The Representation of Woodland Space in Middle English Popular Narrative

by

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Curriculum Vitae

The author was born in Roseburg, Oregon on May 17, 1977. He attended Oregon State University from 1995-2001, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2001. He came to the University of Rochester in the Fall of 2003 and began graduate studies in English. He pursued his research in Middle English Literature under the direction of Professor Thomas Hahn and received the Master of Arts degree from the University of Rochester in 2007.
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Abstract

This dissertation examines representations of woodland spaces in Middle English popular romances and related texts, in light of their immediate social and cultural contexts. Far from being abstract imaginative spaces, Middle English literary forests, particularly those in popular narratives, show some notable correspondences to practical interactions with and assumptions about actual woodland spaces, and these correspondences are present in both contemporary compositions and translations of older texts. The first chapter compares two twelfth-century French chivalric romances, \textit{Yvain} and \textit{Perceval}, to their fourteenth-century Middle English translations, \textit{Ywain and Gawain} and \textit{Sir Perceval of Galles}, and examines the manner in which the differences in woodland representations in the paired poems correspond to general shifts in woodland perception in England over the intervening centuries. The second chapter offers readings of two Middle English Greenwood outlaw narratives, \textit{The Tale of Gamelyn} and \textit{Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley}, and examines the role of the forest in each narrative in the context of fourteenth-century legal concerns. The third chapter discusses two King-and-Poacher narratives, \textit{King Edward and the Shepherd} and \textit{The King and the Hermit}, and compares the imagined abundance of game in the forest to growing fourteenth-
century concerns about hunting by the commons. A brief concluding chapter
discusses hybrid woodland representation in several narratives and offers some
discussion of the conceptual malleability of literary woodland spaces in Middle
English literature.
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Foreword:

Approaching the Medieval English Literary Forest

The forest, as a narrative setting, was a favorite of medieval storytellers and their audiences, and thus it is quite familiar to modern students of medieval literature. It is part of the larger European narrative tradition, and, more specifically, it plays some role in a wide variety of poems and tales in later Middle English. Whether in Malory's chivalric forest or the poacher's cache in the Parlement of the Thre Ages, they serve as spaces where dreamers dream, knights quest, outlaws hide, scofflaws poach, birds sing, and kings and lords, on occasion, actually hunt. It also appears prominently in other, lesser-known, tales with some frequency, and is an integral part of the literary landscape, whether one's tastes run to the “high” or the “low” or drift somewhere between.
The narrative forest itself is somewhat amorphous, however, despite its prominence. The word “forest” is elastic, given that it can designate (with little or no elaboration or additional adjective) everything from a mysterious chivalric woodland where adventure and peril may await behind every tree to a bright and idyllic greenwood where a natural sort of nobility governs the jolly inhabitants. Further, even the legal notion of “forest” offers little by way of useful description; sometimes these narrative forests are named and legally bound spaces, in keeping with the medieval legal designation of the King’s forest, but nearly as often the “forest” is indistinguishable, in any legal or practical way, from any other woodland or wilderness.

Past critics and scholars, in writing about the forests of the medieval imagination, have tended to read them primarily as symbolic spaces, notable for the manner in which they allow particular fears and fantasies to be explored in a more neutral, and separate, context. As one of the most influential of modern historians, Jacques LeGoff helps set the stage for this reading by presenting the common general picture of a medieval Europe as a “great cloak of forests and moorlands perforated by relatively fertile cultivated clearings,” wherein woodland is the main element which separates and isolates pockets of civilization.¹ Further, in a larger meditation on medieval conceptions of wilderness, he sets up a binary, in declaring the “great contrast” of the Middle Ages to be “between nature and culture, expressed by the

opposition of what was built, cultivated and inhabited (city, castle, village) and what
was essentially wild (the ocean and the forest, the western equivalents of the eastern
desert).”

This particular notion of landscape heavily informs critical readings of
medieval literature as well. Corrine Saunders, for example, in her landmark study *The
Forests of Medieval Romance*, complicates this view somewhat, by bringing in some
notion of more complex interactions between forest and civilization, but nonetheless
emphasizes the notion of “great and unknown expanses of forest which did form a
part of medieval reality.” Her project includes but is not limited to later Middle
English—she explores in detail a number of French and English romances from the
twelfth to the sixteenth centuries—and she ultimately concludes that “the fictional
world of the forest is written and rewritten, drawing first closer to and then further
from reality, but the essential emphasis remains the same, the revelation of the human
psyche within this world of 'shaping fantasies'.

Diedre Kessel-Brown, in “The
Emotional Landscape of the Forest in the Medieval Love Lament,” presents a more
focused and specific reading, but comes to a similar conclusion, and offers an analysis
of the association of the forest with the "expression of emotional disturbance wrought
by failure in love," particularly in the poetic love lament.

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2 Jacques LeGoff, “The Wilderness in the Medieval West” in *The Medieval Imagination*, translated
4 Saunders, 205.
5 Diedre Kessel-Brown, “The Emotional Landscape of the Forest in the Medieval Love Lament,”
*Medium Aevum* 59, no.2 (1990), 228-47.
More recently, some critics have approached the woodland through the lens of “Green” or “Eco-” criticism. This is a radically different tack which significantly de-emphasizes the usual anthropocentric view in literary studies, and focuses instead on reading for non-human perspectives. The prime example of this critical method is Gillian Rudd's 2007 volume, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*. In her introduction, she states that "ecocriticism strives to move away from the anthropocentrism which creates and operates a value-system in which the only things that are seen, let alone valued, are those that serve some kind of purpose in human terms," and she presents readings of numerous texts (including *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Piers Plowman*, and selections from Malory and Chaucer) using this lens. An example of this approach in action is her reading of Chaucer's “Knight's Tale,” which she describes as "a story of humanity's fraught and often antagonistic relationship with the vegetative natural world."  

Most literary critics, however, to the degree that they actually focus on woodland space in a narrative context, tend to read woodlands as a kind of “outside” space, in some way separate from the daily life of the community (or of humanity). This would put the forest into the same basic category as other “outside” narrative spaces in Medieval literature, such as the East, or the divine spaces of Heaven and

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7 Rudd, 67. For further examples of this critical approach, see Sarah Stanbury’s “EcoChaucer: Green Ethics and Medieval Nature” (*Chaucer Review: a Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 39, no.1: 1-16), and Rebecca M. Douglass's “Ecocriticism and Middle English Literature” (*Studies in Medievalism* 10: 136-63).
Hell. Thus, the forest is primarily read as a symbolic space, meaning specifically that it is perceived to represent something other than woodland itself, rather than as a more concrete representation of actual woodland, or of common perceptions thereof. Indeed, it would be hard to offer justification for anything other than a primarily symbolic reading of, say, the woodland in the *Book of the Duchess*, since it is an integral part of the furniture of a Dream Vision; in a similar vein, it would be difficult to argue that some symbolism is not at work in the Greenwood, even though it is often coupled with particular named spaces. In this, these critics have much to support their relative positions.

Nonetheless, the core notion of this kind of critical approach, taking woodland as an “outside” space, is itself flawed, particularly when reading texts originating in fourteenth and fifteenth century England. Woodland, be it Royal Forest, noble hunting park, or other sort of property, was an integral part of the English economy and was, in most cases, both occupied and intensively managed—a far cry from an empty and uncultivated wilderness. Aside from the obvious timber, firewood, charcoal, and wild game, woodlands were managed for a wide range of resources, including pannage and pasturage, iron, salt, honey, hides, and hay. The rights to forest resources were highly prized, and people from all walks of life paid varying rents and fines for woodland access. (Such fines and grants, in fact, were an important source of revenue for the English crown throughout the period). For more on the disposition of English Royal Forests, and their economic importance in the Middle Ages, see Charles Young's *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* (Leicester:Leicester UP, 1979), particularly chapter six, and Raymond Grant's *The Royal Forests of England* (Stroud...
wasn't much woodland in England, which intensified this practical engagement. Oliver Rackham, a noted English landscape historian, points out that England, historically, “has had less woodland than most European countries, and has correspondingly taken more care of its woods. By the thirteenth century A.D. woodland management was a fully developed art with conservation as its chief objective.”¹ The English forest of the later Middle Ages was a mundane space, in which many different kinds of people went about their daily lives, and certainly not the deep, dark, and surrounding space LeGoff describes, and Saunders generally assumes.

Given this context, the forest as narrative space ceases to be easily classified as an “outside” space, to be read in symbolic terms. Though they certainly have some degree of symbolic value, the forests of literary imagination did not exist in a vacuum. Many in a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century English audience, particularly those of the more popular, perhaps more coarsely constructed, and less artistically self-conscious Middle English tales, would have some firsthand knowledge of actual, mundane woodland. If one were able, somehow, to peek into the minds of contemporary auditors of a raucous recitation of a tale like Gamelyn, or Ywain and Gawain, or perhaps King Edward and the Shepherd, looking specifically for a concrete sense of how the forests and woodlands so prominent in these tales were

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actually imagined by a contemporary audience, what, exactly, would we expect to see? Would this woodland be a dark, scary place? A bright, airy place? A very ordinary place? Would it be as mutable in the mind as it is between the narratives, and thus imagined differently, depending on the tale?

These are, of course, somewhat leading questions, and there's no real way of knowing the answers, but they are worth exploring nonetheless, since they lead into a consideration of the interactions, at least in the minds of the audience, between the literary forest and the actual forest. The audience element is crucial here, as the descriptions of these woodland spaces are notably lacking in specific detail in the tales mentioned above and similar tales, including the early Robin Hood poems. There are a few key words tossed about, and perhaps certain recognizable elements, but the bulk of the detail is left to expectation of shared assumption. The writers simply seem to assume that the audience knows what each particular forest is, and what sort of narrative moves can be expected within it. Given the likelihood of actual experience with or practical perceptions of woodlands within that popular audience, the descriptive gaps left in the narratives (which the audience must then fill through their own imaginations) would likely, whether intentionally or not, draw some elements of actual woodland into that imagination of the literary forest, even within the framework of narrative expectation. The project set out here, then, is to identify

10 Different strains of narrative forest tend to have different key adjectives and terms associated with them. For example, chivalric romances tend to use phrases like “wilde wodde” (Perceval of Galles) and “ful thik and hard” (Yvain and Gawain) which denote the dangerous, isolating elements of the woodland space, while the greenwood tales tend to use summer imagery and terms like “mereye” (“Robin Hood and the Potter”) to create the sense of an idyllic space.
the major threads of cultural and historical context which may help bridge the gap between the imaginative and the practical, and bring the literary forest and the perceived woodland together in the minds of a contemporary audience.

The idea that one's experience of a space, whether direct or indirect, helps to determine the perception of that or of similar spaces, is in some ways commonsensical, but it also has deep resonances within recent philosophical, anthropological, and particularly geographical, thought. The notion itself is implied by the fundamental structures of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's brand of phenomenology, particularly as discussed in his his *Phenomenology and Perception*, where he lays out the mechanics of subjective perception and concludes by considering the “being-in-the-world” which considers not only the mechanics of perception but the various pieces of mental furniture which allow the subject to make meaning of that perceived reality.\(^\text{11}\) This foundational notion is also built upon by Henri LeFebvre in *The Production of Space*, in which he considers the construction and perception of social spaces according to modes of production and hegemonic control.\(^\text{12}\) Anthropologist Michel de Certeau spins this same basic idea a slightly different way in his *Practice of Everyday Life*, where he considers the ways in which the perceived reality of a space, and the meaning or value of that space, is established by the way people move

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through, or the experiences they have within, that space, rather than through particular objective qualities of the space itself.

By far the most important applications of the idea of subjective perceptions of space, however, come from the field of Cultural (sometimes called Human) Geography. As a field of study, Cultural Geography focuses not on a component-based, object-oriented sense of physical geography (a study of that which occupies or physically comprises a particular space), but how that space is utilized or occupied or understood within individual and collective human consciousnesses. For example, the Tower of London is a physical object which occupies a physical space, but it has also been different things to different people through the centuries, from fortress to prison to tourist attraction (and others along the way), and simply mapping that space (and further determining its orientation, composition, etc.) cannot take into account the cultural resonance of that space, or the Tower itself as cultural artifact.

Cultural geography as literary approach is uncommon in medieval scholarship, but at least two recent volumes have adopted the notion as an organizing factor. The first, *Chaucer's Cultural Geography*, edited by Kathryn Lynch, is a varied essay collection, primarily preoccupied with Chaucer's “Others” specifically placing many of Chaucer's Eastern and Mediterranean narratives, settings, and influences into a contemporary conceptual and historical context. A second volume, Nicholas Howe's *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography*, focuses on

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13 There are many useful introductions to the field, but one of particular note is *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (eds. Atkinson, Jackson, Sibley and Washbourne. NY and London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2005.).
the senses of space, place, and geography expressed in a number of Anglo-Saxon and Latin writings, compared, in some cases, to the actual geographical spaces involved and occupied by those writings. While neither volume is immediately relevant to this study, each functions as an example of how the tenets and assumptions of Cultural Geography can offer a basis for literary scholarship.

In this case, the most important elements of Cultural Geography are the consideration of both “space” and “place” as conceptual constructs. Even within the discipline, the terms are fluid, and sometimes even used interchangeably, but the general distinction between the two is that of definition in physical/functional vs. lived-experience terms. Yi-Fu Tuan, an influential (even foundational) scholar in the field, explains that the two ideas merge in the mind: “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value … the ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition.” In this study, Tuan's conception allows a somewhat fluid differentiation between “space” as an overarching or archetypal idea of narrative woodland, and the particular “place” such woodland becomes in its deployment as part of a specific narrative. The “forest of medieval romance,” as discussed in general, is a “space,” while a particular literary woodland, such as the Broceliande depicted in Chretien's “Yvain,” would be a more particularized “place.” Such “place-making” is not

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14 For more on this, see Phil Hubbard's essay, “Space/Place” in Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts, 41-8.
15 Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1977), 6.
necessarily a matter of naming. Not all fantasy forests are named, and even when these forest spaces are named, the simple act of naming the forest does not itself create this idea of place. Such naming may offer the reader some cues as to the sort of place it might be—for example, Chretien's Broiceliande would be a much less restricting name for a Middle English audience than, say, Inglewood, because the former is a long-ago-and-far-away space with which the audience could have no direct experience, while the latter would be a real and present entity—but even with a named space, the reader must still, mentally, provide the furniture of the space to some degree, within the narrative context provided by the story itself. Thus, the burden of interpretation, the turning of space into place, while certainly guided by narrative cues, still rests primarily upon the audience members, many of whom would likely have had some degree of practical experience with contemporary woodland. In these terms, then, this project becomes an exploration of how a literary space (the forest as general narrative element), becomes a literary place (a practical setting or location within the confines of a particular narrative), in the minds of a contemporary audience, insofar as that transition draws upon the audience's practical woodland experience.

The key to selecting texts for such a study, then, is a matter of determining which narratives draw most heavily on audience assumption, in a context which allows the most direct importation of personal or practical knowledge and experience into the narrative as woodland “space” becomes “place” in the
telling/reading of the particular narrative. To do this, we can examine the mechanics of individual narratives in order to determine how prescriptive the narrative itself is, vis-à-vis the particularization of space and the subsequent creation of place, looking specifically for elements which close off the audience's own present and practical knowledge. For example, while Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* takes place within a forest, the nature of the narrative itself, as dream vision, circumscribes the “place-making” process by presenting the forest specifically and explicitly as a forest of the mind. In a similar vein, the grove in “The Knight's Tale” is established within the narrative as a symbolic space, in which the trees themselves have particular referents and meanings, as part of a narrative that clearly is set at a great temporal and geographic remove. Likewise, the fairy forests of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* are established as a specifically “other” place where access is magically limited and the regular rules of mundane space do not apply. Even Malory's forests, which are not nearly so imbued with direct symbolic value, prevents the wholesale importation of contemporary notions of woodland by continually reminding the audience that this is a narrative of a more noble and glorious past, through his references to “past days” and the old “French Book” which (supposedly) serves as his source. The texts which would best serve would be those that, whatever their engagement with larger or pre-existing literary traditions, lack the kind of narrative construction or language which explicitly denies the sense of the contemporary.

Further, in order for this study to offer any support for larger claims about the
forests of Middle English narrative, the works examined must be foundational, or at
least able to stand alone in a critical study, without requiring significant recourse to a
larger body of narrative. In discussing the outlaw's greenwood, for example, the
seemingly obvious choice of looking at Robin Hood narratives is undercut by both
the paucity of early materials, and the existence of a large corpus of later materials.
The earliest extant Robin Hood narratives are generally assumed to be built upon an
older tradition, so they cannot be consider foundational, and even these early
narratives are so saturated with a sense of that tradition (and the presumption of
audience familiarity with Robin and his particular milieu), that it becomes difficult to
draw conclusions from any single narrative.

With these two key elements in mind, then, I have chosen two important
works for close-reading in each of the three chapters, each pair of which both
demonstrates an important strain of forest representation in Middle English popular
narrative, and allows significant narrative room for the inclusion of contemporary
experiences and concerns in the creation of a woodland “place.” The first chapter,
which discusses the chivalric forest, focuses on Chrétien's legacy, covering the only
stand-alone translations/adaptations of his work into Middle English, *Ywain and
Gawain* and *Sir Pereceval of Galles*. Neither narrative is a faithful translation, and
the forest elements in particular show a different sense of space/place than their
source materials, and thus they offer an excellent opportunity for comparative
reading. In the second chapter, which covers the outlaw's greenwood, offers readings
of *The Tale of Gamelyn* and *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley*. The first, Gamelyn, is the earliest and most complete of the extant Middle English outlaw narratives, and thus has much to offer regarding the origins of the outlaw's forest, while the second, which, like the Robin Hood tales, is clearly drawn from a later version of an earlier narrative, offers a sense of continuity over time. The third and final chapter, which covers the poacher's forest, discusses “King Edward and the Shepherd” and “The King and the Hermit.” Both narratives are versions of the “King in Disguise” trope which specifically incorporate elements related to hunting, poaching, and law in fourteenth and fifteenth century England, and thus offer a slightly different, and much more mundane, perspective on woodlands than contemporary tales of knights and outlaws.

The conclusion brings all three visions of the narrative forest together as part of a larger consideration of hybrid woodland spaces in Middle English popular romance, and then offers some observations about the continuity of concerns addressed within those spaces. It focuses specifically on the Middle English Gawain romances, discusses the ways in which different elements of the previously-discussed forests come into play in their narrative settings, and then concludes with general observations about the place of rules and law within the literary forests of Middle English popular romance.
Chapter One:
The Chivalric Forest

A reading of Malory's famous collection of medieval English chivalric romances—full as they are of knights riding off to find wonders and adventures in the ever-present forest—could easily lead one to imagine the imprisoned knight looking out onto a landscape thick with woodlands that promised, at least in his imagination, the kind of excitement with which his tales are infused. It is easy to see, with this picture in mind, how the forests of medieval England, with their bandits and other dangers, influenced the imaginations of Malory and other writers and translators of chivalric romance who simply filled the mysterious spaces around them with old tales of magic and adventure. This would follow logically, that is, if such forests actually
existed. Unfortunately, the reality was not quite so cut-and-dried, and the woodlands of medieval England—the actual forests that an imprisoned Malory might have looked out upon in the latter 15th century—were in fact quite mundane and bore little resemblance to the wild forests of his Arthurian world.

Oliver Rackham, a leading English landscape historian, states quite directly that “in the Middle Ages, wildwood (and 'wilderness' as modern American writers think of it) lay in the very distant past. Medieval Europeans had no more direct experience of it than modern Europeans, and indeed less than modern Americans.”

The woodlands of medieval England tended to be small and managed for wood, timber, pannage, game, and other natural resources. None was wild; all were named, bounded, and held by someone, and even the most restricted spaces, the numerous deer parks and hunting preserves, were intensively managed. The actual Royal Forests, held under a separate law and known primarily as the private hunting reserves of the monarchs, were also heavily utilized. Grants of access to resources and game were commonly made—for a price—and infractions, despite the gruesome penalties laid out in legal treatises, were almost always punished by the imposition of fines. The kings were not conservationists per se, but rather resource managers with an eye for profit, and indeed the forest economy was a great source of revenue, particularly for the Plantagenets.  

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2 For more on the disposition of English Royal Forests, and their economic importance in the Middle Ages, see Charles Young's The Royal Forests of Medieval England (Leicester:Leicester UP, 1979), particularly chapter six, and Raymond Grant's The Royal forests of England (Stroud
not particularly wild, but they were also, in terms of aggregate acreage, rather small.

According to Rackham, the landscape of medieval England at the time of the Domesday survey was only about 15 percent woodland or less, and the following centuries saw more clearing, leaving only about six percent of the country wooded at the time of the Black Death.\(^3\)

Thus, if we consider the dates of composition (or translation, depending on how one defines it) of those lesser-known Middle English chivalric romances which also clearly utilize this conception of the wild, mysterious forest, and which we will be examining here—namely *Yvain and Gawain*, and *Sir Perceval of Galles*—we can see that they hardly date from a time when England was thick with trees. *Yvain and Gawain* appears in an early fifteenth-century manuscript, in language that appears to predate the compilation by some fifty to one hundred years. *Sir Perceval of Galles* appears in the Thornton Manuscript, which was compiled by Robert Thornton, of East Newton, Yorkshire, in the early to mid fifteenth century. Either of these writers/adapters may well have been familiar with some contemporary woodlands, but such practical interactions seem to have no apparent relationship to the literary forests with which they present us—even if one excepts the more hyperbolic and magical elements of these literary spaces. There is little accurate representation of contemporary woodland to be found in the works here mentioned, and depictions of

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deer parks, managed woodlot, or even of the Royal Forests are rare and fleeting—by
and large, we have only the imagined deep dark forest of Romance.

Returning to Malory for a moment, we can see that his mythic geography
definitely fits the conception of medieval England as a thick blanket of woodland and
dotted with clearings, and shows little acknowledgment of any realistically composite
landscape. Malory's knights regularly move from castle to forest (or moor, or other
waste) with little description of intermediary spaces—one gets the impression that the
forest begins right outside the castle gate, and that trips from castle to castle generally
take one not through fields, orchards, villages, pasture, and woodlots, but almost
exclusively through deep forests full of wonders and adventures. These forests are not
wild in the typical North American sense of the word—uncontrolled, uninhabited, and
somehow untouched by man—since these forests are relatively well-populated with
knights-errant, hermits, and of course the denizens (sometimes good and sometimes
not) of the various castles and other holdings found within the woods. Yet these
woods are wild in that they seem beyond the reach, somehow, of law and/or
civilization—the sole authority here is not the king, but rather the sword and the sense
of honor which is meant to govern its use. These forests, and most of the denizens and
dwellings found within, are “other” spaces that often seem to exist only to be
conquered or otherwise incorporated into the Arthurian hegemony through some
(often violent) form of chivalric exercise. Indeed, Malory's forest is peculiarly suited
to knightly concerns, as there is plenty of opportunity for violence, particularly in
situations which test both one's arm and one's honor together, but very little recognition of any other aspect of life. Not only are there apparently few fields, pastures, woodlots, villages, or even hunting parks in Malory's England, there are also very few of the peasants or lower functionaries who would occupy and manage such spaces. Malory's forests, like those in the great majority of medieval chivalric romances, are part of a vision of a chivalric landscape in which the only spaces worth mentioning are the aristocratic, chivalric spaces of court and quest, and thus the forest seems to exist exclusively for testing.

In part because of this chivalric fixation, it is quite easy to read Malory's, and others', romance forests in more symbolic terms. Indeed many critics, if not most, have done so, focusing primarily, if not solely, on the literary function and symbolic capacity of the chivalric romance forest, rather than seriously considering the relationship literary forests might have with actual ones. In Malory criticism (itself the most comprehensive of any devoted to Middle English chivalric romances), there is little direct discussion of the forest, and again, it tends toward the symbolic. Sally Fermin, in a rare article devoted entirely to Malory's forests, makes a distinction between the secular forests, which offer a neutral environment where knights seek adventure, and the grail forest, in which knights are more directly affected/directed by the landscape itself. She does not at any point, however, consider these narrative spaces in relation to any actual forests. Muriel Whitaker, in her volume *Arthur's S

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Kingdom of Adventure: The World of Malory's Morte Darthur, devotes a chapter to the “Perilous Forest,” and, though she briefly mentions the disjunction between the Malory's forests and actual medieval forests (citing Rackham), she does not explore it in any detail. Indeed, she seems to introduce the idea of the real only to negate any possible connection between actual and literary forest spaces. Even Corrine Saunders, in her landmark Forest of Medieval Romance, focuses mostly on the symbolic import of various forests, despite both mentioning the importance of actual forests to these literary representations and discussing the historical forest early on. If these critics have one thing clearly in common, it is that their work demonstrates that, by and large, the forests of medieval chivalric romance are not correlative to real spaces, but are best understood in terms of their symbolic or narrative function within a popular literary form.

It might seem difficult, then, to make the claim that contemporary conceptions of and experiences with woodland spaces had any significant impact on this very well-established (by the fourteenth century) and traditional narrative setting. All the same, we must consider the manner in which the practical woodland conceptions and experience of the contemporary audience affected both the perception and utilization of these narrative spaces, particularly if we are careful about what we mean by

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5 Even in this, Saunders seems to tend toward a more “romantic” conception of forest, as she dismisses Rackham's claims about the minimal extent of English woodland at the time of the Domesday survey as “rather extreme” (2) and instead favors the “less extreme view” offered by Charles Higounet in an article which predates Rackham's volume and is not specific to England. Her reasons for preferring the earlier, and much less comprehensive, study are not made particularly clear.
"contemporary" and whose conceptions and experiences with woodland we're considering. Malory's forest is clearly more carefully constructed than that of the Middle English chivalric romances we are considering, but it offers us a way in to the discussion of the other texts by virtue of its very self-conscious nature. Specifically, Malory's tale is both nostalgic, and actively historicized—at several points he refers to the differences between what goes on “nowadayes” compared to King Arthur's days (in which the past always comes off the better of the two), and he also repeatedly refers to his (supposed) older source materials directly, usually in the form of the “French book”—both of which indicate that Malory is not just telling a series of stories, but is consciously bringing an idealized past into the present. This idealization of the past extends, or can be presumed to extend, to the forest as well, since the deep dark Romance forest can serve as contrast to the contemporary, “tamed” woodland. Further, this process of idealization and historicization is also apparent in most of Malory's sources. Thus, not only is Malory's Middle English text a reinscription of an earlier set of stories into a new temporal and cultural space, but the French models are themselves filtering conceptions of self and space through the screen of an idealized past contemporary with their composition; essentially, Malory's Works are a fifteenth-century Anglophone version of a twelfth-century Francophone imagined history. Malory's forests, then, are perhaps best viewed through a twelfth-century rather than a fifteenth-century lens, whether one is considering them in terms of practical interaction, literary symbolism, or both.
Though Malory is not the central concern of this study, his Works (and related critical materials) serve as an excellent model for this study because he gives us a relatively concrete bridge between the centuries. His relationships with his sources are not only explicitly acknowledged (if sometimes misleadingly) within the text, but they are also much studied and discussed by critics who often actively consider Malory's compositional choices as he redeployts thirteenth-century narratives in fifteenth-century contexts. The texts we are examining here, particularly *Yvain and Gawain* and *Sir Perceval of Galles*, do not offer the careful and explicit considerations or acknowledgments of source materials which foster such directed readings. However, if we start with the fact that all of these texts are translations or adaptations of earlier works—*Yvain and Gawain* and *Sir Perceval of Galles* are adaptations of Chrétien's Arthurian romances, and Malory depends extensively on a number of earlier texts, including the French Vulgate Cycle—then it would be most useful to not only look at these romances in their immediate contexts, but to also look at their sources, along with the period in which, and the people for whom, they were written. If we consider these as fourteenth- and fifteenth-century re-imaginings of twelfth-century literary models which respond to twelfth-century conceptions and concerns, then the connection between the actual and symbolic woodland becomes more apparent. By doing this, we can see a doubled sense of “reality” underpinning the narrative settings of the later tales, first the twelfth-century “realities” which set
the mold, followed by the fifteenth-century “realities” which provide a different context for receiving and redeploying these now-traditional settings.

**Twelfth-Century Perspectives**

If we look back, then, to the late twelfth-century cultural context in which Chrétien was working, we can see a cultural milieu that is, at least conceptually, much closer the worlds of chivalric romance than it is during later eras. Chrétien, as part of a warlike and expansive Francophone elite, was living in a context of continuous conquest, as the Normans and others moved out into, and claimed for themselves, what they saw as the hinterlands of Europe and the Near East. In particular, the aftermath of the Norman invasion of England, and the continuing press of this new hegemonic group into Ireland and Wales, sets the stage for the bulk of his literary work. While Chrétien himself may never have visited these particular frontiers, his audience of Francophone nobles were highly mobile and were generally, if not directly involved in, at least connected by kinship ties to the hegemonic projects of conquest and colonization then occurring. In order to understand Chrétien's forests, then, it is important to consider the prevailing conceptions of, and experiences with, such landscapes, particularly on those fringes.

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6 While many historians and historical studies acknowledge this general situation, *The Making of Europe*, by Robert Bartlett (Princeton, 1993), is an excellent resource regarding this particular phenomenon.
When considering this “frontier” landscape from the perspective of such a group, one can see that many forests may have seemed very deep and dark indeed. To those who lived there (like the native Irish and Welsh), such spaces were likely quite mundane, but for the invader these same spaces would often be both unfamiliar and quite perilous. Further, this situation was not fleeting, but rather persisted long enough for it to become solidly entrenched in the Anglo-Norman (as well as the Cambro-Norman and Hiberno-Norman) cultural consciousness; the conquest of the British Isles occurred piecemeal, over the course of centuries, and new hegemonic orders developed a distinct “fortress” mentality, particularly on the more obvious frontiers. In the literature surrounding these interconnected conquests, particularly that which focuses on the Celtic fringe, we see much that reinforces the sense of danger and mystery lurking just beyond the walls which is so prominent in contemporary chivalric romance.

Gerald of Wales, a contemporary of Chrétien and perhaps the most popular and influential writer ever to tackle the subjects of Ireland and Wales, had much to say about the relationships between the natives, the conquerors, and the landscape itself; his commentary provides us with a template of the common (if not always particularly accurate) Francophone perceptions of the Celtic West in the latter twelfth century. His work on Ireland likely postdates Chrétien's *Yvain* by a few years, so no

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7 By the later 12th century, intermarriage and cultural intermingling had softened the relations between conqueror and conquered in England itself (and to some degree in Scotland), but Wales remained a contentious hodge-podge of Marcher lordships and native Welsh principalities, and the invasion of Ireland didn't occur until 1169. For more on this, see Robert Bartlett's *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225* (Clarendon: Oxford, 2000).
direct influence can be proposed, but the situations which he describes, and the cultural context in which he's working, are close enough to Chrétien's own that their notions of the Celtic fringe will in many ways correspond. This correspondence is worth considering here not only because Gerald's work is enormously popular and influential, but also because he approaches his subject from an almost ethnographic angle, and his writing is specifically presented as an overview. Gerald's commentary is mostly after-the-fact, and though some of his claims are absurd, he delineates between what he has seen himself, and what he has only heard of. His “journalistic” approach, on which he so carefully insists in later defenses of his work, does support the notion that the ideas presented were, in some form, in circulation before he set them down. Taken all together, Gerald's writing offers the most representative picture of Francophone conceptions of Ireland and Wales in the latter twelfth century, and thus they serve as the ideal comparative texts in a study of Chrétien's forests.8

There are three main assertions in Gerald's writings that are of particular relevance to this study: first, according to Gerald the land itself, though rich and fertile and absurdly wondrous, is also rough and wooded, and thus very difficult territory for horsemen in heavy armor (used to working in open country) to conquer and control; second, the native people, though well built and of noble potential, are by

8 The trio of Gerald's volumes of most interest here, the Topographia Hiberniae (The History and Topography of Ireland) and the Expugnatio Hibernica (The Conquest of Ireland), and the Descriptio Cambriae (the Description of Wales) are all arranged by book and chapter (or simply by chapter alone in the case of the T.H.), and the chapters are generally quite short (often less than a page). Thus, for our purposes here, it will be more practical to cite by book and chapter, or simply by chapter, rather than by page number.
turns hospitable and treacherous, debilitated by their own savage culture; and finally, the conquerors themselves, though (generally) valiant and resourceful, are isolated in these strange lands, and subject to corruption by the local customs.

Gerald's description of the land, particularly of Ireland, is clearly informed by both fantasy and empirical topography, drawing as it does on the tradition of the *Wonders of the East* and the context of military conquest. In the *Topographia Hiberniae*, Gerald draws on themes and wonders associated with exotic eastern materials throughout. He describes wondrous islands, strange creatures, prophecies, and marvelous happenings, and even compares West and East directly, claiming that the West is better because the riches of the East are “tainted and poisoned” while the West is temperate, mild and healthy. These wondrous elements aren’t entirely “eastern” of course—the wondrous wells, for example, are compared with similar wells in Brittany and Sicily, rather than points further—but the “eastern” influence is apparent enough that Catherine Rooney, in an article on the *Topographia Hiberniae*, posits that Gerald made a conscious decision to draw on popular traditions, particularly the matter of the east, “in order to ensure a wide audience for his work.”

Though these singularly wondrous descriptions run throughout the *Topographia Hiberniae*, they are also countered, within the text, by straightforward

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9 The comparative wells (*T.H.* ch. 40-41) are of particular interest here, as the well in Brittany is very similar to the magic well in the Yvain stories, in that water spilled upon a nearby rock will precipitate a rainstorm. The correspondence is not exact, of course, but the similarity is notable, and given that this comes about after the romance is in circulation, the reference may be deliberate.

descriptions of the landscape. The rough and wooded land, according to Gerald, is both fertile and full of mineral wealth, yet uncultivated and undeveloped (due to the laziness of the populace)—a rich place, it seems, once it's cleared and developed, and it's open for the taking. Though not specifically written as invasion propaganda, Gerald's writings present a very enticing picture for the would-be conqueror.

Further, such conquest is clearly something very much supported by Gerald, as he explicitly offers some landscape-oriented advice to these would-be conquerors in a later text, the Expugnatio Hibernica. In a chapter called “How the Irish People is to be Conquered,” he explains that the French style of fighting, which relies upon heavy cavalry and armor deployed in open plains, is useless in the “rough, wooded country” of Ireland and Wales. In Ireland and Wales, he explains, the terrain is “confined and difficult” and more suited to men on foot, in light armor, who can more easily traverse the wooded or boggy ground. This is not a passing notion either, as this same description, almost unchanged, appears in Gerald's Description of Wales. He also indicates that some of the troubles facing the conquerors are in part the result of their not ravaging the enemy's land and building more castles—which might be expected—but also stem, notably, from their not “widening the forest tracks … by felling and drawing aside the trees to give greater protection to travelers” This lack, on the part of the conquerors, created a situation where peace was to be found only

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11 T.H. 93
12 E.H. 2.38
13 D.K. 2.8
14 E.H. 36
inside the city walls, while the outlying areas were ineffectively ruled and quite
dangerous. The place itself, then, if we take Gerald's word, is very nearly defined by
its dangerous, narrow forest roads, and a lack of safety beyond the castle walls—
much like the forests in Chrétien's romances, in fact.

Gerald's discussion of the people also offers much to give the conqueror
pause. By his measure, both the native Irish and Welsh, considered here as the
stereotypical denizens of the forest, are bundles of contradictions. The Irish natives,
both peasant and noble alike, have “excellent natural qualities” but are “wild and
inhospitable” and “so barbarous that they cannot be said to have any culture.”15 In his
*Expugnatio* he takes great care to depict Diarmait and other important Irishmen as
notably bloodthirsty, savage and untrustworthy, especially in comparison with the
“good” Francophone invaders (and not all of them, it should be noted, are considered
good by Gerald).16 In fact, in the *Topographia* we see Gerald employing a sort of
imperialistic logic well familiar to students of later colonial history: the Irish natives,
he claims, “have not progressed at all from the primitive habits of pastoral living,” as
the more civilized peoples (*i.e.* the Franks) have. They favor, by this measure, a wild
sort of life, since they are too lazy to till their fields, and instead use the excellent soil
for pasture. According to Gerald, they “live on beasts only, and live like beasts”17—
and are, it is to be assumed, just waiting for their cultural superiors to come and,

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15 *T.H.* 93
16 This is the case throughout the work, but one the first few battles, which features mass beheadings
and an Irish chieftain (Diarmait) angrily chewing on the face of one of the discomobulated, is
particularly notable in it's grotesque representation of the natives.
17 *T.H.* 93
essentially, bring them out of their physical and cultural wilderness, and settle them into a stable agrarian style of life. And the Welsh fare little better at Gerald's hands, despite his blood relation to the Welsh nobility and self-identification as a Welshman. His picture of the Welsh is very similar to that of the Irish—they are nobly born and built, and quite hospitable and respectful of nobility, but are nonetheless untrustworthy, greedy cowards.¹⁸

This environment is not only physically dangerous and culturally exotic, but psychologically corrosive as well. That it is isolating, for the Marcher lords, is very clear, given the geography and tenuousness of political power in the British Celtic fringe, but for Gerald the issue runs deeper, especially in Ireland. The wickedness and treachery of the Irish, are as “pitch” and “defile” those who come in contact with it, so much so that “foreigners coming to this country almost inevitably are contaminated by this, as it were, inborn vice of the country—a vice that is most contagious.”¹⁹ He continues, and says, in part, that those who are not already accursed are made so by their time in Ireland and contact with the Irish. Even the conquerors, it seems, are not to be trusted, and have the potential to become as bad as the Irish they are meant to be conquering. Again, this situation is not unlike the ones repeated in Chrétien's romances, where the lords of outlying castles often seem at variance with the hegemonic ideals embodied by the questing knights.

¹⁸ His discussion of the Welsh, which continues at length in his Description of Wales is quite clearly contradictory—much more so than his descriptions of the Irish. At one point, for example, he praises their temperance, and then a few pages later he decries their drunkenness.

¹⁹ T.H. 101
The idea that Chrétien's romances may draw fairly directly and intentionally on the kind of communal experience and popular conception which Gerald's writing both draws on and extends is not, of course, directly provable, but neither is it out of line with other critical observations regarding his ability to play to the interests of his immediate audiences. Forest are not the only element of Chrétien's works that reflect the interests, concerns, and experiences of his audiences. Another audience-oriented element, Chrétien's use and depictions of tournament, is particularly worth noting here, since it offers us a lens through which we can view Chrétien's forests in the context of their immediate cultural relevance.

Larry D. Benson, in an article comparing tournaments in the romances of Chrétien and *L'Histoire de Guillaume Le Marechal*, notes that tournament in Chrétien's romances, though “purified … of many of its most objectionable elements,” offered an image of the sport that, in many respects, was true to life. Benson also points out that Chrétien had no literary precedent to work from in constructing his literary tournaments (as the course of his career generally parallels the rise of tournament itself in contemporary chivalric culture), and thus had to draw directly on life, likely with an eye toward the interests and pastimes of his patrons and audiences. The ultimate effect here, Benson proposes, is that the true-to-life details help to “authenticate” the otherwise marvelous narratives by allowing the audience “to believe that these marvels occur to knights who lead lives that are in some

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respects much like their own." In this case, at least, it seems that Chrétien knew his audience very well, and wrote quite specifically for them by taking into account the sorts of details that would catch their attention and help them to identify with his chivalric protagonists.

We can see this same sense of authenticating detail at work in Chrétien's representation of forests, both in terms of his audiences' practical conceptions of forests, and their particular interest in forest as conquerable space. As with his tournaments, Chrétien seems to have drawn many real-life elements of the forest from, if not first-hand experience, then larger cultural conceptions of the Celtic Fringe, as laid out by Gerald. And also as with his tournaments, Chrétien seems to have incorporated not only the activities of his audience, but their interests as well, in creating a forest space in which the desire for adventure, and particularly conquest, can be satisfied. In that vein, it's perhaps not just coincidence, then, that in the mid-1170s, when Chrétien was composing his *Yvain* and therein depicting a knight who travels to a foreign land, vanquishes a foe, marries a noble (landowning) widow, and renegotiates his and his new land's inclusion in the Arthurian milieu, Richard FitzGilbert de Clare, better known as Strongbow, was actually doing (or had very recently done) something very similar in Ireland.

Strongbow, a familiar name in medieval Irish history, was a major player in the Cambro-Norman invasion of the island, which was even wilder, in popular

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21 Benson, 13-14.
22 Dating (1173-1176) comes from Ruth Harwood Cline's Yvain (p.xii).
conception, than it was when Gerald visited two decades later. Diarmait Mac Murchada, an exiled Irish king unable to gain direct support from Henry II, petitioned Cambro-Norman lords from south Wales for assistance in regaining his kingdom. He offered money and lands to most, but to Strongbow he offered his daughter, Aiofe, and, through her, succession to the kingdom of Leinster. Strongbow took him up on the offer, and though he did not take part in the first wave of invasion in 1169, by late 1170 he was both married and established in Ireland. By 1171, Mac Murchada was dead, and Strongbow had taken over the lordship of Leinster and was pushing his influence even further into the Irish wilds. His accession caused no small amount of concern, both to the native Irish nobility, who disagreed with the terms of his claim, and to Henry II, who became uneasy at the amount of power (not to mention the nearly “royal” status) that Strongbow was gaining in Ireland. Henry himself, after some legal wrangling and various negotiation, traveled to Ireland in 1172 in order to re-establish the feudal pecking order. In the end, Strongbow was kept in check, but managed to retain his Irish lordship, as well as his holdings in Wales, England, and Normandy.  

By 1176, Strongbow was dead, his story had run its course, but his life offers a paradigmatic model for knightly adventure into the wilderness, and the similarities between that story and the romance recently composed by the famous Chrétien are readily apparent. While Strongbow was not necessarily the model for Yvain, the fact

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23 These are all pretty basic details which can be found in numerous sources, but an excellent reference is Marie Therese Flanagan's *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship* (Oxford, 1989).
remains that the adventures of the fictional knight, in his fictional Broceliande, parallel in many ways the more successful elements of this real knight's experiences in the wilds of Ireland which Gerald so readily describes. Thus, the degree to which ones reads the fantastical in this romance should be tempered by the knowledge that many of the author's contemporaries did, in fact, imagine such wondrous spaces to exist, and people had, in fact, won themselves exotic kingdoms, by force of arms, in the recent past.

The forests of Ireland and Wales, then, in the latter twelfth century, are not only dangerous and unfamiliar terrain in and of themselves, but they are quite literally perceived to be the spaces of separation, which isolate “civilization” in almost hermetic pockets, and thus create spaces where the hegemonic order may be, and is, regularly challenged, in ways both mundane and wondrous. While dangers abound in (and beyond) these forest spaces, riches and honors are waiting to be won as well. That the “romance” forest can certainly have symbolic value is undoubted, but the perceived reality of such places, in Chrétien's own cultural milieu, is particularly worth noting when we look not only at his forests, but at the forests of his Middle English literary descendants.
Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Middle English *Ywain and Gawain*

A directly comparative, historically informed approach is well-suited to an examination of the forests in Chrétien's *Yvain*, and the Middle English *Ywain and Gawain*, because it allows us to contrast the different senses of “reality” in forest representation in these two closely-related poems. By establishing the sense of authenticating detail that Chrétien employs in the forests of the earlier poem, we can then see how those details translate into the very different contexts of fifteenth-century England, and how those narrative forests subsequently change. In any case, while the ultimate focus here is, of course, on the later poem (since it fits both the language and period of this study, while the first does not), it is difficult to separate the two because the Middle English poem, though certainly a literary entity in its own right, is the only extant Middle English version of Chrétien's tale, and thus offers a unique glimpse into the Middle English process of cross-cultural translation.

Indeed, comparative studies tend to dominate the critical conversation regarding the later poem; though the Middle English poet does not acknowledge or explicitly interact with its source material, as Malory often does, the bulk of the existing critical conversation is primarily focused on the poem as a translation/adaptation of Chrétien's *Yvain*, and most critical and aesthetic judgments of the poem tend to emerge from explicitly comparative readings of the two works. The judgments themselves vary, of course, but the main issue here is that the English
poem is less than two-thirds the length of its source (4035 lines and 6516 lines, respectively), mostly because several elements within the poem are either curtailed or cut entirely, and thus critics have a tendency to account for the changes in content and structure in one way or another.

For many critics, it is simply a coarser poem for a coarser audience—as Newstead points out in the *Manual of Writings in Middle English* entry for the poem, much of the stripped material consists of “Chrétien’s reflective comments and his descriptions of the characters’ emotional conflicts,” and she further explains that the poet “uses English colloquial expressions and proverbs instead of the elevated literary conventions of Chrétien,” and in making these changes, the poet thus “emphasizes chivalric conduct rather than courtly love.”24 This apparent shift from high to low art (contemplative, courtly, and literary to active, chivalric, and colloquial) is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, and judgment depends mostly upon the critic’s aesthetic criteria. Newstead herself calls it “a smoothly-flowing, straightforward narrative that does justice to the excellent tale though without the delicate irony that distinguishes Chrétien’s treatment” and further writes that it is “generally acknowledged to be one of the most successful in Middle English.”25

Other critics have not always been so kind in their assessments, but most of those who have concerned themselves with the shifts Newstead lays out have looked

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25 Ibid.
to cultural changes, whether between eras, languages or social classes, to explain the differences. Norman Harrington for example, argued in 1970 that the “missing” portions are not lacunae (as some previous scholars had suggested), but are in fact the result of the English poet’s drive to “eliminate all the material that would seem unpalatable or irrelevant to the sober, practical, realistic tastes of a fourteenth-century English audience.”

Keith Busby approaches the differences in terms of audience as well, but takes a slightly different tack, arguing specifically that the move “towards a faster moving, no-nonsense sort of romance, in which the subtle interplay between courtesy, chivalry, and love plays a subordinate role, might suggest a less aristocratic public, possibly with a smaller proportion of women in the audience.”

David Matthews, in a more recent article, explicitly reads Yvain and Gawain as an inscription of Chrétien’s Yvain in a new temporal and ideological context, a kind of “textual colonizing” rather than simply translation, and points out that “a fourteenth-century English text … could only apprehend the text of Yvain, not its contexts.” In following this line of reasoning, Matthews re-examines Stephen Knight’s historicizing discussion of Chrétien’s Yvain against some of its dissimilarities with the later text in its own cultural and temporal situation, ultimately determining that the “later text is necessarily imbued with the ideology of its times of production” and

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suggested, in conclusion, that “it is not only possible, but desirable to approach
history in the translation on the same level at which it is considered in the original.”

Since the ultimate intent of this chapter is to follow some form of Matthews’
final exhortation in examining the representation of woodland space in Yvain and
Gawain, it's important to note that, by the latter fourteenth century, great shifts in
practical interactions with, and general perceptions of, woodland space had occurred
in England. In particular, it's important to note that England was a much more
culturally integrated place than it had been three centuries before, and the fires of
conquest in Ireland and Wales, while they had not burned out, were burning much
lower than in the twelfth century. Further, England was itself a more functional and
insulated geopolitical unit, since political shifts in earlier centuries (most notably
King John's loss of most of his continental holdings) had severed or at least curtailed
many cross-channel dynastic ties. England was no longer contested territory, the
fortress mentality of Anglo-Norman society had faded, and the woodland was no
longer, in practical terms, the place of conquest and adventure that it once had been.
Instead, practical experience with woodland, on the part of a fourteenth-century
English audience, would have revolved mostly around more mundane, managed, and
bounded spaces very much unlike the forests of chivalric romance. Yet, despite the
significant shifts, the general, functional representation of woodland space actually
changes very little from one poem to the other.

Matthews, 461-2.
Both poems first introduce woodland space narratively, through the story Colgrevance\textsuperscript{30} tells, at Arthur’s court, about his journey to, and chivalric failure at, the magic fountain. In Chrétien’s poem, he describes traveling through a forest “thick and deep” along a path “treacherous and steep” (171-72)\textsuperscript{31} in order to reach first the castle of the friendly vavasour, and later the churlish herdsman and magic fountain. The English poem’s Colgrevance finds, “in a frith,” a path “ful thik and hard” (157-58)\textsuperscript{32} which he follows to the same spaces of adventure. Later, when the knight of the fountain challenges him, the knight swears, in Chrétien’s text, upon his “word and town and wood” (473), while in the English text the knight refers to the place as “his forest” (412). The most notable differences here are that the forest, named as Broceliande in Chrétien’s text (177), is not named in the English text, and while Chrétien’s monstrous churl is specifically the master of wild bulls (309-310), the churl in the English poem is master of all manner of wild beasts of the forest (295-99). In each case we see a move from a more specific to more generalized representations. Nonetheless, in both poems we have specific references to the same forest spaces as wild and mysterious to the newcomer, but mundane to the established residents, who themselves are somewhat mysterious, though not necessarily unfamiliar to a twelfth-century audience—for example, the churl (one of the few

\textsuperscript{30} Unless otherwise noted, I have normalized the names to reflect the versions in the Middle English poem, in order to avoid confusion and redundancy.
\textsuperscript{31} Line numbers refer to the Ruth Harwood Cline translation.
\textsuperscript{32} Line numbers refer to the METS edition.
peasant figures in the genre) could easily pass for an Irish grotesque, if we buy into Gerald's descriptions.

This opening narrative is, of course, told entirely from the perspective of Colgrevance, but when Ywain sets out to avenge Colgrevance’s defeat the landscape and encounters are exactly as described. The wildness of the forest space through which Ywain must travel in order to find Colgrevance’s path is reconfirmed in Chrétien’s text in lines 716-21: “he made his way / down valley and up mountainside / on into forests deep and wide. He went through many wicked passes, through many treacherous, wild morasses / and eerie places.” In the English poem, this portion is much more concise, and more vague, at least in terms of landscape; in addition to noting “high mowntayne” and “wilderness,” the poem also takes Ywain across “mony a playne” (597-98). Both poems quickly gloss over the night’s lodging, the churl and the challenge at the fountain, and move fairly directly into the fight scene.

Once Ywain defeats the knight and, with the assistance of the clever maid, wins the hand (and lands) of the late knight’s lady, the timbre of woodland representation in the poems subtly changes. Many lines pass without reference to woodland, as Ywain first wins and then settles into his role as lord and protector of the land and fountain. However, after facing down the “invasion” of Arthur and his court by defeating (and shaming) Sir Kay, he invites Arthur and his entourage to stay with him as his honored guests, and during their visit his guests participate in
specifically woodland activities. In Chrétien’s text the “woods and rivers offered sport / to any members of the court / who wished to hunt and fish there” (2295-97), while in the English text the guests enjoyed “huntyng and als of revere (hawking); / For thare was a ful fayre cuntré / with wodes and parkes grete plenté” (1443-46). Here, the deep, wild forest of Colgrevance and Ywain’s journey out gives way to the managed woodlands of Ywain’s newfound realm; the shift is so complete, in fact, that even the wildness of the voyage to the fountain, introduced by Colgrevance and reinforced by Ywain’s journey, is left out in the description Arthur’s journey. The forests that were once so deep and dark and mysterious seemed to have been “tamed” in some way, at least in terms of perspective, simply by virtue of possession; now that one of Arthur’s knights is lord of this land, the wood becomes a mundane and regulated, rather than a wondrous and wild, space, despite the lack of any apparent time or effort spent “taming” it.

Woodland representation changes again in these poems when Ywain, realizing he has broken his vow, becomes a wild man in the forest. Here, in both poems, the woodland becomes a space apart from civilization, though this idea of the forest as separate space seems much more important than the forest as either wild or domesticated space. Ywain himself becomes wild, but the space in which this wild state is maintained is itself relatively mundane, and its “wildness” is much less emphasized here than in the woodland spaces where earlier adventures occur. In Chrétien's text, Yvain's transition from the center to the edge of civilization is
recounted as a clear progression: First, he decides specifically to flee to a “wild land … where no one knew him and could know where they could seek him out” (2611-13), and then his move to this edge space is recounted in fairly direct terms, as he flees “across the fields and rows” (2640), leaving his servants to seek for him in vain in “orchards, houses where at night the warriors in town would stay, and hedgerows” (2644-46). Having crossed the bulk of the civilized agricultural space, Yvain finds himself in a small field, where he steals a bow and five arrows from a boy, thus completing his preparation for life in the wood. In this series of passages, it is clear that, at least in Chrétien's text, Yvain's move is one away from civilization and its trappings—his mad yearnings for the wild wood are based not on what might be found there (as it is in his first foray in to Broceliande), but on what is not found there. In the Middle English text, the transition is much more abrupt and less deliberate: Ywain simply goes mad from grief and “unto the wod the way he nome” (1651). The poet further elaborates that “no man whist whore he bycome” (1652), and describes him “als it wore a wilde beste” (1654), but the transitional description, both psychological and geographical, is lacking here. Indeed, in the Middle English text Ywain is already living a beast-like existence before he steals the bow and arrows, and his theft (from a man this time, not a boy) occurs within the wood itself rather than in a field outside. The question of whether Ywain is running toward or from something is much more ambiguous in the Middle English than in Chrétien, but nonetheless the wood itself again seems to exist primarily as a space outside of
civilization, where one can be mad because one is not known and cannot be found.\textsuperscript{33} This wood, as is fitting for a sort of non-space (or least as a space defined by particular kinds of absence), is passed over essentially without description in both poems, but it is clearly situated right on the edge of civilization, just barely beyond the society which Ywain is trying to escape. It is wild in the sense that there are plenty of wild animals for Ywain to kill, and the hermit is (at least in Chrétien's text) actively clearing land, but it is at the same time close enough to human settlement that the hermit can sell Ywain's deerskins for bread in town, and a lady and her two maids can happen upon the naked Ywain while passing through the wood. If the idea of madness is imagined (as is generally the case throughout the Middle Ages) as a kind of psychological withdrawal from the community, then the forest here is not a space in its own right, but is rather the physical/environmental manifestation of Yvain's psychological distress.

When Yvain's madness is cured, however, the forest again becomes associated with marvels and adventure, and encounters in which one's prowess and general rectitude can be continually tested and re-established. At first the forest itself serves as the backdrop for these encounters, and later it primarily serves as an interim landscape which separates these spaces of adventure from one another, but in either

\textsuperscript{33} In Penelope B. R. Doob's landmark \textit{Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature} (Yale 1974), she offers a reading of Ywain as an “unholy” wild man, who is driven mad by sin (\textit{i.e.,} his failure to keep his word). In this reading, the madness, though certainly metaphorical in its conception, is still coupled with the wilderness, in that the forest allows Yvain to “shun men’s sight” (140), the forest here, then, allows Yvain a space in which he may separate himself from the reason of civilization, and simply be mad.
case the forest is no longer merely a space of absence. In both poems, for example, Ywain's first foray into the forest after his return to sanity leads him to the battle between the serpent (called a “dragoun” in the ME version) and the lion that will soon become his companion. These are clearly marvelous creatures, found in a marvelous space that permits a sort of supernatural testing to occur—in this case the “test” is in Ywain's choice to help the lion, which is ultimately rewarded by the lion's friendship and loyalty. In both poems, the forest here is geographically vague but is all the same an important and multivalent narrative space, since the fortnight Ywain and the lion spend in the forest together after the rescue helps to solidify the marvelous connection between them, while the forest itself simultaneously serves as a sort of bridge for the narrative action, bringing the story back around to the magic fountain, and Ywain's own unfinished business. The fainting episode which occurs upon Ywain's notice of the fountain, including his falling upon his own sword followed by the loyal lion's near-suicide, completes the forest interlude which has essentially re-established Ywain's proper orientation (both geographically and psychologically) and brought him back to his own doorstep. This is hardly a “real” space (marvelous creatures aside), as this forest, so near the fountain which is so central to the narrative early on, is inexplicably unfamiliar to Ywain (so much so that he swoons at the unexpected sight of the fountain), but nonetheless this forest is notable for what happens within it and what lies beyond it, rather than its separation from the civilized spaces without.
The remaining forest episodes in these two poems are very brief, and primarily present woodland as a kind of interim space, something which allows access to new adventure settings. As the “Knight with the Lion” Ywain travels from one adventure space to another through an ever-present and encompassing forest which seems to primarily represent the distance between these spaces. In this they are spaces of separation, but in a rather different manner than that of the wild-wode; while in the madness episode, the forest was a separate place that served as foil to the general concept of civilization, the forest in the latter portion of the poem is a space that actually separates, and thus must be traversed in order to move from one civilized space to another. In this, the narrative importance of the forest overshadows its minimal presence in these poems, because it, as a marker of distance and separation, allows for the existence of differently-civilized spaces that are only semi-accessible and thus can fall outside the immediate control, if not actual jurisdiction, of Arthur's court. The castle terrorized by Harpin of the Mountain, for example, along with the Castle of Evil Adventure and the beleaguered home of the lady who delivers Yvain from his madness, all are spaces in which a knight of great prowess and moral rectitude is necessary to re-align these spaces according to the cultural and political values represented by Arthur's court. It is the forest, as an ever-present and encompassing entity, that allows these spaces to exist.

The forest spaces in both poems fit very clearly within the mode of high chivalric romance. They either are themselves spaces of testing, conquest, madness
and marvel, or more often, are interim landscapes which must be traversed in order to reach these spaces of adventure. They are clearly not domesticated or ordered agricultural spaces, at least not in any way that is acknowledged, in direct and practical terms, by these texts—even the churlish herdsman is not after pannage for his domestic pigs, but is rather a marvelous creature, barely recognizable as a man, who claims to be the master of essentially wild beasts. The forests and associated spaces (perhaps best called “forest clearings”) in these narratives, though clearly habitable and generally occupied by people who are culturally similar to the protagonist, nonetheless all first appear as “other” spaces, without rather than within the compass of the Arthurian court. As is consistent with the general narrative expectations of the genre of chivalric romance, many of these spaces (though not all), carry psychological as well as geographic and political weight, and only remain “other” until the protagonist, Ywain, manages to implicitly or explicitly facilitate or force their incorporation into or alliance with the Arthurian political and cultural hegemony.

Perhaps the obvious conclusion, in reading this lack of change in forest representation between narratives written three centuries apart, is that the particular High Chivalric Romance forests of both poems are best understood as symbolic or literary spaces, and those scholars who have commented upon the forest in this poem have tended to do just that. For example David E. Faris, discussing the exact repeatability over time of the initial fountain episodes in Yvain and Gawain, says that
“geography in romance is subservient to the demands of the plot, or alternatively, that
the hero enjoys the ability to generate the conditions necessary for his self-
realization,” and concludes that, in this poem, “time and geography obey the rhythm
of the hero’s adventures, and do not condition them.”

The situation is more complicated than this, however—while some woodlands
in these poems are clearly, at least to some large degree, symbolic spaces (the wode-
wood, specifically), and some self-conditioning of the hero’s environment does occur,
the presumption that these forests can be written off as literary convention is
somewhat problematic, particularly when considering the earlier text. This last,
though perhaps it seems secondary in a discussion devoted to the later text, is in fact
crucial to the study. If we take Matthews’ historicizing exhortation seriously, and
consider his statement that *Ywain and Gawain* “has a relationship to a fourteenth
century context partly determined by contemporary perceptions of an earlier, twelfth-
century context,” and that “this earlier context had a determining relationship to
Chrétien’s *Yvain*, which in turn has a determining relationship to *Ywain and Gawain*,”
then it becomes clear that, before we can effectively discuss woodland spaces in the
later text we must first get some sense of the how they came to be as they are in the
earlier text.

By placing Chrétien's romances within the context of the Francophone
expansion of the twelfth century, and considering particularly contemporary

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34 David E Faris, “The Art of Adventure in the Middle English Romance: *Ywain and Gawain, Eger*
and *Grime.*” *Studia Neophilologica* 53.1 (1981), 95-6 and 100.
35 Matthews, 458.
conceptions of and activities within the Celtic fringe, we can establish some sense of the “reality” of Chrétien's forest spaces; with the translation, however, this “reality” becomes a little harder to pin down, in large part because the translator, by apprehending only the text, but not the context, of the earlier work, would not necessarily be conscious of any sense of perceived reality regarding the romance forest in the poem.

By the time the *Yvain and Gawain* poet began his translation, the “real” forest of general English perception would have been notably different from that of Chrétien's era, rendering much of the subtlety and nuance of the forest in Chrétien's poem relatively inaccessible to a contemporary audience. In this sense, arguments for a more symbolic reading of the forest in *Yvain and Gawain* have some foundation, as these elements serve a much more specifically narrative role, with much of what might be considered evocative of a twelfth-century “reality” stripped away. This stripping away can be seen at several points in the poem, but it comes through most clearly in the first fountain and the wild-wode episodes.

In the first fountain episodes, both Colgrevance's depiction of the churl and his later conversation with the knight indicate a perspectival shift between Chrétien's audience and the later poet's audience, at least so far as forest spaces are concerned. In Chrétien's text, the churl is a grotesque herdsman, a master of the wild bulls, which corresponds in some ways to contemporary notions of the wild Irish pastoral lifestyle, given that bulls are in fact livestock, and their “wildness” is essentially a factor of
their freedom to range unenclosed and unbound. In the ME poem, however, the herdsman is the master of all wild beasts, which makes him a much more fantastical figure than the first, despite the similarities in their grotesque representation. Twelfth-century contexts provide a correspondent reality to the first description that the second lacks, and in this shift we can see the subtlety of Chrétien's multivalent representation (which offers the fantastical while referencing the perceived reality) shift into a hyperbolically fantastical representation of the churl himself, and, by extension, the space he occupies. Colgrevance's later conversation with the knight, before the battle at the fountain, offers a similar change, in that Chrétien's knight refers to his “town and wood” (474), and thus includes organized human habitation as well as managed forest within his domain; this falls much more in line with general notions of an actual feudal holding than the knight of the Middle English poem, who refers only to “his forest” (412) and makes no mention of a town. As before, this inhabitant of this forest space is painted with much broader brush strokes in the ME poem, and again the invocation of shared cultural expectations in Chrétien’s poem finds no counterpart in the later poem. It seem that these figures, and the spaces they inhabit, perform the same general narrative function in both poems but differ in their relationship to an underlying perceived reality—which not only confirms some difference in awareness and expectation on the part of the two poets and their audiences, but also suggests the development of a sort of narrative tradition in which the forest is a more fluid space, as it becomes fundamentally disassociated from the
practical on-the-ground situations and cultural contexts which overlapped with its initial production. As the conceptual gap between the perceived “actual” forest, and the imagined “fantasy” forest increases (and the authenticating details of Chrétien's narratives grow less important to audience engagement), the poet becomes less bound by that “reality” and is thus allowed more freedom in forest representation.

This notion is reinforced even within the two poets' treatment of the wode-wood episode, which is itself the most fundamentally symbolic or metaphorical representation of woodland in the poems. In the earlier poem, there is a range of intermediate landscapes through which our protagonist passes (and in which he is sought by others) before he reaches the wode-wood proper, while in the later text the shift from civilization to wild space is somewhat abrupt and lacks any description of interim space. In the first, the progression allows a sense of distance, landscape and motion, as the protagonist responds to the environment in a commonsensical way, thus demonstrating a degree of “reality” within the fantasy (this is, after all, a move into a particular kind of nonrealistic narrative space). In the latter poem, without such a logical progression through imagined space, the opposite effect is achieved; here the environment responds to the protagonist, in a manner very much in keeping with Faris's sense of environmental self-conditioning, and the result is an erasure of the senses of distance and landscape (and, to a certain degree, motion) which does much to strip away the degree of “reality” detectable in the earlier poem, leaving the audience with an unadorned and unameliorated move into a decidedly symbolic
space. Where in the former poem the journey away from civilization plays a fundamental role in establishing the nature of this forest, in the latter the forest can stand alone, as the metaphorical/symbolic implications are built into the space itself through literary tradition and audience expectation.

In sum, then, the differences in representation between these two poems, and the subtle shifts in audience interaction and expectation that they imply, offer a more complex view of the symbolic/metaphorical romance forest as offered by Saunders, Faris, and others. While the symbolic weight of these wild spaces is undeniable, the subtlety of representation in the earlier poem, when read within its immediate historical context, opens up a much more grounded and “realistic” reading of the forest spaces, at least in terms of audience awareness and expectation. The loss of such subtle elements in the later poem (or, perhaps, the choice on the part of the translator-poet not to reinscribe those elements) while it does lead to a starker and less “realistic” (in the day-to-day sense) representation of wild space, still does not make it the symbolic forest of literary criticism, which is supposed to be deeply rooted in a larger cultural consciousness; rather, it becomes a symbolism structured by convenience, where the narrative function of the forest spaces in a popular tale remain, though the immediate contexts have changed. The narrative “openness” of forest spaces in popular Middle English chivalric romance, while it does allow for more hyperbolic and metaphorical constructions, is nonetheless very much built upon a re-imagined sense of past realities, adapted to contemporary circumstances.
This shift in woodland representation—specifically the excision of outdated subtleties and contextual references coupled with the retention of basic narrative function—between the two Yvain poems finds resonance in a comparison of Chrétien's *Perceval* and the fifteenth-century *Sir Perceval of Galles*. In fact, this shift is perhaps even more significant here, given the greater degree to which the “translator” re-imagined the earlier text in the later poem.

While *Ywain and Gawian* could be read simply as a stripped-down version of the original, *Sir Perceval of Galles* is, at the very least, a significant rewrite of Chrétien's poem. The Middle English poem offers a number of notable additions (including a fully developed love interest, the survival of Perceval's mother, and, perhaps most importantly, an ending), as well as one considerable omission (in the Middle English text, there is no grail). The later poem is, quite simply, a very different narrative. The differences are so profound, in fact, that there has been some past speculation that the ME poem is based on another source, rather than Chrétien's text. More recent scholars, as Ad Putter points out in a 2001 article, have tended to regard the poem as “simply an unslavish adaptation of Chrétien's *Conte du Graal.*”

In a 2004 article, Putter elaborates on this notion, suggesting that, given the aural

36 Newstead, in the *Manual of the Writings of Middle English*, briefly compares certain elements in the ME poem to other Percival poems, and concludes that “the exact source of the Middle English poem is unknown, but it could hardly have been Chrétien's romance” (72).

context in which a popular romance like *Perceval of Galles* would have been propagated, the poet was intentionally and systematically focusing on “the 'crude' elements of the narrative: that is, the storyline with its beginning, middle and end”—thus taking care to adapt the convoluted French narrative to Middle English oral/aural narrative conventions.\(^38\) Keith Busby, writing on both *Ywain and Gawain* and *Perceval of Galles*, notes a number of other shifts in the retelling, ranging from the flattening of narrative detail to the downplay of courtly behavior, and concludes that the poems themselves represent a generic shift from Old French chivalric romance to “something approaching epic.”\(^39\) Sian Echard, in a study of both Middle Welsh and Middle English Percival stories (including *Perceval of Galles*), argues for the poem as parody, specifically as an “exploration or even demolition of the romance genre”—an idea similarly put forward by Mary Flowers Braswell in the introduction to her 1995 edition of the poem.\(^40\) In any case, it seems clear that the author of the Middle English text was working with, but in no way attempting a faithful translation of, Chrétien's text—and still, as with the Yvain poems, there is, despite a loss of contextual subtlety, very little difference in the narrative role played by woodland in these two poems.


\(^39\) Busby, 611.

In each poem, the woodland serves, first and foremost as a space separate from civilization (or chivalric culture), where, as in the wode-wood of the Yvain poems, identity can be lost, or, more specifically, discarded and replaced. It is a place where Percival, under the care of his mother, can live beyond the reach of the chivalric culture which has so bitterly disappointed her. The actual impetus behind the initial retreat to the forest differs notably between the two poems—Chrétien's poem involves a larger-scale retreat of a crippled father to a rural holding, which is followed by his own death and the deaths of two older sons who had become knights, leaving only baby Percival and his mother, while the ME poem offers the retreat as a relatively complete escape to the wilderness by the mother, only-child Perceval, and one servant, undertaken after the elder Perceval is killed in a joust with the Red Knight—but the ultimate narrative effect, specifically the removal of the protagonist from the chivalric culture which spawned him, followed by the reinscription of a new “rural” identity, remains more or less the same.

This particular retreat and reinscription in each, however, is the comparative element of the poems in which one can most clearly see and contrast the “realistic” woodland elements of Chrétien's text with the more hyperbolic and less subtle representations in the ME poem. The retreat itself, in Chrétien, involves a move that is simultaneously situated within and moving away from the chivalric world, as it involves a move to a small, and rural, but legitimate feudal holding, during the period of unrest following Uther Pendragon's death. As Perceval's mother explains to her
son, his crippled father was “brought / to the sole refuge that he sought: / his manor in
the forest wild (450-452). The notion of this holding as a “manor” is not simply a
convenient translation on Ruth Harwood Cline's part (Raffel, in his 1999 translation,
uses the word “house”); it is established as a larger feudal holding, with peasants and
work obligations and the like, in the first few lines, which reference the mother's
harrowers, sowing with six harrows (82-84) and then later when Perceval tells the
knights that “The harrowers there work for Mother. / They sow and work her fields
today” (300-01). Thus, this forest dwelling, while far enough outside the reach of
chivalric culture that Perceval does not recognize knightly figures or their
accoutrements, is still recognizably within the larger socioeconomic structures of a
feudal society. Its wildness seems to be a function of geography and distance, coupled
with intentional ignorance of specific cultural elements, rather than a static situation
completely at odds with the idea of “civilization” as a whole.

This contrasts notably with the forest dwelling established in the ME poem,
where a sense of “wildness” pervades, and the trappings of civilization are largely
absent. In this poem, the mother takes only her son and a single serving maid,
intending to go to the “wilde wodde … with bestes to playe” (175-6). She leaves
behind “boure and haulle” (181) and all her goods, but for a flock of goats (on whose
milk she intends for them to live), and one “Scottes spere” for the child (185-191).
The actual manner of dwelling place they occupy in the wood is never mentioned,
and his childhood is spent hunting with his spear, “under the wilde wodde-wand”

41 All quotations are from Harwood Cline's Translation (1985).
(211) and in “holtes hare”(230), dressed only in goat skins. This version of the wilderness retreat is clearly much less “realistic” than in Chrétien's poem, as the retreat itself is more sketchily detailed, and seems to work in a much more hyperbolic fashion—Chrétien's poem at least offers a reasonable, if unlikely, picture of daily life to a contemporary audience, but the mode of life depicted in the later poem is unworkable, in practical on-the-ground terms, almost to the point of absurdity. The narrative function of “wildness” is apparent in both, but in the later poem that sense of wildness isn't ameliorated or explained away through authenticating detail to the degree that it is in the earlier poem.

This difference in the practical degree of recognizably “realistic” representation also carries through when one compares the manner in which specific geographical and cultural elements do (and do not) appear in the two poems, particularly in their influence on the reinscription of each protagonist's identity. In Chrétien's poem, the wood in which Perceval is raised is very clearly and specifically denoted as Welsh, and the appearance of the protagonist, as well as others' initial responses to him, are heavily influenced by twelfth-century Francophone notions of “Welsh-ness.” For example, there are several specific references to Perceval's Welsh identity and appearance scattered throughout the first few hundred lines, and one very specific geographic reference—a mention of the nearby Mount Snowdon in line 298—that leaves no doubt as to the geopolitical space in which the early action of the poem occurs. Further, some of the mentions and markers of Welsh identity in the
beginning of the poem, when offering a chivalric, or at least a more worldly, perspective, are presented from a decidedly anti-Welsh cultural position. For example, during Perceval's first questioning encounter with the unnamed knights, one tells another that “all Welshmen are inherently more dumb than grazing beasts could be” (243-44), and later, before he leaves his mother, she takes two of his three javelins from him, “because he seemed too Welsh to her” (609). Perceval may be the son of an “English” nobility, but he is strongly influenced by his anonymous Welsh upbringing, as is clear both from his rough Welsh clothing (497-503, 602-04) and his ability to translate the knight's questions to his mother's harrowers in lines 323-329. The use of terms like “deep forest” and “wild forest” do appear throughout the opening portion of the poem, but nonetheless these notions are clearly and inextricably linked with Wales, and do not exist as distinctly literary spaces. While Perceval goes on to reclaim his heritage, of course, he is nonetheless a hybrid figure whose Welsh childhood, to some degree, both sets him apart from chivalric culture (including, in part, his own mother), and marks him out as an ignorant bumpkin in a way that would come across clearly to a contemporary Francophone audience. Even Gerald of Wales himself, with all his intellectual achievements, was not immune to the taint of Welshness; despite all his criticism of the Welsh in his writings, he was himself a Cambro-Norman hybrid (descended from the Welsh princess Nesta), and in his personal writings he attributes, with some reason, his lack of clerical advancement.

In an interesting sidenote, Perceval's Welshness marks him out again when he first enters a forest on a chivalric quest—in line 1703, the new-created knight rides “into the forest wild—familiar since he was a child” … not a common note for the “knight rides into a forest” trope.
to his Welsh background. In this context, Chrétien's continued use of pejorative Welshness is quite consistent with contemporary notions not just of the native Welsh, but of those who come from Wales (whatever their heritage), and thus neatly pigeonholes Percival as a particular kind of naïf.

The Middle English poem, however, lacks the specificity of Chrétien's, and thus the sense of Perceval's core identity, rather than being stereotypically Welsh or Welsh-hybrid, is instead that of a vague child of nature. While the title of the poem, and the name of the protagonist, is specifically Peceval “of Galles” (Wales), the term “Galles” (and its permutations) only appear a handful of times—twice in the poem proper, and twice in the explicit—and then only as part of a formal naming. The Welshness so clearly apparent in Chrétien's protagonist is here made a matter of name only. While he does dress in goatskins, there is no association of his dress with Welsh style, nor is his ignorant behavior associated with Welsh manners. Instead of being Welsh, he is simply wild, and without the burden of Welsh stereotype upon him, he seems to exist in a state of almost prelapsarian purity. Arthur himself, on Perceval's first visit to his court, recognizes his parentage but also recognizes that, due to his upbringing in the wood, “He knewe nother evyll ne gude … He was a wilde man” (594-96). This description, coupled with the repeated use of catch phrases like “holtes hare” “woddes wilde” to describe his home and upbringing, gives the audience a radically different, and much less “realistic” sense of Perceval's childhood haunts.

For more on this, see Robert Bartlett's Gerald of Wales 1146-1223 (Oxford, 1982), particularly the introduction and first chapter.
Again, the sense of “reality” that one can see in Chrétien's woodland space is stripped away in the Middle English version, while the narrative function of that space remains largely unchanged, thus transforming it into a more symbolic space. While there's no way to tell how much this results from specific intent on the part of the Middle English author, it is worth noting that, as with the Yvain poems, a significant shift in perspective between the twelfth and fourteenth century English audiences may well have rendered some of Chrétien's “realism” obsolete. For a contemporary audience, Chrétien's depiction of the Welsh *naïf* would draw on notions of the Celtic Fringe. There is much here, in terms of geography, politics, appearance, and social hierarchies, that play into very particular conceptions of, and even experiences, with Wales and Welshness (up to and including the Cambro-Norman marcher lords) on the part of an upper-class Francophone audience, and thus create a sense of “reality” within the fantastical. But that sense of “reality” is nonetheless contextually bound—while Welsh-English relations were hardly smooth at the turn of the fifteenth century, and anti-Welsh sentiment would likely have been welcome in many corners, the kind of dynastic and imperialistic concerns coming to the fore in Chrétien's poem, particularly the “taint” of Welshness infecting marcher lordships, would not have been immediately on the minds of a middle-class audience in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thus, the latter poem would gain little from the inclusion of such time-bound detail, and, as with *Ywain and Gawain*, the excision of such authenticating detail allows the forest to become a more fluid narrative space.
Again, the Middle English poet is able simultaneously build upon the “realism” of the past while freely adapting the forest space to the circumstances and expectations of a contemporary audience.

**Conclusion**

Here we have a pair of Middle English poems, based on earlier French romances, which both clearly demonstrate a kind of narrative redeployment of woodland space which corresponds to shifting experiences with and conceptions of contemporary woodlands. Chrétien's poems are here tapping into and building up a sense of realism which would, as Benson suggests, “authenticate” the marvelous narratives being told. That sense of authenticity, however, is contextually bound, and will cease to function as audience perspectives and expectations change. In such popular narratives as these, such non-functional elements would not likely survive in a context of continuous retelling/reinscribing, as is evidenced by the disappearance of such detail, at least regarding the representation of woodland spaces, in the later narratives. The narrative spaces themselves remain, of course, because they are established elements which are fundamental to the narratives themselves, and serve a symbolic as well as a representational function—in this case, Yvain just isn't Yvain if he never rides into a forest, and Perceval just isn't Perceval if he isn't raised in one. So, despite the intricacy of detail and “realistic” reference in Chrétien's versions, as
opposed to the Middle English versions, the narrative spaces themselves are no less symbolic (Yvain's wode-wood, for example, is, at root, no more or less a representation of the protagonist's psychological state in the earlier poem as in the later). The contextual shift is worth noting nonetheless, as it helps to not only delineate some of the particular influences underpinning a very popular medieval (and beyond) tradition of woodland representation in Anglophone narrative, but also offers a vantage point from which one might consider the starker and more hyperbolic representations of woodland space in Middle English Popular romance.

In these medieval chivalric tales, woodlands, whatever the degree of “realism” read into their immediate contexts, tend to function as outside spaces, which separate one from civilization and thus allow that civilization (as embodied or encountered by the protagonists) to be tested, as various questions of both conquest and identity to come into play. This literary function is a potent and malleable one, as is evidenced by its continuing popularity, and thus the symbolic space can outlive its immediate contextual references—in essence, such woodlands, or at least such perceptions of woodland, effectively ceased to exist in England before the rise of Middle English popular romance, but the literary tradition, and thus the particular sorts of narrative spaces required by the tradition, was able to remain. The sort of woodland we see in Middle English “chivalric” literature can be read not only as a universal, mythic space, but also as a contextually-disembodied carry-over from the popular Francophone literature of the twelfth century, creatively adapted by poets working
within their own immediate cultural contexts. Thus, as an established mode of
woodland representation, this sense of a chivalric forest offers us a backdrop, a kind
of conceptual baseline, against which we can measure other sorts of forest
representation which also come to the fore in the popular English literature of the
fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and perhaps more immediately reflect the common
experiences with, and perceptions of, English woodland at that time.
Chapter Two:

The Outlaw's Greenwood

Once one moves past the chivalric forest, which has remained a mainstay of forest representation in popular literature from the twelfth century to the present day, the most prominent sort of woodland representation in later Middle English popular literature is that of the greenwood. The greenwood, even at first glance, appears to be a very different sort of space from the chivalric forest; while both spaces offer a kind of separation from civilization in some way, the chivalric forest tends to represent the external and fantastical, while the greenwood is much more internally focused, and much more in keeping with mundane experiences and conceptions of woodland in fourteenth century England. In practical terms, knights generally enter the forest as
representsatives of their central society, out to test themselves and their hegemonic
ideals in the external space, while outlaws generally enter the greenwood to gain
sanctuary from the local representatives of that central society and their abuses.
Both geographically and conceptually, the knights are going further out, while the
outlaws are going further in, and their respective woodland spaces tend to exemplify
these movements. For the outlaw, the greenwood is not an external space to be
conquered, but an internal space within which, and through which, societal wrongs
can be righted and the spirit (if not the letter) of the King's law preserved.

While there is a great deal of critical analysis devoted to greenwood outlaw
tales and ballads, most of this attention, perhaps not surprisingly, has been focused on
the outlaws themselves, rather than the forest spaces they occupy. The woodland
setting is recognized as a vital element of these tales and ballads, but even so it
usually discussed in passing. Those scholars who do focus on it more directly, such as
Pollard, Keen, Maddicott and Nagy, tend to consider it either in terms of historical
associations with particular named spaces or in terms of its more symbolic functions,
and offer little comparative reference to other sorts of fantasy forests.¹ Further, studies
of the greenwood outlaw tradition, and its most prominent figure, Robin Hood, tend
to work more with later material (since only the earliest tales can be reliably dated to

¹ See Maurice Keen's Outlaws of Medieval Legend (Routledge 2000), A.J. Pollard's Imagining Robin
Hood (Routledge 2004), J.C. Holt's Robin Hood (Thames and Hudson 1989), J. R. Madicott's “The
Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood” (in Robin Hood: Anthology of Scholarship and
“The Paradoxes of Robin Hood” (in Robin Hood: Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism. Ed
the medieval period), and tend to offer analyses understandably skewed toward the larger corpus of post-medieval greenwood literature. While specific discussions of the medieval tradition draw directly on exhaustive historical and cultural research, their conclusions tend ultimately to rest upon speculation, since so little primary or original material is available. Ultimately, then, while the observations and analyses of these and other scholars are quite useful in explicating the particular narrative tradition with which they are working, they are of somewhat limited utility in this comparative study of later Middle English literary forests. Though this chapter will focus on some of the same primary texts and historical materials, the greenwood outlaws are here not particularly important as literary figures in and of themselves, but rather are notable for the manner in which they interact with forest spaces and the ways in which these interactions differ from those of the knights of the previous chapter and the peasants of the following chapter.

Of the large corpus of greenwood outlaw narratives, this study will focus on two Middle English tales specifically datable to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, The *Tale of Gamelyn*, and *Adam Bell*. Of the two, the *Tale of Gamelyn*, appears in a number of fifteenth century manuscripts, and thus is easily placed within our period.\(^2\) *Adam Bell*, however, appears only in later printed editions, but can be reasonably dated to the fifteenth century based on external reference.\(^3\) These two poems, rather

\(^2\) As an interesting sidenote, it is found in manuscript form in a number of manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*, where it is presented as the Cook’s tale, and nowhere else—it was thus was long associated with Chaucer, though it has since been determined that the poem is not Chaucer’s work.

\(^3\) The earliest direct reference to the outlaw trio appears long before the publication of the text discussed here; a 1432 Parliament Roll for Wiltshire appends a number of legendary outlaw names
than the earliest Robin Hood tales, have been chosen for this particular study because
they, unlike the early Robin Hood tales, can be treated as stand-alone entities, and
thus the assumptions upon which the woodland representations within them are based
can be explored without specific reference to the larger corpus of material. Further,
the *Tale of Gamelyn* is generally recognized to be the earliest extant greenwood
outlaw tale, which is itself a literary tradition original to the fourteenth and fifteenth
centuries.

Nonetheless, while the later Middle Ages can be seen as the originary period
of the English greenwood outlaw, there is an outlaw tradition in British literatures
which predates it, as many Robin Hood scholars point out: Hereward the Wake, Fulk
Fitzwarin, and Eustace the Monk all found themselves on the wrong side of the law
and became legends in the period following the conquest. Even Alfred the Great
himself was (if we are to believe Asser) reduced to hiding in the fens before his
triumphant reconquest of the Saxon kingdoms. None of these tales were written in
English, however, and the outlaws within these tales are identified with the high-level
conflicts involving distinctly different cultural groups. Further, all were at least semi-
historical figures whose stories became legendary over time: Hereward the Wake was
a rebellious Anglo-Saxon lord dispossessed by the Norman Conquest, Fulk Fitzwarin
and Eustace the Monk are noble figures associated with King John's trouble with the
barons at home (in the case of Fulk) and the French abroad (in the case of Eustace);

—including Adam Bell and his compatriots—to a list of local representatives, apparently as some
sort of joke. See Knight and Ohlgren's introduction to the poem, in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw
Tales* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Middle English Text Series, 1997).
and Alfred, of course, is the West Saxon king who later defeated the Viking invaders and reconstituted the Anglo-Saxon hegemony. All were in some way dispossessed by a sovereign or invading force (or, in Eustace's case, allied with one sovereign power against another) and all were heavily involved in the power politics of their day. As might be expected, the legends that grew up around them were commensurately expansive in scope.

These earlier French and Latin outlaw tales, however, present fundamentally different sorts of conflicts than the Middle English greenwood outlaw narratives which appear in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the earlier narratives, we see nobles fighting directly for or against sovereign power, while in the later English tales we see less elevated folk fighting against petty corruption and mismanagement. This difference is not minor—for the former, either the sovereign power is (in one way or another) the enemy, or sovereign power itself is at stake, while for the latter, the King (and the justice he represents) is an ally and his sovereignty is never directly contested. Thus, while magnate-level outlaws tend toward the subversive, greenwood outlaws tend toward the conservative, in that they often support the King and the King's law, even as they rebel against local (often cruel or corrupt) governmental officials.

Some of the fundamental differences between earlier and later outlaws can be related to the particular social contexts in which these narratives developed. The legends of the earlier outlaws developed around, or were at least vaguely based on,
the actions of historical figures during periods of intense inter-cultural (in lieu of the anachronistic “international”) social upheaval, and thus are appropriately concerned with the kinds of sovereignty issues which dominated the eras in which they are set. The Middle English greenwood outlaw tales, however, developed during a period of wide-spread but generally internal social upheaval. While trying to generalize an entire century's troubles, and the causes and effects thereof, inevitably distorts local realities, the broadest brush strokes should suffice for our purposes here: the fourteenth century began with a series of poor harvests due to bad weather; saw the devastating arrival of the Black Death in 1349; and—as society both readjusted to significant population loss due to plague and became more diversified economically through the continued growth of towns—people witnessed growing class tensions, represented clearly by both increased legal restrictions upon the lower classes and their large- and small-scale rebellions against such restrictions. There were, of course, high level upheavals as well—most significantly the depositions of Edward II in 1327 and Richard II in 1399—but overall the England of the fourteenth century was marked more by internal and domestic, rather than external and dynastic, change.4

Given this context, it should probably not be surprising, then, that the greenwood outlaws that come out of this century are not nobles but yeomen and petty gentry, dealing not with sovereign power but with low-level bureaucratic abuses and

4 For a quick discussion of the historical tradition regarding the lower-level social upheavals of the fourteenth century, as well as a market-oriented reading of shifting social attitudes and expectations, see David Aers's *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* (Routledge, 1988), particularly the introduction and pages 26-35.
localized class tensions. In sum, while there were certainly outlaw heroes hiding in
the woods of earlier literatures, the greenwood outlaw who has maintained such a
hold on the popular imagination for so long clearly has his roots in the later Middle
Ages, as does the forest in which he finds refuge.

If we consider the greenwood outlaw tradition as emerging from this later
context, then, we find in these tales a preoccupation with questions of law, rather than
questions of conquest, and the idea of what is versus what ought to be, in terms of the
application of justice. There is a powerful association of the greenwood with a sort of
natural, egalitarian justice, and of the greenwood outlaw as, in some way,
representing that justice in the face of local corruption or cruelty. Paralleling this, we
have the powerful association, through law and tradition, of the forest and the king.
When these two strains are combined, as they so often are in greenwood outlaw tales
(particularly the two discussed here), we see the outlaw and the king brought together
within, or somehow because of, the greenwood space; in bringing these two figures
harmoniously together, we often see the notions of “right” and “legal” recombined, as
the king ratifies or reinforces the actions of the outlaw through pardon or promotion.
Here, then, the forest, so often a royal space to begin with, becomes the bridge
between the outlaw and the king, and thus allows the narrative resolution of tensions
between what is and what ought to be. Thus, the greenwood itself becomes, for both
the outlaw and the king, the incubator of justice and rectitude, an alternative to the
corruption of society at large, in which and through which that corrupt society can reconfigured as necessary.

_The Tale of Gamelyn_

In the 895 line _Tale of Gamelyn_, the earliest and least fragmentary Middle English outlaw tale, we have a narrative that is firmly tied to the cultural contexts and concerns of the lower (and perhaps more socially mobile) levels of fourteenth-century English gentry. It is the story of the younger son of a petty landowner, who is dispossessed by his older brother and must fight both his brother, and the legal structures which his brother has corrupted, in order to regain his rightful possessions. In the course of this struggle, which is marked by petty violence (involving fists and bludgeons rather than swords and lances), Gamelyn is marked as an outlaw and is forced into the greenwood. Here he and a servant join an outlaw band, of which Gamelyn is eventually elected “king.” After adventures both in and out of the greenwood, he co-opt the local legal structures, and tries and hangs the corrupt jury, in a mock trial which is later justified by the arrival of the king. The tale ends with Gamelyn not only pardoned but rewarded, as he is made the Chief Justice of the King's “free forest” (888).

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5 By "least fragmentary" I mean that it offers the most complete set of background detail—all the other stories examined here, particularly the Robin Hood tales, offer little if any background to the action, and seem to presume some previous knowledge, on the reader's part, of the narrative contexts in which these characters are situated.
The poem is preoccupied with both petty violence and legal process (and the surprisingly frequent interactions between the two), a twin focus which has been of some interest to historians. While much of the literary criticism focusing on *Gamelyn* has tended to treat the poem as something of an early parallel or a transition piece within the Robin Hood tradition, historians tend to focus on the legal structures and concerns presented within it. Edgar F. Shannon determined, in 1952, that the poem “mirrors accurately, and in some detail, the uncertain, though gradually developing, processes of justice in the fourteenth century.” More recently, Richard Kaeuper, considering the interactions between law and violence both in the poem and in the contemporary legal record, points out that the story was well suited to an era in which men certainly desired the king’s justice, but recognized “how badly it was working in the countryside, how easily it was swayed, how often litigation had to be supplemented by a laying on of hands which was far from apostolic.” While the relative functionality of the English legal system of the later fourteenth century is not of primary concern in this chapter, these historical studies clearly demonstrate that

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6 The transitional/parallel approach can be seen in Maurice Keen's *Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London and New York: Routledge 2000), A.J. Pollard's *Imagining Robin Hood* (London and New York: Routledge 2004), and J.C. Holt's venerable *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson 1989). Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren also support such a reading by including this tale (as well as *Adam Bell*) in their compilation edition, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, which is otherwise dominated by Robin Hood narratives. A notable exception to this reading is the recent study by Nancy Mason Bradbury, “The Tale of Gamelyn as Greenwood Outlaw Talking” in *Writing Aloud: Storytelling in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1998), where she focuses primarily on the tale as representative of a greenwood storytelling tradition, without subordinating it to the Robin Hood tradition.

7 Edgar F Shannon, “Medieval Law in the *Tale of Gamelyn*,” *Speculum* 26, 3 (Jul. 1951), 463.

this poem, unlike the chivalric romances discussed in the previous chapter, not only addresses contemporary concerns but is set in a contemporary space—this is not a nostalgic tale of another time, but a tale of a fourteenth century now. The imagined wood, though unnamed and not necessarily correspondent to any real space, is no Brocéliande of long ago, but rather an internal English woodland space of the fourteenth century. This determination allows us to look at the woodlands in this poem as the product of an imagined present rather than that of a literary past, and thus gives us a different sort of framework for reading its role and function. As fantasy spaces, then, these woodlands function in a very different manner than those of our questing knights.

There are three points in the narrative at which woodland plays a notable role, all of which represent a manner of imagining woodland that is molded much more by contemporary interactions and issues than by those of the twelfth century. The first is in lines 75-100, in which Gamelyn's patrimony (which includes parks and woodlands) is first discussed, the second is the pair of greenwood episodes in lines 611-715 and 765-94, and the third is in lines 886-87, when the King makes Gamelyn the "cheef justice of his free forest."

The first episode, the discussion of Gamelyn's patrimony, is notable because it establishes a conceptual framework for thinking about the uses and values of woodland space, both in the poem and in the fourteenth century in general. The woodlands here are part of Gamelyn's inheritance, given him by his father, “Sire John
of Boundes” on his deathbed, as he parts his estate among his three sons.⁹

Gamelyn, despite being the youngest, receives the lion's share of this estate, and finds himself and his assets in his older brother's care. The brother, however, is not an honest caretaker, and he abuses and neglects Gamelyn's real interests, including his woodlands. In their initial mention, Gamelyn's woodlands are given equal space in the listing of his abused assets: 

"[his brother] lete his londes forfare and his houses bothe / His parkes and his wodes and did no thing welle" (73-74). This is significant because this passage focuses on asset value, in the context of proper management, and thus demonstrates that these woodlands (both parks and woods would be woodland, though differently managed) are very much integrated into the mundane life of the community. They are not wild or separate spaces at all, and do not provide an opportunity for conquest, a conception which is bolstered in lines 83-88:

He [Gamelyn] thought on his landes that lay unsowe,
And his fair okes that doune were ydrawe;
His parkes were broken and his deer reved;
Of alle his good stedes noon was hym byleved;
His hous were unhilled and ful evel dight;

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⁹ This name has no historical correspondent in any specific family or place. Thomas Ohlgren and Stephen Knight, in the introduction to their 1997 edition of the poem, suggests that, as the poem itself gives no place names, the moniker "of Boundes" sets the poem in a nonspecific boundary region. Thomas Hahn, in personal correspondence, has suggested that the name might also indicate a deep concern for social and political boundaries, such as those of "rank, relation, institution, and real estate."
Tho thought Gamelyne it were not aright.

Here we see the woodlands again incorporated into a larger discussion of mismanagement, and again given equal space in a catalogue including lands, houses, and horses. We also are given some sense of what particular value these spaces have to a fourteenth-century landowner, as we see fair oaks felled and deer stolen. Large timber of this type (as well as smaller wood) was a valuable resource, carefully managed in the Middle Ages, and the loss of these oaks would certainly be economically damaging. The loss of deer is an economic issue as well, as the deer do have some commodity value, but even more damaging in this case is the loss of prestige associated with the violation of one's deer park. For a landowner, an assault upon one's deer, particularly by another member of the gentry, is as much insult as practical injury, vaguely equatable with rape. Indeed, it is this particular transgression which is brought out again in Gamelyn's challenge to his brother in lines 96-99:

Of al the harmes that I have I toke never yit hede.

My parkes bene broken and my dere reved,

Of myn armes ne my stedes nought is byleved;

All that my fader me byquathe al goth to shame

In these repeated catalogues and complaints, the deer parks are specifically mentioned more often than any other real assets, including houses and fields, which is perhaps not surprising, as possession of a deer park is a particular status symbol for the lesser gentry in the fourteenth century. In any case, this first series of passages a conception of woodland that is an internal, contemporary and intensely and intentionally managed.

The second mention of woodland, the greenwood proper, in lines 611-715, seems then to fit only awkwardly, if at all, into conceptual mold established by these early passages, because it is both wild and apparently inviolable. The occasion for escape occurs when Gamelyn, after severely injuring his brother, is forced to flee his brother's house with only Adam, the servant who earlier set him loose, beside him. When Gamelyn and Adam escape the house upon the arrival of the sheriff, Adam is not pleased with this move into what he describes as a "wilde wode" (617) which tears his clothes (a distinctly different view of the greenwood than the "merry May" so common to the genre). Further, when they come upon the outlaws themselves —"sevne score of yonge men he seye wel ydight; Alle satte at the mete compas aboute"(623-24)—they seem to be entering a kind of separate world. Here are one hundred and forty well-armed outlaws, which Gamelyn and Adam seem to come

11 There will be more on this in the following chapter.
upon almost immediately upon entering the wood, openly sitting down to what seems to be a good meal, apparently without concern about intrusion or attack, as there are no guards; the master outlaw himself spies Gamelyn and Adam in their thicket, and sends men to bring them out. There seems to be no fear in this woodland, no threats, no privation, and no practical management—in fact, no immediately apparent intercourse with the world outside at all. Further, it seems immediately accessible, as "Gamelyn into the wode stalked stille" (613) is the only line referencing the move from manor house to woodland, and there is no other mention of time or distance which would indicate that this wood is anywhere but right at his doorstep. Such a space is a far cry from the woodland assets described in the earlier passages, and seems at first to have much more in common with Yvain's Broceliande.

That it seems so is perhaps a bit misleading. This is clearly a fantastic space, as Gamelyn and Adam seem to be able to step into the wood, push through a clothes-tearing thicket, and come out into an idyllic sanctuary inhabited only by noble, courteous, and quite generous outlaws, but it is also a space which ultimately seems to correspond to another set of mundane and contemporary concerns regarding boundaries, jurisdictions, and the exercise of law. The fantasy of sanctuary here laid out is, in some ways, a fantasy of jurisdictional sovereignty, and in examining such a fantasy, particularly in a poem that has such a clearly fourteenth century setting, it is worth examining how both jurisdiction and sovereignty over woodland space generally function during this period.
England in the mid-fourteenth-century was a complex patchwork of variously related legal jurisdictions across which different kinds of law were practiced. Pollock and Maitland, in their venerable *History of English Law*, assert that jurisdiction "is intertwined with the law of property and the law of personal status and this in many different ways,"\(^{12}\) and the very vagueness of this statement illustrates the degree of difficulty involved in such a study. Jurisdiction was not a simple geographical patchwork—who had jurisdiction over whom, what, and where could be very complicated questions in medieval England. Pollock and Maitland, in a brief outline of various (and often overlapping) jurisdictions, mention the county court, the hundred court, and the sheriff's court, the seigneurial or feudal courts, the franchise courts, leets, borough courts, and the kings courts. All of them were administered in different ways for different purposes and presided over by different authority figures (though theoretically all such figures derived ultimate authority from the king).

Further, this list is rather limited in scope, and leaves out both the forest courts and the ecclesiastical courts, each of which functioned under its own, entirely separate, legal structure.

In *Gamelyn*, we can see some sense of these various jurisdictional differences in the machinery by which similar crimes committed in the same geographic space are prosecuted. Gamelyn, in Fitt 3, kills his brother's steward in a violent outburst when he returns from a fair, with a party in tow, and is denied entry into the house.

Following the murder, and Gamelyn's assault on his bother's stores (as he entertains his guests), the brother accepts him as his heir; however, in return, Gamelyn allows himself to be bound to a post in the hall, to at least give the appearance of punishment for the steward's death. This murder of the steward is treated in the poem as an in-house affair, in which the brother, as lord of the manor, is empowered to "punish" Gamelyn. Gamelyn's later attack upon his brother's feast, wherein he breaks his brother's back, however, is a matter for the sheriff and the King's justice. Here we have the same man, in the same space, committing the same manner of violent crime, but with two entirely different enforcement outcomes. Whether such a crime as a steward's murder would have been treated quite so casually during the mid-fourteenth century is not at issue here. What is important is that these two different approaches and judicial structures appear in a legally-informed poem without any comment, which shows that there is no real expectation of uniform justice in the world of the poem. The who and where and what of the crime determine not just the punishment, but the particular process as well; here, at least, it seems that a crime against a servant falls under the manor court, while a crime against the lord is a matter for the King's justice. This internal indication of variable justice, embodied by the power which certain individuals (such as the brother) hold in relation to the law, helps set the stage for Gamelyn's need to turn outlaw, and ultimately assault the King's court itself.

Geographical jurisdiction still carries a fair amount of weight, however, and it's worth noting that the manor in question falls within the county presided over by
the sheriff in question, while the wood in which Gamelyn hides likely does not. When Gamelyn is told, in lines 704-706, that his brother has become sheriff of the county in question, he says, "I will be at the nexte shyre have God my life!" (710), and the following line uses the same wording, "nexte shire," to indicate that he does so. While this could simply indicate that he is planning to attend the next shire moot (a monthly county court), the wording could also indicate that he is hiding in an adjoining county, out of his brother's jurisdiction. The meaning of the phrase is unclear (though past editors Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren offer the latter interpretation in their explanatory notes), but the possibility that the wood in question is outside the county is worth considering as we examine the apparent inviolability of the outlaw's greenwood space.13 If the wood in which Gamelyn and Adam hide out is a royal forest, then jurisdictional differences are easy to establish—it would be an entirely different legal and geographical entity. In Gamelyn, however, the particular legal disposition of the greenwood (even considering its fantastical nature) is a bit more difficult to pin down.

The only substantive word used to directly indicate the nature of the space in which Gamelyn and Adam find sanctuary is "wood," a word which is used several times but which indicates only that the space in question is woodland. Adam describes it as a "wilde wode" in line 617, but this description is not only notably subjective (it is, in fact, uttered as part of a complaint, by someone who would rather

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13 See Knight and Ohlgren, note to line 710, p. 226.
be indoors), it is also a bit misleading. As English landscape historian Arthur Rackham points out, "Medieval England had much less woodland than any other European country except Scotland, Ireland, and Crete." As Adam the Spencer, used as he is to life in the manor house, may think it wild, but even in the imagination some limits might be placed on the notion of wilderness. This is, after all, a period in which there is no unheld or unclaimed land in England—there were no wild frontiers or recognized wilderness areas. Some woodland spaces may have been less intensively or actively managed than others (particularly rural holdings whose landlords were often absent), but none were truly wild.

That Gamelyn's greenwood may be a royal forest, rather than a private woodland, is suggested by lines 887-888 (the third point in the narrative where woodland plays a notable role), in which the king personally names Gamelyn the chief justice of "his free forest." While this "free forest" may not necessarily denote the space in which Gamelyn has been hiding out and practicing his outlawry, it does correspond in a narrative sense to his election as leader of the outlaw band—essentially, Gamelyn has already established himself as the "lord" of the wood, and thus the King's formal conference of office legitimizes a de facto arrangement. That the King pardons and employs Gamelyn's men in the following lines further indicates a kind of formal recognition and acceptance of this de facto arrangement. If we take this place to be a royal forest, then, the jurisdictional implications are readily

apparent, as the forest is governed by a different authority than the county over which the sheriff presides.

Further, if Gamelyn's greenwood were not a royal forest but a private woodland in another county (certainly a possibility), the outlaws could still be beyond the power of a local sheriff. In an age where almost all justice is essentially local, criminals could easily move from one jurisdiction into another to escape particular punishment, as studies of fourteenth century criminals attest. There are numerous occasions in the historical record where men outlawed in one county are found to be living (sometimes peaceably) in another, where outlaws maintain hideouts near county borders so that they may move quickly into another jurisdiction if pursued, and where outlaws sentenced (even to death) in one county are tried (or pardoned) for crimes in another, all without any move toward extradition or inter-county cooperation. The well-known and oft-cited Coterel and Folville gangs, for example, committed numerous crimes in several counties, but few formal punishments were meted out to gang members due to disjointed, idiosyncratic, and locally-oriented law enforcement. That it may be easier to "disappear" in a woodland than a village or open field is important, of course, to the perception of greenwood safety and sanctuary, but the jurisdictional implications and apparent limitations of law enforcement, at least in the Tale of Gamelyn, are notable nonetheless.

In any case, the key to understanding the jurisdictional fantasy of “natural sanctuary” here is recognizing that it functions as a binary—there is only one space for the law and one space for the outlaw. In *Gamelyn*, the shire (which, incidentally, includes our protagonist's private woodlands) is the space of the formal law (whether just or not), while the greenwood is the space outside the reach of that law, (where a more informal, and perhaps more just, sort of justice may be found). There is no acknowledgment of any other legal space or authority, or other political power (but perhaps for the King himself), which might affect this binary. The greenwood space is clearly beyond the reach (and possibly outside the jurisdiction) of the first sheriff, but this new space itself apparently has no sheriff, chief forester, or other formal authority enforcing the law. Despite the fact that Gamelyn and his men commit crimes, no new figure pursues them and all legal questions and issues in the poem are firmly focused on the legal structures of the original county. If we compare this to the Folville/Coterel examples, we can see that there is no such binary in play in the historical situation—gang members committed crimes and were outlawed in several different jurisdictions, and were able to use various political connections and sympathetic authority figures to find sanctuary and avoid (for the most part) punishment. While these gangs did hide out in woodlands at various times, there was no particular woodland which, by virtue of its density or isolation, served as idyllic refuge, in part because every space in which they moved was part of some geopolitical unit and was under some established legal structure (though the efficacy
of those structures is another matter entirely). The greenwood in Gamelyn is under the control of none but the outlaws themselves, and there is no indication in the poem that this control was won from any sort of authority (no battle with the foresters or other mode of actual geographical conquest is mentioned in the poem). Though this is clearly an internal space, it is, so far as the narrative is concerned, outside the reach of mundane or ordered society.

This greenwood, then is a kind of legal null space, where a sort of egalitarian camaraderie provides the means for social order without the intrusion of formal laws. As such, it can offer a means for social critique, as it plays host to a fantasy of the way things "should" be in the face of a corrupt or ineffective formal legal and judicial structures that are clearly modeled, as Kaueper points out, on the problematic exercise of contemporary justice. This sense of "right" or appropriate outlawry is clearly indicated in *Gamelyn* in lines 775-78:

> While Gamelyn was outlawe he had no cors;
> There was no man that for him ferde the wors,
> But abbots and priours, monk and chanoun;
> On hem left he nought whan he mygte hem nome.

His only victims, it seems are higher-level clerics (who have already been established in the poem as negative figures during the feast in lines 469-88); the common folk
have no reason to fear him. Like Gamelyn's attack on the law court later in the poem, his actual outlawry is presented as a means of undermining another apparently corrupt and abusive social structure. The greenwood here is not simply a sanctuary for outlaws, but a space in which some sense of fairness or true justice can be preserved or even incubated in the face of local corruption and abuse.

For all its virtues, however, this greenwood is a static space, a timeless narrative dead zone in and of itself, and in order for it to have any meaning, or for the true justice nurtured there to have any impact on the narrative world, the greenwood outlaw must leave the forest and actively contest the corrupt figures or institutions which established the narrative need for the greenwood space in the first place. In *Gamelyn*, the hero is drawn out of his greenwood idyll twice, first in response to his brother's continued depradations as the new sheriff, and later in order to rescue his other brother, Sir Ote, who has stood surety for him after his first capture, and is to be hanged by a false inquest as a result. In the first episode, Gamelyn, acting alone, is quickly overcome, but in the second, Gamelyn, supported by his men, is able to co-opt the entire system by force, and, in keeping with appropriate legal form, replace the justice, round up the false jury, and hold his own inquest. Justice, at least in the sorts of terms set up by the greenwood, has been served.

At this point in the poem, greenwood justice has expanded beyond the greenwood itself, but this creates a problematic and unstable situation which is only resolved through the exercise of some higher power. This grassroots, egalitarian
greenwood sense of justice is essentially a populist structure and can only be temporary, as it fundamentally remains at odds with the formal structures of justice and hierarchies of society in the country at large. Gamelyn has, for the moment, "corrected" a shire, but in order for this to hold he would have to somehow turn the shire itself, and even the kingdom of which it is a part, into a sort of greenwood. This would be moving into the politics of sovereignty in a subversive manner more fitting to the rebellious Hereward and Fulke than our later medieval greenwood outlaws, who, as mentioned earlier, tend toward the conservative. Gamelyn is not a traitor but a local malcontent who truly wants the King's justice, and thus the King himself becomes the agent by which greenwood justice, and indeed the greenwood itself, is reabsorbed into the formal structures of the established system of governance. The King is the ultimate secular authority, and by appointing Ote as justice and Gamelyn as justice of the forest, he is able to translate greenwood righteousness into real world power structures and dissolve the binary set up within the tale, as "legal" and "right" are brought together in the persons of Gamelyn and Sir Ote. The "wild" greenwood is now officially regulated, and is thus brought into line with the other woodlands—private parks and woods—we find first represented early in the tale. It is no longer beyond formal local jurisdiction, but it no longer needs to be, as the duly elected "king" of the outlaws is also the royal official in charge.
Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley

The implications of jurisdictional fantasy in the greenwood of Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley are much less nuanced than in Gamelyn, in part, perhaps, because the ballad offers less narrative development or detail and seems more directly built upon a presumed audience awareness of or familiarity with the characters and situations involved (as is also the case with the early Robin Hood materials). The poem itself, as it comes down to us, seems to be a later version of a narrative or narrative type which had been part of the popular imagination for some time, since the earliest extant versions of this ballad are printed texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the names of three main characters appear in earlier documents, particularly in a Wiltshire Parliament Roll for 1432 (where they are listed along with Robin Hood, Little John and others, apparently as some sort of joke).16

The 680 line ballad itself is divided into three fitts, and recounts the capture of one of the title outlaws, his rescue, and then the pardon and reward of all three after a royal encounter which results in a near-execution, resolved by an archery display. It is a notably far-ranging narrative, with the principals moving from Inglewood Forest to the town of Carlisle to London. As with Gamelyn, it is quite violent, with a body count of "thre hundred men and mo" (555), and, also as with Gamelyn, there is a

16 See Knight and Ohlgren, 235.
royal resolution, though here it is more involved and the Queen plays a significant role as well.

This tale is much less nuanced in its presentation of legal intricacies than Gamelyn, and, overall, exhibits far less "realism" in its portrayal of events; while there is much in Gamelyn that, though perhaps represented in exaggerated form, could have happened, the level of hyperbole in Adam Bell moves the action of the ballad well into the realm of absurdity. The first two battles in Carlisle, for example, first where William is captured, and later when Adam and Clim free the captive William and escape to Inglewood, results in 300 deaths (including, it seems, all of the royal officials in the area). Afterward, when the outlaws decide to ask the king for pardon, they are able to walk to London, and straight into the King's presence, almost unopposed. Later, when William avoids execution by first shooting a target, and then shooting an apple off his son's head, the first shot is at “tweny score paces” (approximately 300 yards), and the second is at “sixe score paces” (approximately 100 yards). These and other examples in the poem demonstrate the degree to which this poem deals in extreme implausibility. This level of absurdity is, of course, not unusual in medieval popular narrative—the degree of "realism" in Gamelyn, even considered in terms of Benson's “authenticating detail” mentioned in the previous chapter, would be the oddity here—but it does indicate that this poem is clearly working within the realm of stock episode and archetype in which hyperbole functions distinctively within a larger narrative context as a comparative measure of
heroic quality. We can (and probably should) compare our outlaws to Sir Isumbras, King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, or Guy of Warwick, all of whom are, within their own tales, absurdly superlative figures demonstrating their prowess and worth on a national or world stage. Gamelyn is strictly provincial, but William, Adam, and Clim are superlative fighters, outlaws, and archers, deserving of reward not because they have been treated unfairly or are somehow "right" (as is the case with Gamelyn), but because of their prowess.

Like so many other Middle English romance heroes, Adam and his fellows are very clearly "stock" figures working through "stock" episodes, in that the motivations, backgrounds and relationships of the various characters (and events) to one another are established in large part through prior knowledge or archetypal narrative expectation. In this they differ from Gamelyn, where such interactions are made more explicit in what seems to be a stand-alone narrative. In Gamelyn, for example, the audience is clearly informed of the transgressions of the brother/evil sheriff, while in Adam Bell the depiction of the sheriff and justice as "bad guys" is dependent entirely upon their opposition to the protagonists, rather than any particular evil deeds. As with many later Robin Hood tales, the royal officials seem to be intrinsically bad, in a manner understood by the audience without explication. Further, in Gamelyn we as audience are apprised of the crimes for which and the process by which the hero is outlawed, while in Adam Bell the named crime—poaching—itself seems to be a stock

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17 Benson, 13-14.
charge and activity that has only a tangential practical relationship to the legal action of the poem. The outlaws do actively poach, of course, and do so much more explicitly and repeatedly than in *Gamelyn*, but their main conflict is not with the royal foresters (who are barely mentioned) and forest law, but with the Carlisle-based common-law authorities. In *Gamelyn*, poaching is simply what outlaws do, in order to feed themselves while hiding out in the woods, but in *Adam Bell* poaching is the definitive act, it seems, that makes the outlaws what they are, and the association is reinforced throughout.\(^{18}\)

The archery contest, particularly the shooting of the apple from the head of the son, is a clearly recognizable version of the William Tell story, and the household betrayal of the outlaw which precipitates the first battle, as well as the intervention of the queen are narrative elements found in other popular medieval tales.\(^ {19}\)

How many of these stock figures, elements and archetypal representations might or might not have appeared in earlier versions of the tale we cannot know, of course, but by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this narrative is clearly functioning largely on audience assumption, association, and expectation, for its narrative cohesion. This situation is particularly useful for our purposes because we can consider the greenwood in this tale (as well as the outlawry which is associated with it) in archetypal, rather than narratively-distinct or -dependent, terms; we can essentially read it as the representation of a popular literary trope (or set of tropes),

\(^{18}\) See lines 13, 193-6, 420-3, and 470.

\(^{19}\) Paul Strohm, in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), devotes a chapter to “Queens as Intercessors” (chapter 5, 95-120), and another to “Treason in the Household” (chapter 6, 121-144).
which can be deployed without explication by the poet based upon a reasonable
expectation of audience awareness.

The inviolable sanctuary of the greenwood is laid out explicitly in *Adam Bell*. Early in the poem, when the three outlaws are clearly established within Inglewood and William decides to return to Carlisle to visit his wife and children, Adam Bell counsels against the move:

"For if ye go to Caerlel, brother
And from thys wylde wode wende,
If the justice mai you take,
Your lyfe were at an end." (29-33)

Later, when William is captured after both a betrayal and a battle, a swineherd notifies Adam and Clim of William's situation. Adam then reaffirms the inviolability of the forest by saying

"He myght have taryed in grene forest,
Under the shadowes sheene
And kepte both hym and us in reste,
Out of trouble and teene." (189-192)
Further, this apparent inviolability is not simply a function of the three outlaws remaining well-hidden, as the forest sanctuary remains inviolable even when they have exposed themselves (and are presumably being pursued) after the raid on Carlisle in which William is rescued from the gallows:

"Thus be these good yomen gone to the wood,
As lyght as lefe on lynde;
They laughe and be merry in their mode,
Theyr enemys were farre behynde." (376-379)

Throughout the poem, without fail, the outlaws, once in the forest, seem to be safe from all official sanction. The Carlisle authorities either cannot or will not follow, and no mention is made of any local forest authority that might intrude upon their idyll.

The forest space here is not entirely static and separate, however, as non-outlaws enter the forest twice in the poem, first when the swineherd notifies Adam and Clim of William's capture, and later when William's wife Alyce is found grieving there. This contrasts with *Gamelyn* where, aside from the outlaws themselves (if one counts Gamelyn and Adam), none seem able (or willing) to penetrate the outlaw's greenwood space. News comes in from the outside, yes, but there is no mention of the messengers or their motives. In *Adam Bell*, non-outlaws are explicitly able to move within the greenwood, and those movements and interactions are much less
marginalized. The swineherd, for example, is clearly familiar with the forest, as he "kept there Alyce swyne; / Ful oft he had sene Cloudesle in the wodde, / And geven him there to dyne (174-6), and he is able to find the outlaws "shortly and anone" (180). Alyce may not be as familiar with the forest, as she is found when the outlaws hear her weeping for her presumed-dead husband, and she seems to be looking for, or at least wishing she had found, the other two outlaws, but she is moving within the forest space nonetheless.20 This, then, is a more active greenwood space than the one in *Gamelyn*, in that there is clear acknowledgment of mundane activity within the wood that is unrelated to either law or outlaw, though one may presume it is sanctioned in some way by both. This is particularly true in the case of the swineherd, whose interaction with the outlaws are the result of his daily duties, which bring him to the forest where the pigs feed. This depiction of pannage, though hardly significant within the narrative, provides an interesting contrast to the generally larger-than-life tone of the narrative, as it acknowledges a kind of mundane interaction between town and forest that would have been quite familiar to a fifteenth-century audience, and thus complicates, in a small way, the kind of town/forest binary that we see so clearly delineated in *Gamelyn*. While royal authorities, or any authorities at all, are still very much absent (apparently unable or unwilling to enter the outlaw's greenwood space), the presence of non-outlaws, particularly the

20 See lines 394-403.
swineherd, in this named forest space, makes for a more realistic and recognizable
depiction of that forest space than we find in *Gamelyn.*

More realistic though it may be, the forest in *Adam Bell* still seems to maintain
the kind of jurisdictional binary previously discussed, with the added inclusion of a
kind of nominal overlordship not apparent in *Gamelyn.* In *Gamelyn* it is unclear who
has official charge of the forest space (until the end, of course), but in *Adam Bell,*
though royal authorities have no apparent power within Inglewood, it is still
recognized within the poem as a royal space. This jurisdictional detail, already
apparent in the recognizably named space (Inglewood is itself a real and royal forest),
is foregrounded by the outlaws' trip to London to ask the King's pardon. In itself this
is something of a logical oddity; the outlaws go to great lengths to recognize the
King's sovereignty, even though they themselves have, by their own actions,
demonstrated the practical limits of that sovereignty. Thus the space becomes both
the space of the outlaw and the space of the king simultaneously, both maintaining
and complicating the outlaw/law binary which is very much present in the narrative.
Here, specifically, it seems that the instinctive justice of the outlaws and the “right”
rule of the King correlate in some way, in opposition to the local legal officials whose

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21 In this distinction, one may find material for arguments about the audience of these and other
outlaw poems, in that the concerns and conceptions laid out by the poets in these works may
perhaps reflect those of their primary or intended audiences. Perhaps the legal and dynastic
concerns laid out in *Gamelyn* more clearly reflect the concerns of the lower gentry, for whom the
forest space may reflect a leisure space or power base, while in this poem the workaday nature of
the forest in the lives of the rural lower classes is highlighted.
“abuses” (though largely left to assumption) seem, in this poem, to be at the root of the conflict.

This alliance of King and criminal is further complicated by the apparently synecdochal nature of "poaching" as crime—the outlaws, who have definitely committed a great number of murders and assaults, and have perhaps committed other crimes as well, ask the King's pardon only for the forest crime of having "slayne your fatte falowe dere" (470), as if this somehow encompasses the entirety of their wrongdoing. This is clearly not the case, as the reportage of the carnage at Carlisle angers the King enough to both put him off his meal and renege on his (forced) pardon, but we still might make some sense of the outlaws' actions if we think in jurisdictional terms. William and company may be murderers, but they are also forest outlaws asking pardon for forest crimes, and it is as forest outlaws, not as common criminals, that they approach the King. Poaching, the forest crime, is the one most directly associated with the king himself, and it seems it is this forest crime which is of most concern to these forest outlaws as they approach their forest lord. The conflict at court comes about because the King himself serves as the point at which all secular law converges—the lord of the forest is also the lord of Carlisle. By focusing specifically on poaching, however, the outlaws' request of pardon “resolves” the specific conflict between the outlaws and the king himself, which then opens up the field for a fuller pardon. The crimes committed in Carlisle, unlike the poaching, are not a personal affront to the king himself, as they occur at something of a remove (no
small thing in a genre which clearly recognizes a separation between the King and the King's often-corrupt deputies); further, the pardon for poaching can undercut the crimes committed in defense of life and limb, since those crimes were themselves occasioned by the excessive punishment for poaching imposed upon William by the royal officials in Carlisle (poaching was never a hanging offense in Medieval England). Here, of course, it is the prowess of the outlaws, rather than legal logic, which ultimately convinces the King, but nonetheless, as with Gamelyn, it is in the person of the King and by his decree that the greenwood/town, outlaw/law binary is broken down, and the legal tensions are resolved.

The resolution here is somewhat different than that of Gamelyn, of course—royal sovereignty over the forest in Adam Bell is nominally recognized but never explicitly asserted, as it is when Gamelyn is appointed forester and thus becomes the implement by which that sovereignty is exercised. In Adam Bell there is a similar appointment, as William is named the king's "chefe rydere" of the north country (655), but the title seems merely honorific, as it's made clear that all three "good yemen"—including William—journey to Rome for absolution and afterward are said to have "dwellid with the kynge / and dyed good men all thre" (678-9). There is no allowance made here for William's return to Inglewood as the King's representative. Thus, we have a situation where the outlaws are themselves removed from the greenwood and somewhat rehabilitated, but the forest itself remains a potential outlaw space. The binary is broken down, in narrative terms, without actually being
broken; the forest is never directly brought any further within the compass of the law than it was to begin with, and thus while we have a resolution to this particular narrative, but this resolution does not obviate the possibility of other such narratives as completely as Gamelyn does. Any upstart outlaws in Gamelyn's greenwood would have a newly and officially sanctioned outlaw king/chief forester and his band to deal with, and thus royal sovereignty over that forest is both reaffirmed and re-enforced. But no such figures are explicitly introduced into Adam, Clim, and William's actual greenwood. William's title is apparently that of a courtier, as he seems to take no independent possession of or responsibility for the north country (presumably including Inglewood) over which he is given nominal authority. Royal sovereignty is here reaffirmed, but not re-enforced. Thus, while in Gamelyn the space of law effectively re-absorbs the greenwood space of the outlaw, here we see the treatment of the greenwood as a kind of perennial potential space of transgression. It retains the exceptional designation as both the space of the outlaw and the space of the sovereign, simultaneously claimed and tamed yet wild and uncontrolled, leaving us a setting in which the crucial half of the law/outlaw binary lies dormant but ready for narrative reinscription. This vision of the greenwood, then is of an exceptional (even paradoxical) space of more or less permanent potential for conservative transgression which both transcends the limits of the particular narrative and stands as a kind of conceptual space in its own right.
Conclusions

In the Middle English greenwood outlaw tradition, exemplified by these two narratives, the forest, while it may be dangerous to some people under certain circumstances, is a known, non-magical, often named internal space, which serves as an idyllic refuge for those at odds with the local hierarchies of political power. It is certainly a much more mundane space than the forest of chivalric romance, given its lack of magic and wonders, and the outlaw's greenwood, while certainly not realistic in any detailed way, would still be much more familiar to a fourteenth or fifteenth century audience than Yvain's Broceliande. By the later Middle Ages—many generations on from the conquest, and two centuries after the British Isles became politically separate from France—England is no longer a colonial territory, and thus the dark, mysterious forest of high chivalric romance, while still present in literature, no longer correlates to the fears, fantasies, and experiences of the gentry as strongly as they might have three or four centuries before. Rather, the audiences of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, no longer involved in the wholesale conquest and colonization of new and unknown territory, would be more familiar with forests and other woodlands that were internal, rather than edge, spaces, managed for particular purposes and subject to particular kinds of administration.

Thus it should not be surprising that the conceptual greenwood space developed during this period is a bounded space, inextricably tied to (though not
controlled by) local population centers, where the challenges faced are of a sort more relevant to daily life—legal and political, rather than magical or wondrous. Instead of questing knights and kidnapped ladies, exotic fairies and convenient hermits, we have yeomen, sheriffs, clergymen and petty gentry, all tied to and working within familiar, mundane locales and administrations.

All the same, the greenwood is hardly realistic. If one of its defining features is its known-ness (its geographical mundanity), another equally important feature is its apparent inviolability, particularly as it relates to local legal structures. One significant element that both *The Tale of Gamelyn* and *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley* share, both with each other and with the bulk of extant greenwood outlaw literature, is the correlation of the greenwood space specifically with royal authority alone. In either tale, one finds no intermediary authority figures within the woodland space itself, nobody who stands between the protagonists and the King, at least during the periods of outlawry. In *Gamelyn*, there are no foresters, or any other formal authority figures, associated with the greenwood until the king, in a sort of *deus ex machina* move, confers that designation on Gamelyn himself. In *Adam Bell* there are foresters mentioned, but only among the list of royal officials killed by the outlaws in the battle at Carlisle, and not in the forest itself. In Gamelyn's forest there seems to be a sort of “natural” nobility at work, as Gamelyn is selected to lead the band once the original, unnamed, outlaw leader is pardoned and returns to the world outside; in the forest of Adam, Clim, and William
there is no question of competition for control, either from within or without, though
all three certainly seem to desire and acknowledge the jusridiction and overlordship
of the king. In both narratives, the only formal figure who at any point exercises
direct formal authority in or over the greenwood space is the king himself, and thus,
at least in these two narratives, it seems that the king, and the king alone, is in charge
of these forests.

Now, while saying that the king is in charge of the forest may seem at first a
rather trite and obvious statement, it's worth reiterating that it is the king himself
who seems to be in charge here, and that this may itself serve as the core defining feature
of the outlaw's greenwood. Here, the King stands alone in his authority, which casts a
slightly different light on the idea of the king's justice as it functions in these
narratives  If the Tale of Gamelyn, as Kauper suggests, demonstrates both a desire for
and a distrust of the king's justice among the petty gentry of fourteenth-century
England, then perhaps this strong and direct association of the greenwood, just action,
and the king himself acts as a kind of palliative for those struggling with or concerned
about the workings of the common law system. While the specific legalities at issue
in Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesly are much more vague
than those in Gamelyn, the same notions of a corrupt local structure (or at least one
that offers unjust and single-minded punishment, as represented by William's betrayal
and condemnation), and the ability of the Kings to resolve such local issues directly,
remain.
If the king's justice is somehow considered good in theory but flawed in practice, then one might easily imagine that the presence of the king himself would cut through the layers of corruption and self-interest and actually redeem the law. The royal forests, given their direct association with the sovereign and relative proximity to so many of the king's subjects, could have served as a kind of lightning rod for this sentiment. The fact that the royal forests were subject to their own laws and bureaucratic hassles goes unmentioned here, in part, perhaps, because it might be the death of hope—an escape to the greenwood would simply be an escape from one flawed bureaucracy into another. Perhaps, then, the appearance of the king at the end of these and similar narratives is not so much a convenient narrative wrap-up that smooths over some very problematic issues, as it is the logical endpoint of the overall narrative arc. Further, one might argue that the greenwood here is not simply a fanciful sanctuary, but is rather a symbolic invocation of royal authority itself. It is a place no-one can follow, where no other authority is acknowledged, and where real resolution comes only at the hands of the sovereign.

How exactly this might relate back to the greenwood of the early Robin Hood tales is speculative, of course, since Gamelyn, Adam, Clim, William, and Robin are certainly not interchangeable figures. Further, the “completeness” of Gamelyn's tale, and the “uniqueness” of Adam, Clim, and William (which elements allow these particular readings), are simply not present in the early Robin Hood ballads. All the same, some notable similarities are there—which is, after all, why these tales appear
so often in studies devoted mostly to Robin. However, it does seem that contemporary ideas of law and jurisdiction, a well as the possible gaps between conceptions and realities of royal justice, may have played a significant role in both bringing the greenwood to life and pushing the creation of a narrative structure in which fundamental inter-relationships between subject, sovereign, and space can be explored. If the chivalric forest is about moving away from the central society, and thus inherently extending the King's dominion, then perhaps the greenwood is about restoring society from within, by extending the King's justice.
Chapter Three:
The Poacher's Forest

While the first two chapters focus on forests which are likely familiar to those with only a passing knowledge of medieval European literature and its cultural contexts, this final chapter moves into much more obscure territory, and deals with a set of primary texts that have received little critical attention in recent decades. Here, the focus shifts to the poacher, or, more specifically, the royal forests in which he undertakes his criminal activities, and the primary texts themselves are narratives of the “King in Disguise” type, in which the disguised monarch, either lost in or traveling through a royal forest receives rough hospitality from a poacher who lives there.
The two most prominent texts representing this poacher's forest in Middle English literature are *King Edward and the Shepherd*, and *The King and the Hermit*. The first is the earliest form of this “King and Poacher” variation on the more general “King in Disguise” narrative, and offers a relatively comprehensive representation of the forest from the peasant poacher's perspective, despite the fact that the ending is no longer extant. *The King and the Hermit*, a later tale, is clearly influenced by the earlier *Shepherd* (or one very like it), though it replaces the peasant poacher with a hermit, among other differences. These are not the only such tales in the period—the Middle English poem “John the Reeve” is similar in its narrative construction, and the Scots poem “Rauf Coilyer” offers a northern take on the poacher's forest—but these two narratives are particularly worth marking out because, in each, particular representations of the forest, and individual interactions with and conceptions of that forest, are vital to the narrative, and offer some insight into the shifts in representation of woodland spaces which is the ultimate focus of this project.\(^1\)

The narrative structure of this “King-and-Poacher” family of tales is fairly straightforward and simple. The king goes hunting, and he either gets lost and must

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\(^1\) This group isn't the only set of Middle English narratives where poaching occurs, but it offers us a much more complete vision of the poacher's imagined space than do the general run of tales—as was shown in the previous chapter, most of the actual poaching, which seems so vital to the outlaw's cultural identity, is mentioned only in passing. One notable exception to this, however, is the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, a latter fourteenth-century poem which offers perhaps the most detailed description of a poacher at work in the Middle English corpus. The opening section of the poem (lines 1-100) describes the poacher stalking, slaying, and butchering a deer, as well as hiding evidence of the activity afterward. This rich descriptive passage is followed by a dream vision, however, which recasts the poacher's activities (as well as the space in which they occur) in heavily symbolic terms, and thus places it beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting nonetheless. For more on this poem, particularly the symbolic elements of the poacher's activities, see Russell Peck's “The Careful Hunter in the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*” (*ELH* 39.3, 333-341).
appeal to a commoner for help, or he comes across a commoner with whom he wishes to have a bit of fun. In either case the king conceals his identity. The commoner invites the king to his home, which is generally in or near the royal forest. On the way home, the commoner may offer some complaint of unfair treatment or poverty, and usually serves his guest a poor meal, at least initially. Upon deciding his guest is trustworthy, however, the commoner breaks out his secret store and serves a lavish meal which in some way represents significant illicit behavior, most often poaching. Throughout there are often numerous references to poaching, and the festivities sometimes involve some sort of call-and-answer drinking game. This episode generally ends with some arrangement made for the commoner to meet his guest at court, for redress of wrongs or to take advantage of some opportunity. At court, of course, the situation is reversed, and the commoner is generally made to play the fool before the king reveals himself and, in all extant endings, rewards the commoner for his rough hospitality.

The stories vary in both particulars and level of detail, but the forest elements, particularly the poached game, are evident in all to some degree, and it is this in particular which marks out these tales from the general run of “king in disguise” tales. There are many other such stories, both earlier and later, but none are so directly preoccupied with forests and hunting. For example, two earlier iterations—indeed the earliest in “English” literatures—are the at least twelfth century tale of “Alfred and the Cakes,” and Gerald of Wales' fanciful twelfth century story of King Henry II, who
loses his way while hunting and lodges anonymously at a monastery. In the first tale, an incognito King Alfred is staying with a cowherd and is scolded by the cowherd's wife for allowing cakes under his care to burn, and in the second the monks teach Henry a drinking game (much like the ones mentioned above) which serves to demonstrate the less-than-holy habits of the monastery. In neither does the forest play a significant role in the narrative (in Gerald's tale it serves as basic setting, but only in the most formulaic way), and in neither does forest law, particularly with regard to poaching, come into play. This is particularly notable with the second tale, as the drinking game offers evidence of some connection between Gerald's tale and the later tales discussed here, and the lack of forest issues in Gerald's tale suggests a later reworking of traditional elements within a framework of more contemporary conceptions and concerns.

This preoccupation with forests and forest law in the later tales is intriguing, in part because it indicates that the forest is not simply a stock element here, and also because it offers us a distinctly different sort of woodland space than those occupied by questing knights and greenwood outlaws. Most notably, there is no sense of separateness in this space, as the king who “owns” it encounters within it only those who have some mundane reason for their presence. There is nothing magical or exotic about it either, but perhaps for the possibility of such an unscripted chance meeting between sovereign and subject. In many ways these forests may at first seem quite similar to the greenwood, given that the primary figures in both are lawbreakers,
and that poaching is one of the main crimes committed by those lawbreakers, but it is in fact quite a different sort of space. In the greenwood the ultimate concerns and issues explored seem mainly to do with the exercise of law and the process of justice (both formal and informal), and look to the king primarily as the symbolic head of the legal structure. The poacher's forest, however, is a more ordinary space, and raises low-level concerns that are as much economic and social as they are legal, and the king himself is more directly humanized as he shares, and comments upon, the day-to-day experiences of much more common folk.

*King Edward and the Shepherd*

*King Edward and the Shepherd* is far and away the most important for this particular study because, of this group of tales, it is the earliest, the longest, and the richest in particular detail. Dating, as is so often the case with such documents, is a bit problematic, with critical estimates regarding composition ranging from the late fourteenth century to the mid fifteenth century, but as it is the earliest of the tales mentioned herein, we can reasonably assert that it at least was not directly influenced by any of the other iterations, and in fact may have served to influence them (though that influence is more speculative than demonstrable).

The 1090-line Middle English poem, which is set in part within a forest and features a poaching shepherd, has received very little critical attention thus far, with
only a handful of essays discussing it and few mentions in book-length studies. Even where one would expect it to be an important text, it often isn't mentioned at all. For example, William Perry Marvin's 2006 *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* lacks any mention, and Anne Rooney's 1993 *Hunting in Middle English Literature* includes only a couple sentences of plot summary, which is itself incorrect. This lack of critical attention could be related to the relative inaccessibility of the text, as it appears in only two older printed editions (Hartshorne, 1829, and French and Hale, 1930) and in two more recent dissertation editions (Downing 1969, and Hicks, 1989). In any case, when critics do address the poem they tend to discuss it, often in passing, either as representative of the King in Disguise motif or as Complaint Literature.² Both approaches are of course quite valid and offer useful insights into both the poem's place within a popular narrative tradition and some of the contexts of production, but as yet there has been little attention paid to the poem as woodland literature, focusing specifically on the nature and role of the forest represented in the poem.

The narrative itself falls into two distinct parts—the forest and the court. It begins in typical romance fashion, as King Edward goes out on a May morning to "pley him be a ryverside" (54), with only a groom (who subsequently disappears from

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the narrative) in attendance. He meets a shepherd whose very name, Adam, seems to represent a kind of original or primitive type (much like the Adam in *Gamelyn*), and they talk for awhile. The shepherd immediately complains about the King's men, whom he says have destroyed his livelihood, taken his stock, and left him with only a tally-stick in payment. The King, for his part, passes himself off as a merchant, and goes under the name Joly Robin, which itself evokes narrative associations with forest mischief. He offers a number of clever clues to his real identity—he says, for example, that his father was a Welsh knight and his mother a Dame Isabel, and that he has a son dwelling with the queen—but the shepherd never catches on. As the conversation progresses, the King offers to use his court connections to help the shepherd claim his payment, and Adam offers to give him a coat worth seven shillings if he does so. The shepherd continues his complaints about the King's men, whom he compares to outlaws and accuses of numerous crimes. The shepherd also brags of his skill with a sling, and finally invites the King to his home.

On the way, they see some rabbits, and the King urges the shepherd to kill a couple, but the shepherd refuses, as it is illegal. His skill with the sling, as he further says, is directed at wild fowl, which the king will soon see at the table. As they come up to the shepherd's woodland home, the King hints at the availability of deer, but the shepherd shushes him and counters with a description of the local forester and his assistants.
Upon arriving, the shepherd serves the king a meal of fine bread, twopenny ale, and a lavish assortment of wild fowl (not exactly the poor meal offered in other variants), and then teaches him the call-and-answer drinking game—in this case the call is "passilodion" and the reply "berafrende." After a bit of drinking and some goading by the King, the shepherd serves up rabbit and venison (both also killed with a sling), and then, after explaining that he gives out gifts of poached game, and in return receives gifts of grain, bread, ale, and wine, he shows the King his underground storeroom before the two return to their drinking game (this time with fine wine). Afterward, the King leaves, and Adam walks with him for awhile, during which time he demonstrates his skill with the sling by killing two rabbits, one sitting and one running. As they part, Adam asks that the King keep his poaching a secret, and the King, as Joly Robin, promises to do so.

The following day, Adam travels to the court, where the King continues the ruse in order to make fun of the rustic, rude shepherd. The king involves named noblemen—Ralph of Stafford, the Earl of Lancaster, and Sir John Warenne—in his scheme, as well as his son, the young Black Prince. The shepherd's lack of manners—he does not doff his hat, nor surrender his staff or mittens—and his distrust of the court environment is the source of the humor in this portion of the poem, and the nobles heartily enjoy themselves at the shepherd's expense. After the shepherd is paid the full amount owed, he attempts to pay for Joly Robin's assistance. The King, as Joly Robin, refuses payment, insists that Adam stay to dine, and when Adam
grudgingly agrees, has him placed in a position of honor. The king then arranges for the Black Prince to start the "Passilodion" game, thus goading the shepherd into anger at Joly Robin, whom he thinks has betrayed his trust and set him up. Joly Robin is then revealed as the King, Adam falls to his knees and begs forgiveness, and the poem abruptly ends (though presumably some original ending had Adam rewarded for his hospitality, as happens in extant endings of similar tales).

Comic and archetypal elements aside, *King Edward and the Shepherd* seems to offer the reader a detail-rich narrative that, while recognizably fictional, is set within a particular geographical and temporal framework, and, indeed, past editors have tended to focus on the poem as an exercise in historical placement. French and Hale, for example, in their 1930 edition, place the poem’s composition at the end of the fourteenth century, but use the several specific internal references (mostly names) to set the date of this “fictitious adventure” as “not long after 1340” and declare that “it must have been written for an audience that knew something of the life of Edward III.” Further, they state that “the truth of the social conditions reflected in the poem is attested in many documents” and briefly mention complaints to parliament about marauding bands and corrupt officials, and statutes directed against poaching, and also include a specific complaint addressed to Edward in 1333 in a footnote. Though these editors do discuss analogous stories that name other kings, they are clearly working on the assumption that this particular poem is a historical artifact closely tied

4 French and Hale, 950-51.
to fourteenth-century memories of and popular perceptions about the life and reign of Edward III.

James Edmond Hicks, in his 1989 edition, seems to take French and Hale's approach in terms of historical placement, and does not fully consider the gap between the period purportedly represented within the poem, and the probable time of its composition. Hicks also mentions contemporary complaints against Edward III, adds mention of a short passage from Hoccleve depicting Edward III going about in disguise, and discusses the specific historical references, names, and allusions in great and largely contemporary detail—even going so far as to posit that lines portraying Edward III's mother as obedient "seem to be royal propaganda" rather than allowing that they might simply be inaccurate. Hicks isn't entirely consistent here—he also, for example, notes similar complaints in the later Piers Plowman—but even so the general trend is clear. Though his analysis primarily focuses on genre and he is less historically-focused than French and Hale, Hicks ultimately offers, in his introduction and particularly his notes, a clearly historicized, 1340s-centered explication of the poem.

Rachel Snell also makes much of the historical specificity of many of the poem's details, though she does so as part of a broader reading of the poem which

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5 Hicks reads the poem as a an example of an oppositional, binary narrative, in which the poet sets high against low and country against court, and his analysis is largely an exercise in narrative classification. He concludes that is is a mixed genre poem written for an upper-class audience, combining romance and social complaint, with a special emphasis on fabliau (because the seriousness of the shepherd's complaints are undermined by the low comedy of his humiliation at the court).

acknowledges and discusses social contexts and concerns of the probable period of composition. Her focus is on the representation of royalty in the poem, and the way in which the poem creates a sense of connection between the monarch and the commons. She addresses the tradition of King in disguise stories, and briefly discusses several similar Middle English poems, but she focuses specifically on *The Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd* as her primary text. Her argument involves a juxtaposition of the specific details about Edward III and his court with some of the political and class tensions of the probable era of composition, and in the process, she both restates and adds to the historical discussion of the representation of Edward III and his world within the poem.

Given the wealth of temporally-specific detail in the poem, and this critical tradition which has developed around it, the obvious approach would be to frame a reading of the forest in the poem in the context of the 1340s, while acknowledging and considering, as Snell very clearly does, the temporal gap between setting and composition. Indeed, in considering the social contexts of presumed period of composition, Snell introduces a number of details and observations that will be very useful to this study. But overall, when considered specifically in term of forest representation, the monarch-centered historicizing impulse apparent in all these studies is somewhat problematic, or at the very least limiting, for a number of reasons—the main one being that, names and archetypal elements aside, there is little in or about this poem that is specifically reminiscent of King Edward's 1340s.
By leaving the king aside and, on the other hand, looking at the specific
details of the shepherd's situation and behavior (of which the poem offers many), we
can see a particular set of economic concerns and anxieties, which are not specific to
any limited decade or era of late medieval England, underpinning the otherwise
archetypal plot. Upon closer consideration, one can see that these elements present
an overall economic picture that moves well beyond the mid fourteenth century.
Neither the specific complaints listed, nor the apparent anxieties about differing
economic systems of exchange represented in the poem, are indicative of such a
narrow chronology. Further, some aspects of these complaints and anxieties seem
outdated by the 1340s, while other aspects seem very much applicable in the later
fourteenth century and well into the fifteenth. The story is specifically set during the
reign of Edward III, but the economic issues and anxieties which seem to be at the
heart of this poem are less temporally stable, even when taking hazy memory into
account, than they may first appear.

The complaints about the depredations of the King's or Lord's men, for
example, can certainly be tied to particular complaints to Edward III, but are hardly
unique to the period in question. For evidence of historic specificity, French and Hale,
Hicks, and Snell all quote in part a letter of complaint written around 1333 which
corroborates the shepherd's complaints about the King's men (here translated by
Dorothy Hughes):
My lord King, behold what deceits are practised by your court in these days. Proclamation is made in the markets that none shall take oats or other things from any persons unless he pay for them as he is bound, under heavy penalty—and none the less, the harbingers of your court, and various grooms and servants, take many goods by violence from their owners, bread, beer, eggs, poultry, beans, peas, oats, and other things for which scarcely any payment is made ...

And they take men and horses during agricultural labour, and plough beasts and beasts of burden, to labour for two or three days in your service, receiving nothing for their labour.7

Hicks, without commenting on the temporal gap, also cites in part the complaint of Peace against Wrong in the C-text of Piers Plowman, from the latter part of the fourteenth century, which follows the specific complaints of the shepherd even more closely, even including the tally stick and the rape:

He borwed of me bayard a[nd] brouhte hym hom neuere
Ne [no] ferthyng therfore, for nouhte y couthe plede.
A meynteyneth his men to morthre myn hewes,
Forstalleth my fayres and fyhteth in my cheping[e]

And breketh up my bern[e] dores and [b]ereth awey my whete
And taketh me but a tayle for ten quarteres otes;
And yut he manes[c]eth me and myne and lyth be my mayde
Y am nat hardy for hym unnethe to loke. (Passus IV. 56-64)

To this one can easily add the more lengthy complaint passage from the Second
Shepherd's Play, cited in part below, which is directed at gentle folk and their servants
(rather than the King's men) and is dated to the period between 1415 and 1450:8

There shall com a swane / as prowde as a po,
he must borow my wane / my ploghe also,
Then I am full fane / to graunt or he go,
Thus lyf we in payne / anger, and wo,

By nyght and day;
he must haue if he langyd,
If I shuld forgang it,
I were better hangyd

Then oones say him nay. (37-45)

(Manchester 1958), page xxxi.
Taken together, these three passages, and others (including the very early fourteenth century poems *Song of the Husbandman* and *Satire on the Retinues of the Great*) demonstrate that such complaints are relevant, at least throughout the fourteenth and well into the fifteenth centuries; indeed, given the popularity and influence of *Piers Plowman*, the complaint aspects of *The Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd* seem more closely related to late fourteenth century literary convention than memories of early 1340s abuses of power. This becomes particularly important when one considers the numerous economic shifts in England, both large and small, that were accelerated, if not caused, by the first appearance of the plague in 1349—all of which occurred after the time in which the poem is set. The archbishop's letter of 1333 may in some way prove the universality of the complaint, but given the larger context of literary representation, the connection seems more likely coincidental. On the whole, it doesn't quite serve as evidence of the accuracy of the poet's historical memory.

The economic structures invoked in the poem are equally complex, and also somewhat anachronistic. On the surface, however, the anxieties here would seem to pit a corrupt money economy, represented by the King Edward III's court, against an illicit barter economy, represented by Adam and his friends and associated, at least in part, with the bounty of the forest.\(^9\) Certain details within the poem, including the prominent role of the tally stick and the cashless nature of the barter economy,

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complicate this reading. Taken all together, the opposition of forest and court, in terms of currency circulation, may simplify the narrative itself, but it also destabilizes the historical placement of the poem in the 1340s.

Throughout the poem, money is only and directly associated with the King's court, and is represented in very specific terms: the shepherd is owed "iiiij pounde/ And odd twa schillynge" (74-75) and has his hazel stick to prove it; the King, as the merchant Joly Robin, claims that he himself is owed "M pounde and mare" (66) by the kings men; Adam offers Joly Robin a coat, apparently worth seven shillings, for his assistance at court in lines 80-83; and Adam's particular sums are mentioned again during the court episode, first when the King arranges Adam's payment (restating the amount to his marshal, and making clear that Adam is not to be shortchanged) in lines 734-748, and again when Adam offers Joly Robin the seven promised shillings (and is refused) in lines 791-808. The specificity and repetition of the amounts, the insistence upon smaller denominations in the importance accorded the "odd twa schyllinge," and the apparent interchangeability of cash and commodity in the case of the promised coat, all make clear that the shepherd's money, in this poem, is meant to be read in terms of practical accounting and real day-to-day exchange value, rather than as some romance treasure, measured in round, fantastical numbers (such as the made up debt of 1000 pounds that "Joly Robin" claims).
The shadow economy, however, involves no money whatsoever, not even in terms of the relative measurement of value. Adam describes it thus (referring in the first line to poached game):

I ete thaim not myself alon;
I send presandes mony on,
And few friends make I me
Til gentilmen and yomanry:
Thei haue thaim all—thei are worthy—
Those that are prive.
Whatso thai haue, it may be myne:
Corne and brede, ale and wyne,
And alle that may like me. (434-442)

Not only is there is no mention of money here, but the terms and phrases used indicate a very nearly entirely anti-commercial, even somewhat classless local society—its participants range along the social scale, and it is only by the recognition of exchange that can we call this a barter economy. Even then, we can use the term only loosely, as we are not given any of the practical terms on which these exchanges are made (though someone presumably must have purchased the wine somewhere). This shadow economy is, in the poem, as vague as the cash economy is specific, and
its benefits more fantastical—the wine as well as the food proves excellent and abundant, and Adam seems to be living (and specifically drinking) very well for an apparently cash-poor shepherd\footnote{This is conjecture, of course, but there's room for little else—Adam's actual *need* (or lack thereof) for the money is never made explicit—he doesn't actually mention actually buying, or needing to buy, or being unable to buy, anything, with the exception of the coat, which is itself essentially a representative's cut of the money gained, rather than an actual practical or necessary purchase.} who has lost much of his stock to the depredations of the King's men.

If we look at the economics of this poem, then, we have a real and specific money economy, associated specifically with the upper echelons of society and complete with bureaucratic abuses of power, contrasted with a vague, communal, and cashless fantasy economy which ameliorates or eliminates those abuses. The financial tensions underpinning such a narrative are, like the initial complaint itself, hardly peculiar to the 1340s. Further, the specifics, even viewed through the haze of fantasy and nostalgia, seem as appropriate to the thirteenth century as the fourteenth, and perhaps moreso. The tally stick in the poem tells us little; they were in use from the twelfth century to the nineteenth, and were widely used in the manner represented in the poem throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.\footnote{See Hilary Jenkinson's "Medieval Tallies, Public and Private." *Archaeologia* 74 (1924) 289-351.} The practice of peasant poaching and gift-giving, as well, is nonspecific. According to Jean Birrell, the forest court records provide abundant evidence of peasant poaching (including poaching with slings) during the latter half of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and provide examples of deer being shared out within peasant communities—in part, perhaps, to safeguard the poacher's interests by implicating fellow villagers in the
crime. Birrell also points out, however, that throughout this period, peasant-poached deer were very valuable and often sold. In terms of the use of money itself (or lack thereof), the passage describing the shadow barter economy seems most out-of-place, as England in the 1340s had an economy in which cash was used in numerous transactions at all levels of society, and more actual coin was in circulation than at any other time during the English Middle Ages. In fact, the need for larger denominations created by the pervasiveness of cash transactions at the time caused Edward III himself to introduce the first gold coinage in England in the 1340s. One would have to look back to the previous century, or even earlier, to find anything remotely like the fantastical cashless, localized, barter economy of Adam's circle, even considering the illicit nature of his exchanges and the presence of presumably imported commodities (fine wine).

All in all, it is clear that the many names and specific references to Edward III and his reign (including the naming of actual historical personages), though quite interesting in detail and relative accuracy (given the much later composition and the archetypal nature of the poem's plot), are essentially surface elements, at best a kind of “authenticating” detail that plays to an audience's sense of the familiar, much like Chrétien's incorporation of tournament in his earlier romances. They are not enough in and of themselves to justify a temporally limited or specifically historicized

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13 Birrell, 85-6.
reading of the poem, if only because so many other specific and somewhat more deeply embedded (in a structural sense) elements fit that temporal framework only vaguely, if at all. The forest in this poem is not a "real" forest at Windsor, during Edward's reign, even as viewed through a hazy veil of memory. Thus, by opening up the temporal field beyond a late fourteenth century memory of the 1340s, we can more closely examine the ways in which the forest in this poem functions as a conceptual space in both the general context of fourteenth and early fifteenth century literature, and in the more immediate contexts of the turn-of-the-fifteenth-century audience (or audiences) for whom this poem was presumably produced.

There are a number of forest-related elements in *The Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd* that mark it out for special consideration, not only in the general context of later Middle English literature, but also among the smaller group of otherwise similar "King in Disguise" poems. When contrasted with other sorts of literary woodlands and read against a late fourteenth/early fifteenth century context, these elements—specifically including the placement of the forest at Windsor, the peasant presence in the forest, the focus on hunting (not just poaching), and the prominence of financial specifics—combine to offer a notably different kind of fantasy forest space.

First and foremost, both in the poem and in the analysis, is the specific placement of this forest. The forest here is clearly a royal space, and is very near Windsor. This detail certainly fits the poem's connection with Edward III (who was born there, was known early in his life as Edward of Windsor, and spent much time
there), but whether this is the "real" Windsor, of the 1340s or even the 1390s matters little. The key element here is that this is not the deep dark forest of high chivalric romance, nor is it a forest far from the political center, like Sherwood or Inglewood—Windsor is only 25 miles from London, and is thus right at the heart of Royal England. Unlike Sherwood or Inglewood, the King's possession is not merely a matter of law, but a matter of personal, and very present, possession; it is essentially the King's own backyard. This is reinforced by the fact that in this poem Edward, unlike the kings in the general run of "King in Disguise" poems, does not get lost—he is very much on familiar ground. The political centrality of this forest space is further highlighted by the Northern dialect of the poem and the West Midlands manuscript in which it appears, which together place both the poet and audience further from London than the action of the poem. The forest in this poem is clearly an internal, regulated space, and the power structures are unquestionably established (though not necessarily obeyed), all of which implies that the concerns and anxieties explored in this space are more focused on the domestic and personal relationships of lord and tenant, rather than on the larger, more national questions of law and identity that we see at play in the chivalric forest or the greenwood.

Windsor could, of course, be simply convenient name, used by the poet because of the association with Edward III (in whom the poet was obviously interested, given the breadth of personal detail the poem provides), but the central peasant presence in the poem more broadly supports the implied focus on domestic
concerns. Peasants are rare in high chivalric romance, and even the less fantastical Middle English outlaw tales are commonly concerned with the possession/dispossession of members of the landed classes than with the lot of those on the lower rungs. The shepherd of the *King Edward and the Shepherd* is no Kitchen-Knight or Havelok and has no bearing whatsoever on the already well-established power structure. Thus, the central presence of the shepherd shifts the narrative focus and opens the door to a discussion of how political power structures affect society at large, rather than how such structures are established and maintained by the societal elite. When Adam is contrasted with another well-known Middle English shepherd drawn from popular romance, the churl in *Yvain and Gawain* (235 ff.), the difference in concerns becomes clear. We as audience are given no reason to directly consider the day-to-day hardships or relative standard of living of the peasant in *Yvain and Gawain*—he is simply a monstrous curiosity, a plot device as fantastical as the forest itself, in a romance whose primarily political concerns are with the tensions between the responsibilities of knighthood and lordship. Adam, however, as the audience is clearly made aware, isn't so fantastical and must make do, in some way or other, in this most central of English places. This becomes, then, a poem of policy and administration, and, in this context, the forest of *King Edward and the Shepherd*, while it may offer the King an opportunity for a bit of fun, almost entirely lacks the potential of magic, danger and general adventure common to so many
romance forests. The forest here is instead a forest of laws and loopholes, bureaucracy, resource management, and the practical economics of everyday life.

This general situation gives us some insight into the prominence of money and resources (particularly poached game) in the poem. This prominence is worth noting, because, though the humor of the fabliau elements and the archetypal plot seem to be the main entertainments offered by the poem, the practical action throughout revolves almost entirely around what the shepherd does or does not have in a particular context, and how those possessions and commodities are gained and lost. The tension between the two ways of gaining and losing, the two economies in this poem, are brought almost immediately into the poem with the appearance of the shepherd. Adam's first complaint, which follows hard upon his initial greeting of the king, lays out the main matter of contention in notable detail:

I am so pylled with the King
that I most fle fro my wonyng
And therfore woo is me.
I hade catell—now haue I non—
Thay take my bestis and done thai slone,
And payon but a stik of tre.
This complaint is actually more substantial than his initial greeting, and Adam says this without any prompting from the King, and even before the King has adopted the Joly Robin persona. The shepherd, whatever else he might be, clearly represents a failure of practical management, from the lord/tenant perspective. Further, it is primarily this failure of practical management that, in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, sets up the sense of crisis which can then be ameliorated, though mostly illicitly, by the bounty of the forest. As previously mentioned, we as audience are clearly made aware in this poem that Adam, unlike Yvain's churl, must make do in practical ways, and thus it is crucial here that the sense of need and the failure of the King's administration are laid out in the poem *before* hunting is mentioned or Adam's poaching is revealed. This is an aspect of the poem not shared with other poems of this group, and it here complicates the representation of Adam as poacher and allows a more nuanced consideration, within the poem, of hunting and its place in day-to-day life.

Hunting, in particular, is detailed in some rather telling ways in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, and it is with this focus on hunting in the poem that the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century context becomes notably important. As previously mentioned, the "King in Disguise" tale, including the distinctive call-and-answer drinking game, had appeared in British texts at least two centuries earlier, but this is the first of such tales to feature hunting and poaching. Further, while contemporary outlaw tales often mention poaching, these are generally passing references, and they
lack the significant direct attention to both hunting law and peasant hunting practice that we see in *King Edward and the Shepherd*.\textsuperscript{15} While, Gamelyn, Adam Bell, Robin, and their assorted ilk certainly do poach, they most often simply nock an arrow and fell a deer at whim (never any other quarry), and there is little of the careful preparation and legal consideration we see in the “King-and-Poacher” variants, nor is there any real need for explanation or justification of the practice. This lack of literary precedent, combined with the centrality of hunting and forest law in the poem, imply a particular interest in such issues on the part of the poet and contemporary audience, and this fits with a poem composed at the end of the fourteenth century or just after, as it is during the last decades of the fourteenth century, much more than during the 1340s, that attitudes toward hunting and its regulation shift significantly in England.

For much of the fourteenth century, as with previous centuries, hunting law, for the most part, worked geographically. The Royal Forests were subject to Forest Law, of course, with its specific protections of venison and vert (which addressed both the deer and their habitat), but outside the forest such laws did not apply.\textsuperscript{16} There were also private parks, warrens, and chases, which were established by Royal grant to individuals or corporations, on which unauthorized hunting, though illegal, was not prosecuted either according to forest law or in private courts. Outside these designated areas was the common chase, and while legal issues can be hard to pin down due to lack of primary evidence, variable enforcement of existing laws, and

\textsuperscript{15} Even the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, with it's detailed description of a poacher at work, offers little commentary or direct discussion of the legal and social implications of the activity.

\textsuperscript{16} See Young, 17.
questions of overlapping jurisdiction, it does seem that hunting went largely unrestricted here.\textsuperscript{17}

Private parks, however, became a mark of social standing, and throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries park ownership moved steadily down the social ladder, from the nobility to the lower levels of gentry. By the latter fourteenth century, thousands of such parks existed, often extending to hundreds of acres, and as the upper classes sought to regulate and protect these private spaces and maintain hunting as a gentle pursuit, tensions between the private parks and the common chase became apparent.\textsuperscript{18} These tensions clearly appear, as Marvin, Almond, and others point out, with the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, when the rebels at St. Albans, according to Thomas Walsingham, include hunting and fishing rights in their catalogue of demands and nailed a rabbit to a pillory to symbolize rights of free warren. Further, according to Henry Knighton, Wat Tyler demanded of the king himself that "all preserves of water, parks, and woods should be made common to all: so that throughout the kingdom the poor as well as the rich should be free to take game in water, fish ponds, woods, and forests as well as to hunt hares in the fields."\textsuperscript{19} These tensions are also clearly evident in the landmark statute of 1390, which restricts the possession of hunting dogs to persons with a minimum income of forty shillings a year, to which the king appended

\textsuperscript{17} See William Perry Marvin's \textit{Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature} (D.S. Brewer, 2006), pages 105-9.

\textsuperscript{18} See Susan Lasdun's \textit{The English Park, Royal Private and Public} (Andre Deutsch 1991), chapter two. For a specific discussion of the number of parks at this time, see page 5, and the accompanying note.

a prohibition on "female hounds and ferrets, rabbit-snares, nets, hare-pipes, ropes, and all other devices for capturing and destroying game, hares, or rabbits, or any other sport of gentlemen." According to Almond, the statute of 1390 "spelled the end to commonalty hunting on unenclosed land and initiated an establishment policy, basically of increased cooperation between Crown and great and small nobility, to restrict hunting to persons of 'gentle' rank." Though, as Almond also points out, the statute was rarely enforced, it did fundamentally change hunting from a geographically-regulated to a class-regulated activity, and, in any case, it certainly demonstrates that the English, at all levels of society, had hunting on their minds at the end of the fourteenth century.

With *King Edward and the Shepherd*, we get a story that is clearly addressing the main sources of hunting-related anxiety for a late fourteenth century audience, which are questions of the legality and practice of hunting by the commons. First, legality is clearly a concern in the poem, particularly as the King and Adam travel to the shepherd's home. This is indicated by the scrupulous manner in which the shepherd at first describes the illegality of taking rabbit and deer, even to the point of including descriptions of the warner (the keeper of the rabbit warren) "hardy and fell" (235) and the forster and his "yong men thre" (271). The illegality of hunting rabbit and deer is directly offset, however, by the shepherd's assertion that "Ther is no wilde foule that wil flyne, / But I am sicur hym to hittyne;" (241-2), and the further

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promises that his guest shall "se my slyng slaght" (250), referring to the meal of wild fowl which awaits them. The wild fowl, it seems, both in this poem and according to Forest law, is legal to hunt, at least so long as one does it with a sling (a weapon not mentioned in the Statute). 22 This specificity in laying out that the shepherd knows what he can and cannot legally hunt is notable, as it makes clear that not all hunting is poaching in this poem, and thus Adam can be a hunter without being a poacher. This is a distinction which none of the other poems in the group makes, or even hints at. 23

The lavishness of the initial meal served by Adam to the King adds another dimension to our discussion of the forest in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, particularly regarding the questions of what this forest represents, and to whom. In all the other poems in this group, the king is first served a poor (legal) meal, and it is only when trust is gained that he is served the lavish (and illegal) meal. Here, however, because hunting fowl does seem to fall into the “legal” category, the initial meal itself is absurdly large and well-prepared:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Brede of whete bultid smalle,} \\
&\text{ij peny ale he brought with all,} \\
&\text{Thereof wolde he not lett:}
\end{align*}
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22 According to Robin Oggins (noted in a private e-mail to the author in 2008), fowling was never illegal in the Royal Forests, though hawking was occasionally restricted. French and Hale make no comment on the wildfowl. Hicks presumes that the wildfowl are taken illegally (though he offers no direct evidence for this and does not acknowledge the lines within the poem that indicate legality) which affects his reading of the issue. Snell says nothing about poaching, but does suggest that the meal itself is a transgression of a 1336 alimentary law which restricts number and content of meal courses for the lower classes; while this is an interesting observation, such a restriction goes unreferenced in the poem, while the legality of wildfowl hunting is clearly implied.

23 The other tales either conflate poaching and hunting, or remove the act of hunting entirely by presenting the poached meat at table with no discussion of its source
A fīesaunde brid and therwith a crane

Other fowles were ther gode ane

Before the Kyng he sette. (292-97)

.....

He broght a heron with a poplere,

Curlews, boturs, bothe in fere,

The maudlart and her mech,

And a wulde swan was bake (304-7)

As a whole, this meal (including the bread and ale) is truly, as Adam says, "worthy a gret lord" (302-3). This is a far cry from the bean-bread, old salt-meat, and sour ale served up in John the Reeve or the bread and cheese of The King and the Hermit. Even before the audience discovers that a poaching-driven trade network is the ultimate source of the bread and ale, we can see that the bulk of the legal meal represents a kind of bounty of the forest, and already it is clear that legal hunting is helping to ameliorate the political and financial crises suffered by Adam.

When the poached game, and the poaching itself, come into play later in the poem, they extend, rather than introduce, this sense of forest bounty, and further elaborate on the ameliorative effects this bounty has on Adam's situation. Again, this

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The bread is made of finely ground flour, rather than the coarse flour one might expect, and the term "twopenny ale" denotes a stronger brew in the fourteenth century than it does in later centuries—in the 1390s, comparatively, poorer ales are denoted as penny, or even halfpenny ales, as in, for example, Piers Plowman (see the Middle English Dictionary entry, "Ale").
highlighting of the difference between legal hunting and poaching brings a strong sense of legal nuance into the poem, but it also complicates the narrative dichotomy which would contrast the shepherd's financial mistreatment with his illicit successes. The poem offers an unusual sort of middle ground, since the cash-poor shepherd seems to be doing fairly well as a legal hunter in this game-rich environment, even before poaching becomes an issue. Throughout the poem, this sense of abundance is reinforced in small ways—notably in the repeat appearance of the rabbits, and the statement that Adam doesn't return home without "new mete" (566-7)—and while there may be a number of questions and concerns about hunting legality and ritual raised in this poem, there is no question that the surrounding forest is absurdly abundant in wild game.

This bounty of the forest seems so abundant, in fact, that it removes any sense of resource competition from the poem, which allows, at least implicitly, the peasant and the King to draw from this bounty without taking from the other. The peasant's activities, and indeed the activities of his entire circle, seem to have no detrimental effect on the King's own sport or table, and thus the King becomes a much more disinterested figure than he might otherwise be in the poem. It is this sense of non-competition that sets the stage for the comedy of the interaction, because the King can enjoy the jest without concern, and treat the merely “legal” infractions of the shepherd with a wink and a smile; he can be, for a moment at least, a person at the common table, rather than a figure of royal authority. Essentially, as long as the forest
can provide enough for everyone, there's no need for bad blood between the
principals. Indeed, so long as the forest can provide, there's no need to worry too
much about the breakdowns in management that Adam introduces in the beginning of
the poem, and the king and subject can here meet on relatively equal terms, without
regard to rank and role.

We're clearly looking at a fantasy of peasant self-sufficiency here, with the
forest offering a surfeit of resources which allow the otherwise downtrodden peasant
to live quite comfortably, but the question of how this fantasy might work is a little
more complicated. Hicks, in his introduction, suggests that the feast episode is a
psychological salve for an upper-class audience:

It assuages their collective conscience, for it assures
them that wretched conditions and painful hunger are not
pervasive among the poor. The feast is implicit proof that misery
is non-existent among the lower classes, that they live and eat as
well as the upper classes. This is a poetic affirmation of a widely-
held class bias; this is a psychological manifestation of social
prejudice.25

25 Hicks, 37
While Hicks is a bit heavy-handed and overly-general in his analysis, he does raise an interesting possibility, in that this sense of forest bounty certainly seems to make up for the depredations of the King's men, and thus ameliorates the negative effects of harsh management. This approach, however, is undercut by the very existence of the Statute of 1390. If the sort of “live and let live” attitude of the poem were carried to its logical conclusion, and the peasant hunter/poacher were really doing no perceived harm, then legal concerns about hunting rights and practices would be a non-issue. This situation is further complicated by the fact that Adam seems to be able to do all this with only a sling, thus he is able to fill his larder without actually possessing or utilizing any of the items banned by the statute. The social element may be at issue here, since Adam is clearly not reproducing the processes or pageantry of a noble hunt, but there is no direct comparative counterpart in the poem, such as the King's hunt, which would set up the contrast. From Hick's presumed gentry perspective, the perceived message of the poem seems to turn around on itself; while an

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26 Hunting in England, for the ruling classes, was, throughout the Middle Ages, a highly ritualized sporting affair, a social spectacle treated as an art. For the ruling classes, this ritual was more important than the result, as, according to Almond, "it was not what was hunted and caught, but how the hunter did it which defined him as a gentleman or ungentleman" (60). Adam's hunting practices are detailed within the poem: he brags of his skill with the sling in lines 193-200 and 241-45; explains his bloodless method for killing deer with the same sling in lines 420-30; finally does kill rabbits in lines 530-50; and it's noted three times that his sling is better than a bow, in lines 193-200, 415-26, and 548-50. Despite this detail, the all-important ritual is entirely lacking. Adam simply kills things with his sling, and, as both his boasting and his larder indicate, he seems to do so both easily and well. There is not even a sense of some crude peasant version of noble hunting rituals here, which is particularly notable since, as Hicks points out, the poem does offer a kind of mirroring, setting the the peasant's life—his hospitality, manners, home, and feast—against the King's in a clear binary pattern (30-31). This lack of ritual, though not explicitly indicated in the poem, would have been clearly apparent to a late-medieval English audience, and it would have been particularly apparent to the ruling classes, who would have considered Adam's activity (legal or not) to be crude and unsportsmanlike—not really hunting at all.
aristocratic audience certainly may have enjoyed the rough humor of the peasant's humiliation and the caricature of class, the “message” is not entirely consistent with their interests as landowners, because it ultimately offers sly official sanction for an activity (peasant poaching) which they have, as a group, been trying very hard to wipe out.

It would be doing a disservice, however, to consider the gentry exclusively as a target audience, as the poem also contains much that might appeal to the lower classes. We do, after all, have here a peasant who has, perhaps, been mistreated, but who has also managed to live a quite luxurious life through his own skill and cunning, and without using or possessing any of the contraband items specifically forbidden by law. While this poem predates all extant Robin Hood poems,27 many of the same elements which seem to be so appealing about the later Robin Hood are here apparent—we have a non-gentle protagonist who, though breaking the law, represents a kind of contextual "rightness" in action or intent that is ultimately (presumably) rewarded rather than punished. The shepherd's success, in any case, reinforces the notion that legal access to wild game would significantly improve the lives of the peasantry. In sum, the fantasy of peasant self-sufficiency at the heart of this poem is itself multivalent, and could appeal as much (or more) to those working in the lord's stables as it would to those eating at his table.

27 It is, however, worth noting, that the only manuscript in which King Edward and the Shepherd is found also contains a version of Robin Hood and the Monk, the earliest extant Robin Hood poem.
This narrative clearly depends on the perceived abundance of the forest, because it only works so long as a surfeit of game is available and accessible. It is with this recognition that the kind of forest we're working with here becomes clear. Rather than a forest to be conquered and claimed in some way, or a forest that offers often temporary refuge to victims of corrupt legal structures, the value of this forest is measured in the availability and accessibility of its resources. That this availability and accessibility is hyperbolically, rather than realistically, represented, is apparent when one looks at the contrast between the specificity of the cash economy and the vagueness of the barter economy depicted in the poem. Whether one could or could not take such a range and volume of game in a royal forest (using only a sling) isn't really at issue. Here, the poet is obviously familiar with the manner in which values are determined within a money economy (the chattel and coat, for example, have cash-specific exchange values), while all sense of relative value is absent in the vague descriptions of the shadow gift/barter economy (there's an abundance of resources and luxury items, but we are never given any specific, comparative amounts or values which would underpin such a system). The gift/barter economy represented in this poem, then, is not a realistic reflection of actual economic activity, but is rather the narrative mechanism behind a fantasy of surfeit, which is itself dependent entirely upon a narrative setting which allows, at least conceptually, an absurd degree of resource accessibility and abundance. This forest in *The Tale of King Edward and the*
Shepherd, then, is as much a fantasy space as that of high chivalric romance—it simply enables a different set of fantasies, and ameliorates a different set of concerns.

**The King and the Hermit**

This sense of forest bounty also pervades the later *King and the Hermit*, despite several important differences between the two poems. In this much shorter poem—at 523 lines it is just under half the length of *King Edward and the Shepherd*—we find many of the “authenticating” details stripped away. There is, for example, no mention of money at all, no explicit and direct feudal relationship between the poacher and the king, nor is there any distinction made between hunting and poaching. Here, the poacher is not the King's own peasant, flirting with legality by using a sling and hunting multiple species, but is instead a hermit-priest who uses a bow and hunts deer. There is also no corresponding court episode here (though one is hinted at), and the main action of the poem ends with an archery contest of sorts.

The date of composition is uncertain, as, like the previous poem, it clearly predates the later fourteenth century manuscript that contains the compilation in which it appears, but its composition seems to be either vaguely contemporaneous with or following not long after *King Edward and the Shepherd*.²⁸ In any case, some

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²⁸ According to the most recent editor of the poem, Melissa M. Furrow (which appears in *Ten Fifteenth-Century Comic Poems*. New York: Garland, 1985), the language and dialect offer little evidence for specific dating. She places it between 1377 and 1461, based on a reference to a King Edward in the first stanza which indicates composition at a time when an Edward was not on the throne (See Furrow, 243). Thomas D. Cooke, in the *Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, says
relatively direct connection between the two is apparent due to a number of shared
details, including the call-and-answer drinking game, which in the Middle English
corpus is unique to these two poems. Further, the actual representation of the forest
space, particularly in the sense of forest bounty, differs little from the previous poem.

The poem is temporally set in "god Edwerd days" (1), though the Edward in
question is not here specified, and the entirety of the action takes place within
Sherwood forest. Here the king goes hunting, and after first conversing with his
foresters about the best place to go and then following a buck for the better part of the
day, he finds himself lost in the woods with night coming on. After offering a prayer
to St. Julian, he comes upon a hermitage, where the occupant, suspicious of this
lordly figure, claims that he hasn't the means to host him for the night. The King,
however, discovers that the town is five miles distant, along a "wyld wey" (148), and
insists upon staying the night. The hermit grudgingly allows him in, and the king
gives straw to his horse and chops wood for the fire. The king calls for food, and
observes that, were he living in this place, he would have venison to serve his guest.
The hermit does not respond, but instead asks the King where he lives, to which the
king replies that he lives at court, and had been chasing a deer with the King's hunting
party that day. The hermit serves bread and cheese, with nothing to drink, and the
King, unsatisfied with the poor meal, more directly suggests that the Hermit could get
away with poaching deer. To this the hermit replies that he would not transgress the

simply that the poem was composed "somewhat earlier" than the latter fourteenth century
manuscript in which it appears, but Cooke also clearly identifies The Tale of King Edward and the
Shepherd as the earliest extant "King in Disguise" tale in Middle English (See Cooke, 3168, 3160).
King's law, because he would be imprisoned and possibly hung if caught poaching. The King persists, promising to keep it secret, and the hermit again resists, but ultimately, after reflecting that "it is long gon seth any was here bot thou thyselue tonyght" (288-9), he brings out candles and a tablecloth, white bread, and a selection of baked, salted and fresh venison. The King then mentions drink, and the Hermit says he has a four gallon pot (of ale, presumably), and sends a servant (not previously mentioned) to fetch both the pot and grain for the King's horse. The Hermit then teaches the King a drinking game (this time "fusty bandyas" and the answer "stryke pantner"). After a bit of drinking the King invites the hermit to come to court, where he will repay the hospitality. The Hermit demurs, and says that it is a rough, half-day trip to the court, and he lives well in the forest, where he gives gifts of venison to his neighbors in return for gifts of bread and ale. The King insists, the Hermit inquires for whom he should ask at court, and the King says his name is Jake Flecher. The hermit then shows the King his bow, which the king is unable to draw. The hermit then asks (based on the name “Fletcher”) for the King's help repairing an arrow, to which the King agrees. The two of them eat and drink a bit more, and then the King leaves the hermitage and rejoins his men. The tale ends there, without a corresponding court episode.

If, as before, we look beyond the archetypal plot and focus on the representation of the hermit rather than the king, we again have a poem in which legal and social issues related to hunting are highlighted. Though this poem allows no
middle ground and makes no distinction between hunting and poaching, as the previous poem does, a full five stanzas (60 lines) are devoted to the discussion of poaching, all before the hermit relents and serves the second, illicit meal in lines 286-97. The King brings up poaching and is rebuffed three different times, and the conversation is not simply repetitive; each time the king brings up the subject, he does so in a slightly different way, and each time the hermit offers a substantially different response. When the King first broaches the subject, he does so indirectly, leading with "And I sich an hermyte were..." (191), and the hermit does not acknowledge the suggestion. The second time, the King is more direct, saying that, in such a place, "To shote thou schuldes lere" (240), to which the hermit replies by stating his loyalty to the King, and outlining the penalties for poaching. The third time, in direct response to the Hermit's mention of penalties, the King says he will not tell—"Ther schal no man wyte for me" (269)—and the Hermit responds that it would cause trouble for his order, as his business (mastery) should be prayer, penance and fasting, rather than archery. In the two direct responses from the Hermit, then, we are given two clear reasons, one general and one specific, why he should not be shooting deer: first, that it is illegal, and punishable by imprisonment and/or execution, and second, that it is improper for a cleric to hunt, as a cleric shouldn't be enjoying such a luxurious diet anyway. The audience, then, is treated to not only a story about a poacher, but a story which discusses in some detail the problems of this particular case, in both secular and religious terms.
This poem also, unlike the *Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, offers a model of the noble hunter which contrasts with the activities of the poaching hermit. The king's hunt is depicted as a significant affair in the first few lines of the poem, as he hunts "With ryall festes and feyr ensemble, / With all the lordes of that contre" (22-3). The first five stanzas of the poem are dedicated to a description of the hunt, which includes horns, hound, nets, traps, and men on horseback, and also involves a consultation with a group of professional foresters—how the King manages to get lost on his own during such a large-scale operation is its own mystery. This is not an unusual element in popular Middle English romance, as many tales (the Gawain romances in particular) begin with a royal hunt, but here, instead of being a stock element used simply to get the king into the forest, the hunt has a significant bearing on the rest of the poem. Because the poem begins with formal hunting scene, the contrast between the royal hunter and the skulking poacher is readily apparent, much more so than in *The Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, and would be one more indication, to the gentle audience, that the hermit, whether of gentle blood or no, is transgressing social as well as legal boundaries with his activity.

While legal and social concerns about hunting are certainly apparent here, this tale differs significantly from the *Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd* in that it offers neither a space for legal hunting, nor an immediate crisis, such as the depredations of the King's men, to which hunting could serve as a response. This could, at least in part, relate to the fact that the concerns here addressed have little to
do with common hunting: the hermit here is no peasant, and, as a cleric, his concerns are not meant to be the day-to-day concerns of lay society. He is, after all, supposed to have made a choice to be in the wilderness living a life of self-denial, and is perhaps even intentionally meant to be subsisting, like so many other hermits and wild men in medieval literature, on the "rotys and ryndes" he claims as his food in line 128. The audience discovers, of course, that he is living quite well, but here the transgression is moral as well as legal—by eating so much meat, and trading for ale and luxuries like fine bread, he is not living beyond his station, like Adam the shepherd, but beyond his vows. This poem, though it does represent a sort of shadow economy, is not really about money so much as morals.

Rather than an economic fantasy, then, we see in this poem at least a touch of anticlerical satire, though that satire is itself undercut by the general attitude of the poem. The hermit as poacher represents a kind of decidedly un-monastic figure, and indeed, as Anne Rooney points out, "hunting commonly appears as an indication of immersion in and preoccupation with the material world in secular attacks on the clergy." Of course, such satires often depict clerics who, unlike our hermit, participate in the formal hunt (Chaucer's Monk is probably the best-known example of this), and The King and the Hermit also lacks the representations of other sins (greed and lust in particular) which so dominate Middle English anticlerical works, so overall the anticlerical touch is light; further, the Hermit is ultimately presented in

29 Anne Rooney, Hunting in Middle English Literature (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993) 122.
positive light, with little more than a sort of winking nod to the “official” clerical position. The hermit's behavior, however, is still at odds with the expectations of his order, a point not left to inference but rather clearly laid out in his second response to the King:

"Men of grete state,
Oure order thei would make full of bate
Aboute shych mastery.
[Vs bos] be in prayer and in penans,
And arne therine by chans
And not be archery. (274-79)

(Men of great state,
Would make trouble for our order,
Over such a “profession.”
We are meant to be in prayer and penance,
And earn therein by alms
And not by archery.”)

Here the hermit clearly states that, if he were playing by the rules, he should be spending his time in prayer and penance, and earning his keep through alms (“chans”)
rather than with his archery. Further, the issue here is not just one of clerical expectations in general, but specifically of the "men of grete state" who might cause problems for the order if such a clerical vocation (his "mastery") were discovered. This indicates, at least within the context of the poem, some contention over secular conceptions of the religious orders, and the role they play within society at large. Whether this references any particular historical conflict between the gentry and clergy is difficult to establish, particularly since clerical hunting (poaching) did occur throughout the Middle Ages. Despite some measure of official disapproval, hunts were sometimes allowed (or at least tolerated) by the church and sometimes not; thus, in practical terms, the question of whether such activity was in keeping with the religious life was never effectively resolved during this period, though the anticlerical satires do indicate some measure of debate.\textsuperscript{30} Within this poem, in any case, it is clear that the hermit is on shaky ground in political, as well as moral and social, terms. Overall, though the hermit and his situation differs significantly from that of Adam in \textit{King Edward and the Shepherd}, this poem also clearly focuses on questions both of who should or should not be hunting, and of how it should or should not be done—again, questions of great concern to the latter fourteenth and early fifteenth century gentry. Regarding these questions, however, the presentation of the hermit undercuts what might at first be seen as the social "message" of the poem; while \textit{The King and}
the Hermit does allow an audience to enjoy the representation of an ultimately likable and even sympathetic hermit, it simultaneously confirms the notion that clerical hunting is inappropriate and unjustified. There are no economic crises or questions of bureaucratic mismanagement here to offer justification for the behavior, but the King, himself a layman, seems to have no fundamental problems with the idea of a hunting cleric.

This poem is clearly not a fantasy of self-sufficiency, then, and the preoccupation with economic issues so prominent in King Edward and the Shepherd are here barely acknowledged, yet again we have a narrative which depends on a sense of forest abundance in order to function. The moral, political, and social issues raised by this poem depend almost entirely on the hermit's ability to live well, and the hermit, with his mighty bow, is able to live well because the forest itself allows him the means to do so—he is able, essentially, to take enough game to contravene his ascetic vows, set "great men" against his order, and (implicitly) debase the nobility of the hunt. The hermit's success is not due simply to his own skill, either, as the King's foresters make clear that the whole forest is teeming with deer, in lines 32-6:

"Ouerall, lord, is gret ple[n]te,
Both est and west.
We may schew you at a syght
Two thousand dere this same nyght
Or the son go to reste."

Given such huge numbers, the focus of the royal hunt in the poem moves from the general to the specific, as the King is ultimately directed, by an old forester, to the largest, most impressive deer, which he then pursues—the King's hunt is only unsuccessful in that he does not get this particular buck, and thus this lack of success has no relation to some lack of available quarry. The abundance we see here, then, is a function of the space itself, rather than individual skill. Again, there is no sense of competition between the principals, and again, the sense of non-competition allows the King to put aside his formal, legal, persona, and become, for a time, a part of the common run of men, participating in their mundane reality.

In general terms then, while *The King and the Hermit* may not be as legally convoluted a poem as *The Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, and addresses a slightly different set of hunting-related issues, it is still set very much in the same kind of forest space. Again, we have a narrative that is rooted in a bountiful, resource-rich forest space, which both allows the chance meeting of principals, and offers a neutral environment in which questions of resource access can be explored.
Conclusions

These particular poems offer us a forest that is specifically suited to the exploration of a set of social and legal issues that are of primary concern in the late fourteenth century, but they also, in the process, offer us a very different perspective on the role of the sovereign in popular forest narratives. One of the key elements of the forest space and the forest bounty in these poems is that it allows, for a time, a sovereign to cross the boundary between the “official” world and the “real” world—an opportunity not often seen in the chivalric or greenwood narratives discussed in the earlier chapters. In the chivalric romances, the King tends to be represented as a distant figure, bound in almost entirely by court and the pageantry of “official” life; he rarely goes anywhere alone, does not undertake his own quests, and thus serves primarily as the symbol of the central society in whose interest the questing knights act. In the early greenwood outlaw tales, the King primarily functions as the official seat of legal power and justice; he is not so much a person, as the representation of justice personified, and he appears very specifically, in his role as sovereign, in order to resolve the tensions raised by the activities of the principals. In these “King-and-Poacher” narratives, however, the forest space allows the King to escape the court in relative security (it is, after all, his own land) and without accompaniment. Further, the forest bounty, as previously discussed, is so great that there is no real need for the King to put a stop to
the poaching or punish the offender, or otherwise act in any official manner. Thus the stage is set for the personal, humanizing interaction which occurs in these poems.

The significance here is not only that it creates a sense of connection between the King and the commons, as Snell points out, but also that this sense of connection is intimately tied to the forest space itself. There are, of course, other versions of the “King in Disguise” tale, set in other locales, but it is telling that it is the forest, and particularly the royal forest, that serves this function here. Much like the actual royal forests of medieval England, we have here a space where the highest and the lowest (perhaps, the most “official” and the most “real”) elements of English society are most closely overlaid, since these forests are simultaneously mundane feudal demesnes (albeit royal ones), and the home of the royal hunt, with its impressive and involved ritual and pageantry. Few other places in the country allowed, in such an “authentic” manner, such contrasts, and such direct connections between King and commons. If the King is to cross the boundary between the “official” world and the “real” world, the royal forest would be the most logical place for such a move to occur.

Humanizing the King in the royal forest also allows the discussion of hunting and poaching related issues in a surprisingly neutral environment, at least in these two poems, because the King is not in a position to exercise royal authority—at least, not primarily royal authority—in either poem. In the first poem, the King is at Windsor, his own holding, and thus is as much Lord as he is King, if not moreso; the peasant is
his own man, the depredations visited upon him are also caused by his own men, and
the game is his own game. Here, then, the King is not an outside figure come to lay
down the law, as in most Greenwood tales, but is instead simply the local lord
attending to the management of his estate. Thus, *The King and the Shepherd* can
tackle contemporary issues relating to the regulation of private game parks (those
leading, particularly, to the Statute of 1390), despite the setting in the royal forest,
since the relationships and issues here are fundamentally similar. Instead of a royal
intervention, we see in this poem a direct and essentially in-house relationship
between lord and peasant that would be common throughout the aristocratic classes,
so the king, despite his royal status, can be a stand-in for any lord with a hunting park.
Further, in *The King and the Hermit*, though much is made of the King's law, the
poaching cleric, if taken, would be subject to Church, rather than Forest, Law, and
thus the King's law is only an illusory threat. The real issue here is one of the “men
of grete state” who would make trouble for the order, rather than the King himself.
Again, we have a situation where the real issues are deflected, though not necessarily
resolved, by the presence of the King. In these forests, then, unlike those of the
knights or outlaws, the King serves a part of the commentary on, rather than as the
cause, or the cure, to the social tensions explored in the poems.
Conclusions:

Hybrid Woodland Spaces and Their Implications

The tales discussed in the previous chapters have all been relatively straightforward, perhaps even pure, examples of particular strains of woodland representation in Middle English narrative, but none of these strains are mutually exclusive, especially in coarser, less self-conscious tellings. In terms of woodland representation, hybridity abounds in the corpus of Middle English popular narrative, and we can see forests that draw on elements of two or three of the forest types previously outlined—sometimes even to the point of creating narrative inconsistency.

Several of the Middle English Gawain romances, for example, combine elements of the chivalric forest and the outlaw's greenwood in ways that, upon closer examination, turn out to be fundamentally illogical, particularly in terms of their
temporal and geographical setting. For example, this group of poems tends, on the whole, to identify the temporal setting specifically in the distant, mythic past—in the “tyme of Arthoure” and such\(^1\)—yet the geographic settings, at least in the forest-focused tales, tend to be named geopolitical spaces of much more recent vintage—primarily Inglewood, a royal forest established after the Norman conquest. Also, these woodland adventures often begin with a royal hunt, which is the definitive activity associated with a later medieval forest like Inglewood (and which, in some form, is often either referenced or directly described in both greenwood and poacher narratives), but rarely occurs within the forests of high chivalric romance, with which Arthur and his knights are most strongly associated. Here we have a fundamental conflict, as the chivalric forest is primarily represented as an unbounded, externalized space, while the greenwood/poacher's forest is specifically a bounded, geographically enclosed space; in these tales however, there are strong elements of both, and thus the place in which these narratives are set is thoroughly hybridized from the beginning.

Once the scene is set, and the king and his knights are in the woodland space, the hybrid elements in this group of tales sometimes persist, particularly regarding the

\(^1\) Not all of the tales in this group use the phrase “Arthur's time” directly (as The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, and The Awntyrs of Arthur do), but there are variations on the idea that also appear, including references to the elders that have come before (as in lines 7-8 of The Avowyng of Arthur), and the phrase “Wen Arthur he was King” (in line 1 of The Greene Knight). In the tales that don't specifically reference the time as past, such as Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle, there instead appears a lengthy preamble that establishes the character and history of Gawain in a hyperbolic past-tense construction which itself creates a strong sense of temporal distance. In these tales the temporal focus of these preambles and catch-phrases evoke a clearer sense of past time than the opening lines of either Yvain and Gawain or Sir Perceval of Galles, in which the past tense descriptions are used, but not in such a specific or directed way. The one notable exception to this in the Gawain tale group is The Marriage of Sir Gawain, which begins in (and remains in) the present tenses, with no reference to or evocation of the past at all.
sorts of adventures encountered within the woodland space. For example, in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, King Arthur becomes lost in the forest, and is captured by the mysterious Sir Gromer Somer Joure, who then makes demands that set the wheels in motion for this well-known “Loathly Lady” narrative. Sir Gromer is certainly a marvelous figure, and, as Thomas Hahn points out, he “represents the forces of wildness and incivility: he appears suddenly in the middle of the forest, he behaves in ways that violate knightly protocols, and, most of all, he has a name that connects him with the licensed anarchy of Midsummer's Day.”

Thus, he is exactly the sort of figure one might expect to appear in a chivalric forest. Yet this chivalric romance figure is undercut by the very reason he provides for the kidnapping itself, when he says, in lines 58-59, “Thou hast gevyn my landes in certayn / with greatt wrong unto sir Gawen.” Despite his seemingly marvelous nature, his complaint is a very prosaic one, much more in keeping with the concerns explored within the greenwood than the chivalric forest. While not exactly a Robin Hood figure, Sir Gromer Somer Joure is clearly motivated by concerns about the application and enforcement of the King’s law, and is taking those complaints into the royal forest to pursue redress. The very inclusion of this direct complaint, which hardly seems a narrative necessity, again muddles the nature of the narrative woodland in which these events occur. Neither is this an integral element of the story in its Middle English iterations, as Sir Gromer and his complaint does not appear in

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3 All line numbers from the METS edition.
the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” (where this forest element is excised entirely, and the action is instead initiated at the hands of a court of women), and, while the complaint may have existed in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* it cannot be assumed, if only because this portion of the narrative is no longer extant. That this element is not universal points to some sort of choice, on the part of the composer, to plug a narrative hole in a manner that, intentionally or not, draws in a strong element of more contemporary woodland narrative by layering greenwood concerns atop chivalric narrative structures.

A similar sort of contradiction occurs in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, where we have an essentially “outside” narrative occurring within a notably “inside” woodland setting. The narrative itself (which involves knights who get lost in a forest, and seek shelter with a cursed warlord whom they ultimately redeem and draw into the Arthurian hegemony) seems to demand a purely chivalric forest setting, where adventuring knights can move into an unknown “outside” space which they can, in one way or another, essentially “conquer” through their chivalric exploits. The setting here, however, is again set up as an internal, bounded space, which may be to some degree “wild,” but is hardly unknown or unconquered. While the forest is never explicitly named, the action takes place near Carlisle, and the tale is set in motion by a large-scale royal hunt, which involves a long catalogue of named knights as well as “fife hunderd and moo” archers to “fell the fallow der so clene” (105-108).⁴ The hunt

⁴ Again, line numbers taken from the METS edition.
is quite a success as well, as there are “fife hunderd der ded on a lond lay” by mid-morning (113). Such an undertaking is hardly associated with a wild and mysterious space; this event, described in such detail in the poem, is the sort of full royal hunt for which the royal forests were intended. The individual adventure, of Kay, Gawain and Baldwin, is spurred by their pursuit of a “raynder” in a manner that closely matches the King's pursuit of the large deer in *The King and the Hermit*. Once they are separated from the main party, and the real adventure begins, the sense of mystery is again undercut, as they are not really lost—Bishop Baldwin knows exactly where they are, and where to find the cursed Carl's castle. The forest, then, is, in practical terms, much more an internalized and familiar royal forest than it is a mysterious and externalized chivalric forest. Thus, while the structure of the plot seems to support one kind of forest setting, the narrative itself delivers quite another, and the “traditional” literary expectation is undercut by contemporary conceptions of woodland.

The same sort of hybridization occurs, in a more subtle way, in both *The Greene Knight* and its much more elaborate cousin, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the first, the traditional chivalric forest episodes are minimized, almost to the point of nonexistence. The primary contrast in the story is between two courts, those of Arthur and the Green Knight, and the description of the distance traveled between them is compressed to a mere six lines (280-285). In a more typical chivalric romance, one would expect numerous adventures to occur within this
woodland, in-between space, but here such adventures, while they do occur, are
simply referenced in passing, with the doubled phrase of “many furleys” in lines 280
and 283 noting that such marvels were experienced. Further elaboration, however,
falls flat, as the only encounters specifically referenced are with fowls (281), wolves,
and wild beasts (284), rather than any particularly marvelous creatures or persons.
This is followed up by the line “On hunting hee tooke most heede” (285), which
seems to indicate that he's riding across and through owned and maintained
woodlands, where hunting would be limited or controlled in some way—a conception
much more in line with a later medieval English woodland than with the traditional
chivalric forest. This poem, then, not only turns the chivalric narrative upside down,
by focusing on the court rather than the forest, but it further offers an almost sly off-
the-cuff acknowledgment of narrative expectation while simultaneously proscribing
it.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this earlier and more carefully-
constructed version of the tale follows the same pattern, and in fact undercuts
chivalric narrative convention (at least regarding the forest) even more than *The
Greene Knight*. Here also, the journey from one court to the other is condensed, and
the marvels one would expect to occur on such a journey are referenced rather than
actually described—as the narrator puts it, ““So mony mervayl by mount there the
mon findes / Hit were to tor for to telle of the tenthe dole” (718-719). The marvels
and adventures themselves are less mundane than in *The Greene Knight*, as Gawain
encounters “wormes” (720) and “wodwos” (721) as well as wolves, bulls, and boars, but they are nonetheless dealt with in a very off-hand manner. The description of Gawain's journey, however, though still brief with the larger context of this 2530-line poem, is much more involved than in *The Greene Knight* and describes not only the practical geography of the journey, but also the discomfort of travel—two elements generally not present in the typical chivalric romance. The itinerary in lines 698-701 specifically names North Wales, the “iles of Anglesay,” “Holy Hede,” and finally the “wyldernesse of Wyrale,” all of which are very real places, named in terms that would be recognizable to a late-medieval English audience. This is a far cry from the mysterious and amorphous “Broceliande” of Chrétien's *Yvain*, as it offers a specific geographical context for the action. Further, the narrator makes the specific point that Gawain's battles on this journey are not nearly so difficult as the winter weather he encounters, by noting that “werre wrathed him not so much that wynter nas wors” (726), and then further describing the discomfort of sleeping in “yrnes” (armor) in the freezing rain and sleet (727-732). Here, by playing down the expected marvels of the journey and playing up the practical elements of winter travel in wild places, the poet undercuts the chivalric forest of literary tradition and narrative expectation. As with the other Gawain romances, this poem manipulates the conventions of the chivalric forest in ways that create a subtle, though still very present, intrusion of later medieval notions of woodland into an earlier narrative form.
Whether the implications of these inclusions of narratively-dissonant elements were intended by the composers of these poems, we cannot know, but the inclusion of such features itself is worth noting, and suggests a distinct shift in the ways that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century audiences interacted with this older narrative tradition. The marvelous, which is so integral to the genre of chivalric romance, is not allowed to stand entirely on its own in these later tales, but is explained away to some degree through these dissonant elements. Further, the narrative commentary and the explanations put forth through these introduced or reworked elements tend to highlight a sense of commonplace, or at least logical, experience as a supplement to traditional literary motifs. In these tales, perhaps, we may be seeing examples of a fifteenth-century version of Benson's “authenticating detail” being applied to narratives that work within structural contexts which, though quite popular, were older and less immediately relevant. It could, in essence, be the composer's attempt to spruce up an older tale by bringing in more contemporary elements, including the bounded greenwood spaces, the prosaic legal concerns, and the focus on practical, rather than wondrous, challenges (like cold winter weather). That this “sprucing up” creates such narrative inconsistency seems to matter little, which leads one to conclude that then, as now, while writers and audiences might appreciate a certain level of verisimilitude, they also didn't let it get in the way of a good story.
Lest we let this narrative elasticity suggest that the forests of Middle English popular narrative are too inconsistently deployed for unified conclusions, however, it's important to note that there is one aspect of these forests which both draws heavily on contemporary conceptions of woodland space and tends to remain consistent regardless of the degree to which these narrative forests are (or are not) hybridized; the forest is overwhelmingly represented as the space in which “right” rule is established or reinforced, particularly if that right rule is at odds with legal or customary usage. The King is often a central figure in these narratives, and even in narratives where the King does not appear directly, his policies, influence, or cultural values tend to serve as a stand-in for him. I have, of course, argued variations of this point specifically in each of the previous chapters: the chivalric forest allows the knight, as a sort of proxy for the central society, to extend the hegemonic influence of that society, in a manner which is ultimately ratified by the sovereign; the outlaw's greenwood allows the wronged to circumvent local, corrupt legal structures, and call upon the King himself, in his own person, to right the legal wrongs that have been done; and the poacher's forest allows King and lowly subject to interact as seeming equals, and thus allows on-the-ground commentary on the rules which govern the lives of the commons. In the hybrid woodlands of the Gawain romances, this sense of right rule still holds true even in the absence of the king, as Gawain's chivalric and courteous behavior represents the best of the king's court, and by extension the best of the king himself. The forest, then, is a place where social and legal concerns can be
brought to the attention of, and often resolved by, either the king himself or his (most upstanding) proxy.

To say simply that the forest is a sovereign space would be somewhat trite, given the great degree of variation in the representation of the king in these tales, but nonetheless the forest, in later medieval England, was connected directly with the sovereign, both legally and conceptually, much more than any other sort of (particularly rural) landscape. The forest was the King's personal space, and thus the forest becomes the appropriate narrative space in which to explore questions of sovereignty; whether those questions are of great political import (the issues of conquest and control which underlie many chivalric romances), or of a more mundane nature (the legality of hunting explored in the poacher's tales), the king is consistently the figure around whom they ultimately revolve. While the “essential emphasis” of the forest here may, as Saunders suggests, “be the revelation of the human psyche within this world of ‘shaping fantasies,’” it is nonetheless important to note the sort of fantasies being shaped in these popular tales, particularly given the remarkably consistent nature of those fantasies. The forests in these stories often serve as a place where the idea of the “right” (whatever this “right” happens to be in a particular story) lives on, even if this “right” rule or behavior is not commonly practiced outside the forest (or if it must be established within the forest, as in the *Carl of Carlisle*). It is the place where England, as a legal and social structure, can reimagine itself according to high ideals, where king and subject can be in
(sometimes very direct) agreement, without the intervening levels of bureaucracy, abuse, corruption and misunderstanding that were so often part of daily life in the later Middle Ages. The forest in these tales, at first glance, may appear to be a place outside of the law or beyond the grasp of society, but on further reflection it becomes clear that, rather than being beyond the law they are in fact the center of it. These forests may seem wild, but it is that very wildness that, in the later medieval English imagination, allows them to serve as the incubator for right rule and the redress of “civilized” abuses.
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