the same time, it is true, however, that religious rhetoric frequently occurs in the speeches of romance heroes. For a medieval author, to include it in the text is as natural as breathing.

entanglement with her, but she also blasphemes when she inappropriately links the Lord's name with worldly riches. At the end of her speech, she repeatedly implores Bevis that he would do with her whatever he wishes. He, in return, rejects her with even more forceful nay than was the previous one. Like a refrain, these repetitions enhance the impact of the whole scene where the knight is being tempted into carnal love that might impair his moral reputation and make him betray his faith at the same time. However, Bevis retains his moral strength and, perhaps with a slight disgust, rejects Josiane who, consequently, accuses him of being a "churl" since he denied her the pleasure of his company. According to her opinion, he also broke one of the courtly rules in which the knight is bound with an obligation to carry out every wish the lady-sovereign might think of. However, in Bevis' eyes, she is all but his lady and therefore, her hot-blooded reaction is not left without consequences. Bevis, sorely insulted, intends to leave the country.

The lady alone in her bower quickly loses her mask of a temptress and, giving vent to her desperation and remorse, turns into an anxious, grief-stricken lady. This is when the bower gains another of its typical features that has not been mentioned, yet. It is not only a place where amorous feelings are nourished, yet also the one in which grief caused by lost love and remorse may reside.¹¹⁰ Thus shut in her bower, secluded from the world while haunted by her guilt, she finally decides to approach Bevis in his chamber through her messenger, Boniface. By inviting Bevis into her bower, she hopes to make amends for her improper boldness.

Forth wente Bonefas in that stounde
And Beves in is chaumber a founde
And seide, she him theder sende,
And that she wolde alle amende

¹¹⁰ Character of the bower as a space of mourning for lost love is perhaps the most powerfully described in the romance *Squire of Low Degree*. Here, its heroine mistakes the dead villain for her beloved Squire. Her grief and love she feels for him urges her to have the wrong body balmed and laid into a coffin. The corpse of her supposed beloved remains her only companion in her bower in which she, shut from the outside world, laments his death for seven years.

Al togedres to is wille,
 Bothe loude and eke stille.
 Thanne answerde Beves the fer:
 "Sai, thow might nought speden her!
 Ac for thow bringest fro hire mesage,
 I schel thee yeve to the wage
 A mantel whit so melk:
 The broider is of Tuli selk,
 Beten abouten with rede golde,
 The king to were, thegh a scholde!"
 Bonefas him thankede yerne,
 Hom aghen he gan terne;
 A fond that maide in sorwe and care
 And tolde hire his answere,
 That he ne mighte nought spede
 Aboute hire nede,
 And seide: "Thow haddest unright,
 So te misain a noble knight!"

(ll. 1147-1168)

(That moment Boniface went forth and found Bevis in his chamber and told him she sent him hither and that she wanted to make all amends he would only wish – both loud and also quiet. Then Bevis, the fair, answered, "Tell her you cannot aid her in any way! But because you bear her message I will give you a shirt as white as milk embroidered with Toulouse silk and adorned about with red gold – the king himself should wear it! Boniface eagerly thanked him and returned home. He found that maiden sad and full of care and he told her what his answer was – that he could not help her in her need and said, "You did wrong to speak evil of such a noble knight!")

The lady's attempt to summon insulted Bevis back into her bower fails. He does not forget to reward the messenger for his service, though. Thus, he confirms his nobility in the presence of the steward who, therefore, cannot but disapprove of the lady's immoderate reaction. At this moment, the bond of male solidarity that is based on misogyny is established between the two men. The words that Boniface brings back to his mistress are not those of Bevis but his own which scold her for her improper behaviour and thus make Josiane repent her mistake anew. Similarly to *King Horn*, again the lady's messenger makes it clear where his loyalty truly lies: rather than serving the lady, it is the knight's interest he pursues instead.

When the messenger thus fails in his role, the lady decides to be as daring as to approach the knight on her own. Such a conduct is

normally considered to be a significant transgression of courtly behaviour. Among romance ladies, it is typical of the temptress to sneak into the bower of the knight whose moral integrity she wants to put on trial. However, Josiane's motive for coming to Bevis's chamber is more than excusable as this time, she is lead by desire to set things right.

Whan he nel nought to me come,
 The wei to his chaumber I wil neme,
 And, what ever of me befallle,
 Ich wile wende in to is halle!"¹¹¹
 Beves herde that maide ther-oute.
 Ase yif aslep, he gan to route.
 "Awake, lemman!" she seide, "Awake!
 Icham icome, me pes to make.
 Lemman, for the corteisie,
 Spek with me a word or tweie!"
 "Damesele," queth Beves thanne,
 "Let me ligge and go the wei henne!
 Icham weri of-foughte sore,
 Ich faught for thee, I nel namore."
 (ll. 1175-1188)

(When he will not come to me then I will make my way to his chamber, whatever happens to me, I will go to his room! Bevis heard this maiden outside and he began to snore as if asleep. "Darling, awake!" she said, "awake! I have come to make peace. Sweetheart, for your courtesy speak to me a word or two! "Damsel," quoth Bevis then, "let me rest and go away! I am weary with fighting. I fought for you and will not any more."

Bevis, who still bitterly feels her insult, remains deaf to all her pleas. His bad temper is apparent already in his reaction when he hears her coming: he starts to snore in hope she would leave him alone. As Judith Weiss already noted, the scene is rich with comic elements and this would certainly be one of them. However, at the same time she identifies Josiane's pleading, somewhat girlish in its resolution, as another of its comic features.¹¹² Yet the question is whether her desperate act could not be viewed in a different context. When Josiane leaves her bower, she is well aware that she is doing wrong but her guilt

¹¹¹ Here the word "hall" is used instead of "chamber, bower" most likely for the sake of the rhyme.

¹¹² Weiss, "The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance", op. cit.,p. 153. Weiss at the same time remarks the identical motif of a faked sleep appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

is so strong she would do anything to make amends for it. Even if her reputation should be therefore at stake, she does not stop. Thus paradoxically, her transgression of courtly rules implies that her feelings for Bevis are true.

Perhaps more than in her behaviour, humour can also be discerned in the knight's reaction that, in fact, represents a complete reversal of the typical bower scene of an amorous conversation. That Bevis is reluctant to accept Josiane's love is evident from the very beginning when he coldly addresses her as "damsel" in reply to her endearment "lemman".¹¹³ As Josiane transgressed the rules of courtesy both by coming on her own and by her insult, he does not even take the trouble to be courteous despite of the lady beseeching him to speak with her in the name of his courtesy. His only reaction to her desperate pleading is his complete denial of her as his lady in that he both refuses to talk to her and fight in her service.

Josiane's forward attempts to woo the knight she is in love with end disastrously. As a pagan, she enjoys even less respect from Bevis, who therefore shuns her presence with all his might. His utter rejection of the lady is most evident in his refusal to enter her bower when he is invited. Usually, such behaviour would be taken for a gross flaw in his courtesy, however, here it is justified by the lady's pagan faith which is also considered to be the cause of her passionate nature. It is only when Josiane rejects her faith in order to become a Christian that Bevis accepts her as the lady of his heart. Moreover, when baptised, Josiane also loses her identity of an over-passionate, tempting-prone pagan beauty.

Although in these two examples, the character of the temptress as such does not appear, still, the knight, when alone with the lady in her bower, finds himself in a situation in which he has to act with firm moral resolution. By resisting the passionate woman, the knight at the same time performs the role expected in a medieval man whose responsibility

¹¹³ From the Old English "lēofman", that is, "my beloved", or "sweetheart".

it is to control the woman's fervour in love. Hence, the principles of courtly love, according to which the knight is obliged to be at his lady's command, can be seen as somewhat undermined. As seen above, the knight never assumes a subordinate position to the passionate lady nor becomes her lover when she commands it. By contrast, he, morally superior to her, either moderates her passion or strives to win her in marriage. In this respect, the Middle English romances discussed above can be seen as reflecting the medieval understanding of a woman as a creature whose passion makes her unequal to a man who, therefore, has moral responsibility for her.

4.4.2.2 Gawain defying temptation

One of the characteristic features of the French romances by Chrétien is that, here, the test by temptation may often turn symbolical. The temptress, who would usually slip naked into the hero's bed by means of some sly guise, entirely disappears and the knight has to face the so-called "perilous bed" test instead.¹¹⁴ The knight passes this trial in a castle where he seeks to find rest after days spent on journey. There he finds a bed so richly adorned that he has never seen its like before. Impatient to rest his weary limbs inside, he is warned, however, that only the most virtuous of knights may rise from it alive in the morning. The knight pays no heed and nestles between the sheets but, as soon as he falls asleep, he is threatened with shafts and arrows shot in his direction that, on a symbolical level, may be read as signifying the pangs of lust that the knight has to resist. It is no accident, that the knight who is thus tested is mainly Gawain who, particularly in the French tradition, has the reputation of a courtly lover.

To draw the attention back to the English tradition, it is in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – a fourteenth century gem of a romance

¹¹⁴ Among other works of the genre, it is, for example, Chrétien's *Perceval* that provides the typical example of such an allegorical test. (See Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, op. cit., p. 475)

that can in quality boldly compete with the elegant, witty and complex romances of Chrétien – where Gawain proves his moral virtue in bed. However, instead of the allegorical shafts, here it is an all too real temptress that puts his moral integrity to test. In this regard, the bower, disguised as a space of safety, turns into a more important testing place than the world outside the castle walls. Moreover, it is particularly in this romance that the interaction between the public and private spaces of the castle draws attention to itself.

When Gawain enters the castle of Lord Hautdesert¹¹⁵ he is more than heartily welcome by all who cannot wait to learn the skill of “luf-talkyng” from this knight who can pride himself with the reputation of the “fader of nurture”.

Typical of the castle of lord Bertilac is that the life inside its walls constantly moves between its public and private spaces which enhances the feeling that there is a fluid transition between the formal, ceremonious character of the courtly world and the more relaxed atmosphere of chambers and bowers. Crucial for this romance is that such “spatial volatility” finds its expression in “blurring the boundary between masculine and feminine spheres”.¹¹⁶ Later in the poem, this interaction will become the most apparent in the freedom of the castle lady to leave her bower and enter without any previous warning into the bower reserved for the knight errant.

As soon as Gawain is formally welcomed in the hall by the lord of the castle, he is ushered into his bower which is furnished in the best of tastes. The following passage represents the most detailed as well as delicate description of the bower that can be found in the Middle English romance.¹¹⁷

And there were boun at his bode burnez inno3e,

¹¹⁵ I will restrict myself to pointing out only the details of the plot important for the theme of this work. A detailed analysis of the poem can be found in J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London, Henley and Boston, 1965).

¹¹⁶ Spearing, “Public and Private Spaces in Gawain”, op. cit., p. 142.

¹¹⁷ Such lavish descriptions of the splendour of the courtly world are typical especially of the French romances of Chrétien de Troyes.

That bro3t hym to a bry3t boure, ther bedding watz noble,
 Of cortynes of clene sylk with cler golde hemmez,
 And couertourez ful curious with comlych panez
 Of bry3t blaunner aboue, enbrawdred bisydez,
 Rudelez rennande on ropez, red golde ryngez,
 Tapitez ty3t to the wo3e of tuly and tars,
 And vnder fete, on the flet, of fol3ande sute.¹¹⁸

(And many men were ready there at his service who ushered him to his bright bower where a noble bedding was and curtains of pure silk, hemmed with bright gold and /there were/ very elaborate coverlets with fur edging of bright fur on the top and embroidered on its sides, curtains running on ropes, on red gold rings. On the walls there hung tapestries of Toulouse and Tarsian silk and under feet on the floor /were those/ of similar sort.)

The lavish furnishings of the bower itself constitute an important part of the ritual of the lord's hospitality shown to his guest.¹¹⁹ At the centre of the bower, the curtained bed stands in promises well-deserved rest. Significantly, there is also fire in the hearth which ensures warmth in the world scourged by cold and damp. As mentioned above, the bower also appears here as a place where a meal can be taken (ll. 884-900), yet it should be added that Gawain dines there only because he arrived too late for dinner served in the hall.

It is chiefly in the hall where one of the most magnificent ceremonies of the courtly world – a feast – takes place. Here, Gawain later enjoys his meals together with the whole court assembled. Seated next to the lord and his delicate wife, he can practise with her the art of courtly dalliance described here as the “clene cortays carp closed fro fylthe”¹²⁰ (ll. 1013). According to the ritual, the entertainment begun in the hall then shifts to the lord's chamber where it can be enjoyed in greater privacy by the close circle that Gawain has the honour of joining. Off the public space of the hall, more serious matters are discussed. In the privacy of the lord's chamber, Gawain reveals his identity and

¹¹⁸ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, rev. Norman Davis (Oxford, 1967), ll. 852 – 859. All other quotations have been taken from this edition.

¹¹⁹ The archaeological evidence shows that the lodgings reserved for a guest were furnished with the same splendour and care as that of the lord which emphasizes the importance of the courtly ritual of fair welcome. Girourard, op.cit., p. 55.

¹²⁰ “Clean courteous talk free from sin.”

informs lord Bertilac what the purpose of his journey is. What is more, it is in this space that the agreement, crucial to the whole story, is settled.

At Lord Bertilac's behest, Gawain agrees to stay in the castle while the lord will be a-hunting, since, in the lord's opinion, Gawain needs to rest and recover. Thus Gawain, excluded from the male sport of hunting,¹²¹ is bidden to rest in his bower as long as he pleases, to eat whenever he likes and, finally and most importantly, to enjoy the company of Bertilac's divinely beautiful wife. The core of their agreement is constituted by Gawain's obligation that he will (in exchange for the hunted game) publicly return to his host whatever fortune will deem fit to send him while the lord will be hunting in the woods. This troth of trust and affection pledged between the guest and the lord has an immense impact on the character of the bower which therefore significantly changes. From this time on, all its secrets must be publicly revealed to the lord in an open demonstration of loyalty that, on the one hand, appears to be one of the courtly games lord Bertilac is so fond of, but on the other hand, it has a serious undertone. Had Gawain breached their pact and thus betrayed his host, he would pay dearly for this by losing his honour. Therefore, as soon as their covenant is pledged, the bower thereby loses its character of an intimate space.

The company of the adorable lady of the castle is one of the comforts Gawain is – with the lord's permission – exhorted to enjoy. However, their first meeting in private shows it is the lady who intends to make the most of having Gawain fully to herself. Thus again, the lady uses the courtly ritual of dalliance for her own, this time unchaste purposes.¹²² Significantly, she does not meet the knight in her bower but she secretly creeps into his.

And as in slomeryng he slode, sle3ly he herde

¹²¹ Hunt is the important pastime activity of the courtly world the skill of which is considered indispensable for a knight. Similarly to a tournament, the ritualized form of fight, hunting is another opportunity how to demonstrate one's mastery of weapons.

¹²² At this point, it is difficult, though, to state with certainty what the true intentions of lady Bertilac are – whether she acts on her own accord or whether it is the mysterious enchantress Morgan who persuaded her into accepting the role of a temptress.

A little dyn at his dor, and dernly vpon;
 And he heuez vp his hed out of the clothes
 A corner of the cortyn he ca3t vp a lyttel,
 And waytez warnly thiderwarde quat hit be my3t.
 Hit watz the ladi, loflyest to beholde,
 That dro3 the dor after hir ful dernly and styлле,
 And bo3ed towarde the bed; and the burne schamed,
 And layde hym down lystyly, and let as he slepte;
 And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,
 Kest up the cortyn and creped withinne,
 And set hir ful softly on the bed-syde,
 And lenged there selly longe to loke quen he waked.

(ll. 1182-1194)

(And as he slept in a slumber, warily he heard a little din at his door and quickly /the door/ opened and he raised his head out of the bedclothes and pulled back a little the edge of the curtain and waited watchingly what it might be. It was the lady, loveliest to behold, that shut the door behind her very stealthily and quietly and went towards the bed; and the knight was shamed and lay down softly and pretended to be asleep. And she stepped very quietly and stole to his bed, cast up the curtain and crept within. And seated herself softly on the bed-side and lingered there very long to watch till he wakens.)

The ritual of a lady sending a messenger to the knight she intends to see also helps to make her private purpose public and thus irreproachable. By contrast, the careful secrecy of lady Bertilac's coming betrays her possible dishonest intentions, since the woman moving thus freely represents a potential threat. Thus suddenly surprised, Gawain first listens to a strange noise¹²³ at the door. Sheltered in the privacy of his curtained bed, he tries to figure out what it may be and soon, he is able to observe the lady's careful and quiet closing of the door which turns his bower into a trap and the lady's presence into a siege. Gawain whose reputation rests on the image of him as the one confident in courtly dalliance suddenly finds no words to exchange with the lady since neither the nature of her coming nor the situation in which he finds himself at the moment¹²⁴ agree with the principles of courtesy. The very nature of her coming and the boldness therein cause Gawain to

¹²³ It is significant that before the Green Knight enters King Arthur's court it is noise that foreshadows his coming (l. 132). Similarly, it is a strange noise that Gawain hears before lady Bertilac enters into his bower. Noise that links the two scenes then might suggest that the lady approaching to the bower may represent the second challenger.

¹²⁴ Gawain is an easy prey for his nakedness confines him to his bed.

be deeply embarrassed.¹²⁵ The lady does not stop in the bower but further invades its privacy by stepping behind the curtains of his bed. Thus surprised, Gawain, similarly to Bevis in the extract above, pretends to be asleep in hope that the lady will leave him in peace. However, to Gawain's great disappointment, no such thing happens and he is left with no other choice but to talk to the lady and find out whether she is friend or foe. When Gawain finally decides to open his eyes (his eye-lids being his last defence) it is the lady, however, who starts talking first and thus demonstrates her power. She addresses Gawain in jest that is partly meant seriously since it plays with the spatial metaphor of a siege:

Now ar 3e tan as-tyt! Bot true vus may schape,
I schal bynde yow in your bedde, that be 3e trayst.
(ll. 1210-1211)

(Now you are caught at once! Truce may be arranged between us, I shall bind you in your bed, be sure of that.)

The allegorical image of a siege is widespread in the medieval writings and the image of the besieged fortress is usually, as Malcolm Hebron remarks, associated with “exemplary virginity, the female, and the female interior”, and “is common both to spiritual allegories of the beleaguered soul and to the erotic sieges in romances, love lyrics, and allegories.”¹²⁶ Gawain passes an extraordinary test for a knight,¹²⁷ instead of the world full of perilous adventures it is the female space of the bower (and bed) which substitutes the battlefield. This time it is not the combats he has to win with the tip of his sword, but the temptation he must beat with an exemplary virtue. Since the reason for his testing is to put on trial his moral principles in an amorous dalliance in which he is

¹²⁵ Roberta Krueger remarks that the commonplace motif of many of the 13th century French romances is that of Gawain being “embarrassed by unwanted female attention”. See Roberta Krueger, “Questions of Gender in Old French courtly romance”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 143.

¹²⁶ Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege – Theme and Image in Middle English Romance* (Oxford, 1997), p. 143.

¹²⁷ Unlike other romances, in which a temptation scene is just one of the many adventures the knight passes, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* it is right at the core of its plot.

skilled, the bed in this context might be seen as coming close to the idea of the allegorical “perilous bed” test of the French romances.

On the first day of her wooing, the lady does not forget to refer to the utter privacy of the bower. From Gawain’s point of view, this becomes significantly unpleasant since it implies there are seemingly no obstacles imposed by the hall on the practise of adulterous love save for the covenant between Gawain and Bertilac itself. While in the romances discussed so far, there is always a sense of the lord in the hall watching over the female spaces of the castle, the hall in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* lacks the lord for a significantly long part of the day.¹²⁸

My lorde and his ledez ar on lenthe faren,
Other burdez in her bedde and my burdez als,
The dor drawen and dit with a derf haspe.
And sythen I haue in this hous hym that al lykez,
I schal my ware my whyle wel, quyl his lastez,

With tale.

3e ar welcum to my cors,
Youre owen to wale,
Me behouez of fine force
Youre seruant be, and schale.
(ll. 1231-1240)

(My lord and his knights departed a long time ago, other servants are in their beds and my maidens also, the door is shut and closed with a stout bolt and since I have in this house him that all like I shall spend my time well, while it lasts, with talk. You are welcome to my body /company/, it is your own will to choose, it behoves me indeed to be your servant and I shall be one.)

The lady’s strategy is to hide her sinful aims under the mask of courtesy and to abuse the principles of courtliness in order to suit her own purposes. Similarly to *Sir Eglamour*, the lady utters the words of welcome, yet this time, she bluntly points at what the nature of the service she offers might be.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ J. A. Burrow identifies this lack of the lord (“lord away on hunt” is another typical romance topos) as bordering on the fabliau tradition in which the question “where is the husband, and when will he come back?” is often asked (Burrow, op. cit., p. 75).

¹²⁹ J. A. Burrow also suggests that in her words of welcome there is, after all, space left for a certain degree of ambiguity. In the ME “my cors” apart from “my body” may simply refer to “me” which makes it possible to interpret the whole phrase as “I am at your service.” (Burrow, op. cit., p. 81.)

Lady Bertilac constantly refers to Gawain's public face as the paragon of courtesy which allows her to force him to exchange the courteous words of love for the deeds of love since an exemplary knight should obey his lady's every wish. The dilemma between which horns Gawain finds himself may in fact give rise to critique of the courtly rituals, especially that of courtly dalliance, that can easily lead to sensuous love. Gawain is trapped not only in the bower but also in the principles of courtesy that command him to be at the lady's service at all times. However, as the lady's wish clashes with the covenant of loyalty arranged between him and the lord, Gawain cannot hear her pledges. Moreover, Gawain's interpretation of what a courtly dalliance should be like differs significantly from that of Dame Bertilac. Gawain views love-talking as one of the rituals, or "games with rules"¹³⁰ practiced at court, that has very little in common with real feelings or passion. As it is performed in public, that is, with the permission of the lord, it remains the "clean courteous talk free from sin" (l. 1013). By demanding adulterous love, the lady urges him to do the very opposite – that is, to get entangled into the net of secrecy, hiding and lies that would have a devastating effect on his reputation.

In *Bevis of Hampton*, Josiane in a similar manner tries to seduce Bevis into sensuous love. However, the crucial difference between the two ladies is that Lady Bertilac only pretends ("let lyk", l. 1201) she loves Gawain so much. This is what turns all her efforts to break Gawain's moral defence into the cold-blooded tactics of the temptress.

Gawain is torn between service to the hall and to the lady. However, through his exemplary courtesy he manages, unlike Lancelot in a similar position, to maintain the fragile balance between the two. This is why he is so displeased when on the second day of his stay, the lady wants to continue with her shameless seduction at the feast right in front of the whole court. Gawain's anger shows (l. 1660) when that which "originated in the chamber begins to drift into the hall" as the lady

¹³⁰ See J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics* (London, 1997), p. 89.

“attempts to create in this public setting a space of intimacy for herself and Gawain.”¹³¹ Such dangerous merging of the two disparate spaces could easily destroy Gawain’s reputation as one who is always flawless in his courtesy.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight shows that the conversation inside the bower may pose a serious threat to the moral excellence of a knight. As, according to the French tradition,¹³² dalliance with a lady is one of Gawain’s weaker points, it is perhaps not an accident that it is in the private, feminine sphere that he has to fight the hardest battle.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is not, however, the sole romance in which Gawain has to face the temptations of the bower in order to deserve to be considered the most perfect of Arthur’s knights. Yet in no other text is his strife with temptation described with such mastery and detail. In comparison to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the one in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* may seem slightly unsatisfactory. Here, the lady of the giant Carl is brought, as part of the test, into a splendid bed in the lord’s own chamber and Gawain is invited to kiss her in her husband’s presence.

They toke Syr Gawen, wyttout lessynge;
 To the Carlus chamber thei gan hym brynge,
 That was so bryght and schene.
 They bade Syr Gawen go to bede,
 Wytt clothe of golde so feyr sprede,
 That was so feyr and bryght.
 When the bede was made wytt wynn,
 The Carle bade his oun Lady go in,
 That lovfesom was of syghte.
 A squyer came wytt a prevey far
 And he unarmyde Gawen ther;
 Schaply he was undyght.
 The Carle seyde, "Syr Gawene,
 Go take my wyfe in thi armus tweyne
 And kys her in my syghte."

¹³¹ Spearing, "Public and Private Spaces in *SGGK*", op. cit., p. 143.

¹³² According to Helen Cooper, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the two contradicting traditions of Gawain blend. In the English one, Gawain is famed as the paragon of all virtues while French romances, especially those of the Vulgate cycle, prefer to portray Gawain as a lecher. See Helen Cooper, "Introduction" in Keith Harrison’s translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Oxford, 1998), p. xix.

Syr Gawen ansswerde hyme anon,
 "Syr, thi byddynges schall be doune,
 Sertaynly in dede,
 Kyll or sley, or laye adoune."
 To the bede he went full sone,
 Fast and that good spede,
 For softnis of that Ladys syde
 Made Gawen do his wyll that tyde;
 Therof Gawen toke the Carle goode hede.
 When Gawen wolde have down the prevey far,
 Then seyde the Carle, "Whoo ther!
 That game I the forbode."¹³³

(Without delay, they took Sir Gawain to Carl's chamber that was so radiant and bright. They bade Sir Gawain go to a bed that was so fairly spread with cloth of gold which was very beautiful and bright. When the bed was made, Carl commanded his own lady who was of a fair semblance to lie down. A squire came discreetly and helped disarm Gawain, fittingly he was undressed. Carl said, "Sir Gawain, go and take my wife in your arms and kiss her in front of me." Sir Gawain answered him anon, "Sir, your bidding shall be done indeed /even if you/ kill or slay or throw /me/ down." He then went quickly to the bed, fast and with good speed. For the softness of that lady's body Gawain /almost/ did his will this time. Carl took good heed of it and when Gawain would take their intimacies too far he said, "Whoa there! I forbid you to play this game.")

In the extract quoted, the ardour that Gawain shows is notable when he plunges headlong into Carl's splendid bed to fulfil his behest and kiss the lady. This time, however, the lord himself is present in the bower, ready to intervene in the event that Gawain tries to perform more than he is allowed to. And, truly, he would probably do exactly that, were it not for the lord's protests. Carl himself is far from behaving in a lordly manner, though. In reward for passing the test, he invites Gawain to spend a night with his own daughter into whose bower he himself ushers the knight. However, this is already a feature of the bower that will become the topic of the last chapter.

The examples above have shown that the private character of the bower plays its crucial part also in the scenes where the place is used for testing the moral integrity of the knight. This time, however, its intimate character does not prove beneficial for the secret love but it tempts the

¹³³ *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, published in *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands (Exeter, 1986), ll. 442-468.

knight to enjoy the pleasures of love in its secrecy. It depends then on the knight's own moral strength to reject its lures and save his reputation by resisting the temptation with a similar bravery to that he demonstrates when beating his adversaries in the world of adventure.

4.4.2.3 The bower besieged

I shall conclude my discussion of the various roles of the romance bower with the one that is poles apart from its characteristic function as the space that secures safety for the lady who dwells inside. Although the bower at times failed in its role of providing shelter for the secret love, so far it has always been a place where the lady was protected whether she was good or evil. However, sometimes it may be the lady herself who is trapped inside.

With reference to the above-mentioned *Carl of Carlisle*, here, the lord's treatment of his own daughter is rather disturbing. He acts quite differently from the lords encountered so far who anxiously guard the reputation of their daughters. Instead of raiding the bower when the lovers are embracing inside, he himself leads Gawain inside his daughter's chamber so that they could "play together all night". In this regard, the act of entering the bower might perhaps remind one of the later fabliau tradition in which the "hero" comes into the bower for the purpose of slaking his lust. Moreover, this is normally done with the aid of a pimp whom the lord in this case strongly resembles in this case.

In the context of the bower as a place where a lady is virtually offered to a knight, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* has to be mentioned. Here, the lovers are brought to bed together by means of a ruse contrived by Pandarus, Criseyde's uncle, who (seemingly) acts on Troilus' behalf as a go-between. After he slyly invites his niece into his house, he lodges

her for the night separately from her maidens in a “closet”¹³⁴ that can be entered via a secret trap-door. After all is quiet, Pandarus secretly creeps into her chamber. When Criseyde first realizes she is not alone, she feels ashamed as well as ill at ease:

“What, which wey be ye comen, benedicite?”
 Quod she: “And how unwist of hem alle?”
 “Here at this secret trappe-dore,” quod he.
 Quod tho Criseyde, “Lat me som wight calle!
 “I! God forbade that it sholde falle.”
 Quod Pandarus, “that ye swich folye wroughte!
 They myghte demen thing they nevere er thoughte.”¹³⁵

(“God bless you, where have you come from?” She asked, “And how /did you get here without being/ noticed? He answered, “Here, through this secret trap door.” Then Criseyde said, “Let me call someone!” “Fie, God forbid this should happen,” said Pandarus, “and that you should commit such a folly. They might think what they have never thought of before.”)

The privacy of her chamber thus suddenly violated makes Criseyde fear for her honour, which she tries to save by calling her maidens in. However, Pandarus craftily turns her effort to make the secret space public against her by threatening her with “wicked tongues” that might slander her unjustly. Hence, Criseyde is by cunning tricks of Pandarus trapped in her bed where she is bidden to “lie still” until Troilus enters. Thus suddenly alone with his beloved in the bower, Troilus finds his courage and seizes Criseyde who – as she has no other choice in the situation she was manipulated into – finally surrenders to the blissful Troilus. In this emotional scene, Troilus’ speech is based on the image of the siege already encountered in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

“Now be ye kaught; now is there but we tweyne!
 Now yeldeth you, for other bote is non!”
 (ll. 1207-1208)

(Now you are caught; there is no one else but the two of us. Yield now as there is no other help /at hand/!)

¹³⁴ A closet in medieval house was basically another type of a private chamber that in the course of time began to be used as an oratory, or a room for private study. See Girourard, op. cit., p. 56.

¹³⁵ The text of *Troilus and Criseyde* is quoted here from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, (Oxford, 1987), p. 529 (ll. 757-763).

This scene presents the allegorical siege of a woman from two contrasting perspectives. In the first (puritan and medieval) perspective, Pandarus acts the treacherous pimp while Criseyde plays the role of a virtuous woman who has to defend her chastity in a situation that may easily put her reputation at stake. The latter (sensuous and renaissance) perspective, which later prevails, uses, by contrast, the motif of a lady besieged in her bed to heighten the pleasure of the reader of in the ensuing erotic scene. Chaucer's skill as a poet is the greater since he ingeniously works with the tension that arises between the two.

When focusing again on Criseyde trapped in her bed, J. A. Burrow points at the similarity with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when Gawain is similarly imprisoned in his bed by Lady Bertilac. However, there is one important difference: "The courtly-love conceit of prisoner, which means everything to Troilus, means almost nothing to Gawain, who accepts it as one of the lady's 'bourde3'".¹³⁶ Moreover, a knight besieged by a lady in the bower is never as helpless as a woman is in a similar situation.

4.4.2.4 The bower and the damsel in distress

As shown in the above examples, the bower that should secure the lady's safety may also turn into a trap where she can end up besieged and exposed to amorous advances. While in the previous examples the lady surrendered willingly, the bower as a test of lady's virtue gives her a chance to prove her fidelity to the knight who has captured her heart. The bower in such cases becomes her prison where she has to avert the threats to her chastity. While for a knight besieged in his bower mere words may suffice for him to defend himself, they are of no great use to a lady who naturally seems to be much more vulnerable in a similar

¹³⁶ "Jests", Burrow, op. cit., p. 79.

position.¹³⁷ She either depends on her knight to save her or she may try to defend her chastity herself.

Sir Bevis of Hampton provides an unusual example of the lady defending her chastity. Here, Josiane ends up married against her will to an earl called Miles. After their marriage takes place, she is brought into the bower to spend her wedding night with the man she was forced to marry. Since her heart and body belong to Bevis, she succeeds in averting her violation by means of a startling plan:

Josian he het lede to bour,
To have hire under covertour;
Upon hire bedde ther she sat,
That erl com to hire with that,
With knightes gret compainie
With pymment and with spisorie,
With al the gamen that hii hedde,
For to make hire dronke a bedde;
Ac al another was hire thought,
Ne gannede hire that gle right nought.
"Sire," she seide to that erl sone,
"Ich bidde thow graunte me a bone,
And bouthe thow graunte me this one,
I ne schel thee never bedde none.
Ich bidde thee at the ferste frome,
That man ne wimman her in come;
Belok hem thar-oute for love o me,
That no man se our privité!
Wimmen beth schamfast in dede
And namliche maidenen," sche sede.
That erl seide a wolde faine.
A drof out bothe knight and swaine,
Levedies, maidenen, and grome,
That non ne moste ther-in come,
And schette the dore with the keie.
Litel a wende have be so veie.
Josian he com aghen to:
"Lemman," a seide, "ichave ido,
Thee bone ichave do with lawe,
Me schon I mot me self of drawe,

¹³⁷ A reversal of male and female roles can be found in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* in which Gawain turns into the helpless object of woman's desire. In order to save King Arthur's life, he proves his unshakeable devotion to his sovereign by consenting to marry the most hideous woman under the sun, Dame Ragnell. Ragnell, who is described in the terms of an ugly churl, also behaves like one since by marrying Gawain she strives to have "her desire both in the bower and in bed". Such words are usually uttered in romances by treacherous men who strive to defame the heroine.

As I never yet ne dede."
 Adoun a set him in that stede;
 Thanne was before his bed itight,
 Ase fele han of this gentil knight,
 A covertine on raile tre,
 For no man scholde on bed ise.
 Josian bethoughte on highing,
 On a towaile she made knotte riding,
 Aboute his nekke she hit threw
 And on the raile tre she drew;
 Be the nekke she hath him up tight
 And let him so ride al the night.
 Josian lai in hire bed.

(ll. 3183-3225)

(He commanded that Josiane be led to the bower where he would have her under the covers. There she sat upon her bed when the Earl came to her with a great company of knights with spices and spiced wine and with all the tricks they knew in order to make her drunk in bed. But her mind was somewhere else, this gaiety amused her not a whit. "Sir," she said to this Earl anon, "I ask you to grant me a favour and unless you grant it, I will never go to bed with you. I pray that you do not allow a man or a woman to come here. Lock them outside for the love of me so that no one will see our secret things! Women are modest in their doings and particularly maidens," she said. The Earl replied that he would gladly do so. He drove out knights and servants, ladies, maidens and grooms so that no one could get in, and he locked the door with a key. He never expected to seal his doom thereby. He came to Josiane. "Darling," he said, "it is done, I have carried out your wish in good faith. I will take off my shoes myself as I have never done before." And there he sat down. Many servants of that gentle knight prepared curtains on the rail right next to the bed so that no one could see in. Josiane thought quickly, she made a noose from the towel and threw it around his neck and she drew the rail and fastened him up by his neck and thus she let him ride all night. Josiane lay in her bed.")

Josiane uses the intimacy of the bower which up to this point seemed to play into the hands of the lecherous earl to her own advantage. While pretending to be a demure maiden, she coins a plan that allows her to turn the closed space of the bower where she is trapped to the means of her own defence. However, such a violent way of preserving the lady's chastity is the exception rather than the rule.¹³⁸

Similarly, Rymenhild also faces the threat of being married against her will which would, moreover, result in bigamy since she had

¹³⁸ The use of magic is another favourite means of preserving a lady's chastity. For example, in Chrétien's romance *Cligés*, a heroine finds herself in a similar situation. However, instead of violence, she uses magic potion that makes her husband believe he is embracing his wife when, in fact, he is only dreaming.

already plighted her troth to Horn in a clandestine marriage (ll. 675-680). She proves her courage as well as unshakeable fidelity to Horn by wanting to slay her husband and commit suicide rather than adultery.

Herte, nu thu berste,
For Horn nastu namore,
That thee hath pined so sore."
Heo feol on hire bedde,
Ther heo knif hudde,
To sle with king lothe
And hureselve bothe
In that ulke nighte,
If Horn come ne mighte.
To herte knif heo sette,
Ac Horn anon hire kepte.
He wipede that blake of his swere,
And sede, "Quen, so swete and dere,
Ich am Horn thin oghe.
(ll. 1206-1219)

("Burst now, heart, for no longer you have Horn, who grieved you so sorely." She fell on the bed where she hid her knife to use to slay the loathed king therewith and also herself that very night if Horn did not come. She held the knife to her heart but Horn quickly caught her up. He wiped the dirt off his neck and said, "Queen so sweet and dear, I am your own Horn...")

However, unlike Josiane, she does not have to go as far as to execute her plan because her hand is stopped by Horn who steps into the bower just in time to save her and claim her publicly as his own.

As the examples included have illustrated, the woman besieged in the bower is not perhaps as helpless as it might seem at first sight since she often shows resolution to actively defend her virtue even if this is at the cost of the life of the one who threatens her chastity. Moreover, this is one of the few times when the lady can take the initiative without being reproached for her forwardness.

Thus, with the bower as a space that poses danger to the lady who would normally find shelter within its walls, the topos of the bower with all its different features finally comes full circle.

5. Conclusion

The theme of the bower provides a useful key to understanding the genre of romance. On an allegorical level, as a space characterized by its emotionality, the bower points to the newly emerged interest of this genre in exploring the intimate sphere of human life. In romance, it is first of all love of a lady – rather marginalized by epic – that motivates the knight in his pursuits in the public world of knightly virtues. For this reason, the main difference between epic and romance may be found precisely in the attention suddenly turned to the intimate. While in epic, interest in the public prevails, the plot of romances could be characterized as one seeking balance between the public and the private.

The epic events are first and foremost connected with the glorious space of the mead-hall which stands at the centre of heroic life. However, the hall as the seat of the king as well as the symbol of his power over the realm requires protection against the evil that frequently threatens its safety. Consequently, in heroic society, the hero proves his renown in the brave fight undertaken for the purpose of protecting his liege lord as well as his comrades in arms. With regard to this constant need for defence, the heroic world of epic seems to testify to the uncertainty of the age in which it came into being. Therefore, it is not surprising that in such a world references to the intimate are scant since this is not the focus of the writer nor his audience. The private space of the epic “bur”, a distant predecessor of the romance bower, is never entered with the purpose of describing the events that take place inside. As far as this space is concerned, only the most obvious is stated. It is normally linked with the presence of a lady, most commonly a queen, by whose side a king may find his repose. The other contexts in which it can be found are significantly unheroic. Entering the bower may either symbolize unwillingness to face the danger in the heroic space of the hall, or a visit to the lady’s bower (with all its connotations) is portrayed as weakness on the part of a hero which may lead to his doom.

With regard to its interest in human emotionality, romance relishes in the description of the scenes that take place in private. As the knight's public achievements are usually incited by the love he feels for the lady, his visits to her bower are at the beginning of his knightly pursuits. Love that is pledged in the privacy of the bower then urges the knight to win renown in the knightly world of chivalry, the power of which is concentrated in the castle hall. Here, apart from earning an honourable status for himself, the knight is also rewarded by permission to seal his (secret) love to a lady in the public act of marriage.

Since the public and the private interest of the knight are so closely intertwined, it is impossible to discuss the theme of the bower without reference to its interaction with the hall. The hall is the domain of the lord of the castle that symbolizes his wealth and power. In contrast, the bower presents an intimate and usually feminine space where love often finds its expression. However, there is nothing like a sharp divide between the two spaces as they can be often seen to interact. The bower and the hall with its symbolic connotations of the male space of power and the courtly rituals on the one hand, and the female space of feelings on the other hand, can be viewed as two basic notions which operating within the structure of the romance plot.

The examples examined clearly show the space of the bower to be subordinated to that of the hall. This proves to be true in most cases when the lady seemingly seizes the initiative and tries to act as if from the position of a lord. The only departure from this pattern is to be found in the romances in which the lord of the castle is not present and the lady is – as there is no other choice – his substitute. Needless to say, she plays this role only until she finds herself a husband who will then take the role of the lawful lord upon himself.

The power the lady seems to be exercising in inviting the man she desires into her bower usually proves to be limited by the rules of courtesy set down by the hall. She is able to do so only via a messenger who, at the same time, serves to the lord of the castle and may at any

time communicate her intentions to the lord. Her sending a messenger is thus not so much a sign of her power as a means through which she makes her private wishes public and thus makes it acceptable in the space of the hall. If the lady leaves the bower in order to meet the knight herself, her behaviour is viewed as a serious transgression of her assigned role since this is considered highly improper for a virtuous lady. No wonder that such conduct is typical of a temptress.

As is often the case, a visit in the bower may enable the knight to establish his position in the public world of chivalry. However, the lady is seldom able to help directly. She may aid her knight by means of a magic token, or she must rely again on sending the messenger who might intervene on her knight's behalf in the hall in front of the lord. The act of healing the knight by the lady herself may be considered an exception, yet it should be added that again, the lady often cures the knight at the direct command of the hall.

The loving care of the lady who heals the knight of his wounds in her bower allows us to read the space as figuratively merging with her body, and more specifically, her womb. Such a reading was possible also in other contexts – the bower entered on a wedding night would be the most obvious example; the king's anxiety that his daughter's bower would be penetrated by a knight unworthy of her standing can be classified as another instance of such a meaning of the bower.

The space of the bower thus metonymically merging with the lady herself necessarily touches upon the role of the woman in medieval male society. In medieval theological treatises, a woman is repeatedly described as an over-emotional creature who is unable to restrain her passion and for such reason has to be governed by a reasonable man. Such an opinion is often reflected in romances, particularly in the passages in which the emotionality of the bower is viewed as dangerous. Therefore, the space itself is taken for one that has to be subdued to male control.

Such control of the hall is evident in the scenes in which the lord assaults the bower in order to avert the (possible or real) danger of sin. Sometimes, it is the knight himself who has to resist the amorous advances of a passionate lady. In such cases, the practice of courtly rituals inside the bower should also ensure that the knight will not be seduced into abandoning his moral principles. However, the courtly rituals themselves might be sometimes playing into the hands of a temptress instead and as such they are found wanting.

A misogynous view of a woman is projected into her portrayal as one who uses the secrecy of the bower for overtly evil purposes. Among these, a woman plotting the murder of her husband would be one of the most extreme examples. The passionate woman who threatens a knight's virtue in her bower is a characteristic feature of a temptress. A knight trapped inside her bower then has to prove his moral strength face to face with her seduction.

In examples like this, for the knight, the bower completely loses its character as a space of safety. Similarly, when it is the scene of the secret love of a knight and a lady, the space may equally lose its protective nature; although it is only with difficulty that the lady can leave her bower, the threshold of her bower may be crossed from the direction of the hall at any time.

Finally, the bower itself may turn into a space in which the lady herself may become a prisoner when she, similarly to a knight, is to prove her chastity and devotion to the knight she loves by resisting the amorous advances upon her by an unwanted suitor.

To conclude, the theme of the bower seems to be linked with the very heart of romance since it touches upon the *topoi* vital for the genre. Among these, the theme of love between the knight and his lady and the circumstances under which they are allowed to unite so as to establish harmony between the private and public space is of particular significance.

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RÉSUMÉ

Topos komnaty dámy ve středoanglickém veršovaném románu

Práce vnímá komnatu dámy jako metaforu samotného rytířského románu, neboť láska, jež je jedním z klíčových témat tohoto žánru, nachází své vyjádření právě v tomto intimním prostoru vyhrazeném citům. Prostor komnaty je navíc možné chápat i jako jedno z témat, jež dělí rytířský román od epiky, ze které tento žánr vyrůstá. Práce se na svém počátku zaměřuje na to, jak je soukromý prostor vykreslen epikou, pro niž je typické, že v ústředí jejího zájmu stojí veřejný prostor dvorany jako samotného centra hrdinského světa. Intimnímu prostoru stojícímu mimo dvoranu epika věnuje jen málo místa a je přirozeně vnímán odlišně, než jak je tomu u rytířského románu. Nicméně i v epice je možné najít některé jeho základní rysy, které se později v odlišném kontextu rytířského románu stanou nezbytnou součástí zápletky tohoto žánru. Intimní, soukromý prostor má v epice podobu příbytku ženy, který stojí mimo prostoru dvorany. Když se v epickém textu objeví, je mu věnována jen letmá zmínka a to, co se odehrává uvnitř, zůstává skryto. Intimní prostor v epice je nejčastěji spojen s přítomností ženy. Za jistých okolností může poskytovat ochranu, ale zároveň se vždy jedná o prostor neheroický. V epickém světě má dvorana ústřední význam jako místo, v němž se nejen odehrávají tradiční rituály hrdinského světa, ale jež je zároveň nutno bránit. Pakliže bojovník opouští dvoranu tváří v tvář hrozícímu nebezpečí, pronevěří se tím zároveň hrdinskému řádu, který mu velí dvoranu ochraňovat. Na druhé straně lze ve staroanglické epice najít příbytek dámy, který představuje potenciální nebezpečí pro hrdinu, jenž sem vstupuje. Láska vedoucí sem jeho kroky se ukazuje být slabinou hrdinovou, kvůli níž nakonec ztrácí svůj život, když je nečekaně přepaden a obklíčen v prostoru tolik netypickém pro boj. V souvislosti se samotným charakterem epického světa, jenž odráží úzkost a nejistotu doby, ve které je tento žánr ukotven, však zůstává intimní prostor na okraji zájmu autora i obecnstva.

Jinak je tomu u rytířského románu, v němž citovost sdílená v intimním prostoru komnaty tvoří důležitou součást jeho zápletky. Zároveň se s touto komnatou úzce pojí základní rituály rytířského světa, mezi které patří například dvorná konverzace nebo rituál uvítání rytíře. Charakter komnaty dámy se rovněž úzce prolíná s dvojím pojetím lásky, jak je vykresleno v rytířském románu. Na jedné straně láska představuje čistý cit, jenž je pro hrdinovu osobnost nezbytný. Láska k dámě dává rytíři sílu utkávat se s nebezpečím, neboť často je cílem jeho dobrodružství získat proslulost, aby mu bylo dopřáno stvrdit svou lásku k dámě veřejně - manželstvím. Tehdy je možno vnímat rytířovy návštěvy dáminy komnaty jako prostředek, který mu otvírá cestu do světa rytířství. Práce v této souvislosti ukazuje na

příkladech ze středoanglických veršovaných rytířských románů, kdy to může být sama dáma, jež rytíři pomáhá uspět v rytířském světě.

Druhá tvář lásky rytířského románu naopak představuje nebezpečí pro hrdinovy rytířské ctnosti a jeho dobré jméno. Láska, která svádí k hříchu, pak proměňuje prostor komnaty ve zkoušku pokušením, kterému musí hrdina čelit příkladnou mravností, nechce-li porušit pravidla kurtoazie, jež mu sice na jedné straně velí plnit přání dámy, ale na straně druhé jej váže slibem věrnosti k hradnímu pánu. Tehdy se komnata dámy stává pastí a přítomnost dámy - svůdkyně připomíná obléhání nepřítele.

V rámci hradu komnata dámy vyjadřuje antitezi k prostoru dvorany, ale zároveň s ní tvoří neoddělitelný celek. Oba tyto prostory ve své základní charakteristice nesou svou metaforickou funkci. Dvorana je prostor především mužský a veřejný, v němž hradní pán demonstruje svou moc, na straně druhé stojí komnata dámy jako prostor vyhrazený ženě, tedy i citovosti a emocionalitě. Práce zkoumá vzájemnou interakci obou těchto prostorů včetně případů, kdy se dáma komnata snaží přiblížit funkci dvorany. Zároveň si všímá prostupnosti hranic mezi oběma prostory. Toto téma se často ukazuje být úzce svázané s rolí dámy v rytířském románu, na rovině obecné pak s postavením ženy ve středověké společnosti.

Práce dospívá ke zjištění, že role dámy je často v rozporu se základními tradovanými principy, které by měly v rámci rytířského románu fungovat. Tímto principem je dvorská láska, hlásající naprostou rytířovu oddanost své paní. Jak se ale ukazuje, role paní jakožto „hradního pána“ je omezena pouze na prostor její komnaty. A i tam nakonec příklady ze středoanglických rytířských románů ukazují, že je její suverenita mnohdy podkopána. Pohyb dámy ven směrem do dvorany nebo prostorů vyhrazeným mužům je často omezený a závisí na svolení dvorany – dáma je odkázána na prostředníka, chce-li si ve dvoraně vydobýt své požadavky. Na straně druhé se dominance dvorany nad prostorem dámy projevuje v absolutní překročitelnosti hranice komnaty směrem ze dvorany, která mnohdy vnímá její intimní charakter jako možnou hrozbu.

Komnata dámy představuje základní prostor rytířského románu, jenž na sebe nabaluje typické motivy spjaté s tímto žánrem, zároveň je pro zápletku tohoto žánru charakteristické hledání rovnováhy mezi prostorem veřejným – dvoranou – a prostorem intimním, tedy komnatou dámy.