‘In-to þe wildernes he geþ:’ An Ecocritical Reading of Wilderness as Represented by Fairies in *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* and *Sir Degare*

By

Martin Hansen Løntjern

Master’s Thesis

Department of Foreign Languages

University of Bergen

May 2020

Norwegian Abstract:

I denne masteroppgaven valgte jeg å se på hvordan feene i tre veldig forskjellige tekster fra middelalderen deler en kobling med villmark som er sterkere enn villmarken som blir presentert eksplisitt i tekstene. De tre tekstene, *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* og *Sir Degare*, viser en sammenheng mellom feene sine anti-sivilisasjonsholdninger og hvordan vi oppfatter villmark. Feene i disse tre historiene tar på seg, eller forsterker aspekter fra villmark som ikke er funnet i naturen representert i tekstene. Jeg har valgt å bruke økokritikk som hoved-tilnærmingsmåte fordi det tillater tolkninger av villmark som er hjelpsomme for å forstå holdningene til middelalder personer og naturen. Jeg baserer meg på villmarks-definisjonen til Gillian Rudd som sier at villmark består av det ville, det utemmede og det ukjente. Min analyse av de tre tekstene er knyttet opp til feene i *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* og *Sir Degare* alle oppfører seg og oppholder seg i miljø som er motstridene menneskenes. De bryter med samtidig menneskelig konvensjon og med hva som forventes av dem i situasjoner hvor de interagerer med menneskene. Tesen min går ut på å utforske implikasjonene av konvensjonsbruddene og feenes projisering av villmark i menneskeverden. Den første teksten jeg tar for meg er *Sir Orfeo*. Argumentet mitt i dette kapitlet tar for seg hvordan feene invaderer menneske-verden hvor de bruker sin påvirkning til å skape forstyrrelser. Jeg argumenterer så at historisk forskning på skog i middelalderen og skoglov viser at skogen Orfeo befinner seg i ikke er villmark. Til sist argumenterer jeg for at Orfeos reise inn i Fe-verden er den faktiske reisen inn i villmark. Det neste kapitlet mitt tar for seg *Sir Launfal* og hvordan Fe-verdene sammenlignes mellom de forskjellige tekstene. Jeg bruker også feministisk teori for å vise at Tryamour, fe-prinsessen, blir en Moder Natur skikkelse i teksten. Følgene av dette er at hennes samfunnstrossende side gjør at hun projiserer forstyrrende elementer i samfunnet. Til sist i kapittelet argumenterer jeg for at Launfal reiser fra menneskesamfunnet på grunn av at den kunstige fasaden som holdt det sammen er brutt for han. Den siste teksten jeg diskuterer

er *Sir Degare*. Hovedargumentet mitt er at Degare er en slags reversering av *Sir Launfal*. I motsetning til *Sir Launfal*s optimistiske syn på villmark, så er *Sir Degare* en tekst om frastøtning av villmark. Degare som er halvt menneske og halvt fe begynner i kontakt med sin fe-halvdel, men blir mer og mer involvert i menneskeverden. Hans transformasjon gjør at han mister mer og mer av koblingen med villmark etter hvert. Tematikken i tekstene belyser en kobling mellom feer, villmark og samtidige forhold til villmark. De implisitte koblingene mellom feer og villmark blir tydelige når man ser hvordan hovedkarakterene motarbeider, blir motarbeidet eller samarbeider med feene. Tolkningen av Fe-verdene avslører en klar fasinasjon med menneskenes egne komplekse forhold til det ville, det ukjente og det utemmede. Analysen av både feene, menneskene som interagerer med dem og Fe-verden bidrar til å bedre forstå kompliserte og motstridene holdninger til villmark.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Laura Saetveit Miles for her guidance and help as the supervisor of my thesis. She has provided invaluable help in shaping my thesis and I am very grateful for the many hours she has dedicated to helping me. I would also like to thank my parents for their unending patience and support. Next, I want to thank my fellow Master student friends: Gerd, Halldis, Henriette, Kaja, Tore, Trond, Simon and Victoria. I really could not have done this without you. Lastly, I would like to thank Richard Firth Green for writing the book *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Belief and the Medieval Church*. The book has been the inspiration for my entire thesis and provided me with information about the three lays in the thesis.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Thesis introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the Middle Ages, fairy belief on the British Isles was a genuine form of belief. The peoples of the British Isles believed throughout the Middle Ages that fairies inhabited their world and worlds beyond. We know this because the church was concerned about fairy belief as early as around year 1000 as seen in a penitential by Bishop Burchard of Worms that refer directly to rural fairy belief. To quote Richard Firth Green's translation of the Latin: 'Have you believed what some are accustomed to believe that there are rural women whom they call sylvans?' (Green 2016, 15). In his seminal study of fairies, Green continues by highlighting that by the fourteenth century, the *Second Lucidaire*, a '…French-Dominican redaction and translation of the *Elucidarium* [a popular theological handbook]' (Ibid.), shows that, '…the faithful are left in no doubt not only that fairies exist, but also that they are quite simply devils…' (Ibid.). The fairies from romances enter church writings as devils. Green argues that,

> …when we turn to pastoral manuals, saints' lives, sermons, exempla, and miracle tales, we encounter a host of fairies masquerading as devils. Admittedly they are generally more shadowy figures than their counter parts in vernacular romance, but they offer the great advantage of highlighting the attitudes of the representatives of official culture toward them (2016, 16).

We know belief in fairies was widespread because of the church's strong reaction to them. Green points out that the clergy's attempts, 'to rationalize, negate, or dismiss fairy belief can tell us a great deal about their vigour and their ubiquity' (2016, 13). We also know about their spread by the amount of romances and other writings that feature fairies, that exist today.

Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* is an example of the anecdotal writings, where fairies make several appearances both as devils and the spirits of the dead, but the most

widespread form of fairy writings by far is the romance. The romance as a genre was one of the more popular genres from the thirteenth century to the late sixteenth century. The romances of *Mélusine*, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, Landevale, Reinbrun, are but a few of the texts with fairies in them. The three stories I examine in this thesis are all Breton lays, which was another popular literary form of romance texts based on Marie de Frances' French *lais*. The lays were mostly popular during fourteenth century to the sixteenth century. The romances portrayed many different kinds of fairies, as will become evident as I discuss the three lays in this thesis.

While there was genuine belief, there is no unifying, definite idea of the fairy in the Middle Ages. When describing the various taxonomical projects of medieval Europe, Green discusses their names and their name's' meanings:

> …when he [Thomas of Cantimpré] turns to what we might call 'fairies' (under the heading of 'hornets'), we discover that these too can cause tempests and bad dreams. Hornet demons, he says, can be divided into four classes: *neptuni*, who swim in water; *incubi*, who roam the earth; *dusii*, who live under the earth; and *spiritualia nequitie in celestibus*, who inhabit the air (2016, 3).

Green points out that none of these might have been in popular use nor that they 'represented any kind of popular taxonomy' (2016, 3). That is one of several examples he gives on the difficulty of making sweeping statements generalising fairies. Another example he gives is one that attempts to classify them into colours and size:

> In addition to white, black, and green (green is sometimes mentioned—as with the green children of Woolpit— but it is by no means universal), we also have gray (in The Merry Wives of Windsor), red (in an account from Thomas Walsingham),[13] and polychrome (as with Tristram's fairy dog Petitcriu). Perhaps the key to all this is the

> innate volatility of fairies: they can be any size (or shape) they wish, and, as in Petitcriu's case, their color is inherently unstable (2016, 4).

Fairies, as exemplified by Green, are inherently difficult to categorise. Because of their many historical incarnations, the variance between different fairy kind can be so big that they are unrecognisable or incomplete, even within a singular culture. Even today, it would be a major struggle to make a taxonomy of modern interpretations.

I will instead, as Green defines what he means by fairies, be 'concerned primarily with that class of numinous, social, humanoid creatures who were widely believed to live at the fringes of the human lifeworld and interact intermittently with human beings' (2016, 4). Moreover, I am most interested in the part of the definition that mentions 'the fringes of the human lifeworld.' The 'fringes of the human lifeworld' is not limited to the fringe of human culture and civilisation, but includes physical space as well. In medieval sources, fairies exist in a space that is almost beyond reach, the fringe of the known world. Fairies exist in is what commonly referred to as fairy worlds or Otherworlds. They exist almost outside the reach of humanity and often resist human interaction. In fairy stories, the Otherworlds are usually unreachable unless you know how to get there or are invited by a denizen. Additionally, Otherworlds vary greatly in appearance and content between texts, but what is consistent is that they are removed from the human world. They can be flat green planes, which is the case in *Sir Orfeo*, or they may manifest inside forests, which they do in both *Sir Launfal* and *Sir Degare*. Nevertheless, Otherworlds are not limited to simply appearing different, they may initially seem just like the human world, but they often follow their own rules. For example, in *Sir Orfeo* stands still, or almost stands still; while in *Sir Launfal*, it is ambiguous. *Sir Degare*'s Otherworld may have time, but this is never made clear. Even concepts of death may fall away, such as the perpetual purgatory found in *Sir Orfeo*. The Otherworlds' fringe status lends itself well to interpretations and scholars have shown interest and given

interpretations of the Otherworlds. I will follow in that tradition and suggest a more natural reading of the Otherworld; namely that Otherworlds are similar to wilderness. Wilderness is seen, in most cultures, as outside human civilisation, it is untamed and wild. It exists on the fringe of human civilisation just as Otherworlds do, and the concept of wilderness has something untimely about it. It is like a constantly unexplored place that hides unknown secrets, just like the Otherworlds remain unknown to most humans in the texts. Fairies, the denizens of the Otherworld that I examine in my thesis all have a relationship to nature, and more specifically, to wilderness.

1.2 Argument

The main project of this thesis is to explore the implication and function of wilderness and its association with fairies in three Middle English lays: *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* and *Sir Degare*. In all three lays, human protagonists interact with fairies and vice versa in similar yet distinct ways. Fairies seem to amplify and/or project wilderness in whatever sphere they are in, whether those be human settlements, forests, their own settlements, their own worlds and so on. Moreover, fairies themselves sometimes take on aspects of wilderness when interacting with the human world as they come into contact with it. My research has shown this to be a novel scholarly approach, as there has been done little academic writing about fairies and fairy worlds as ambassadors of wilderness.

In each of the three lays, the main characters come into contact with fairies that are all connected to wilderness through various means. The fairies in each of the stories vary greatly in appearance and power. Moreover, the fairies' connection to wilderness changes throughout the lays; their relationship is not always clear, nor is it always explicit. I will throughout the thesis show that the way fairies interact with wilderness varies greatly by demonstrating how their power, gender-roles and relationships to the human world remains inconsistent, yet manages to convey the same wildness, untamedness and unknowability as in the wilderness.

As with wilderness in real life, the occurrences of wilderness are as multifarious as the fairy characters in the lays. Therefore, this thesis will highlight the connection between fairies and wilderness in order to make the opaque connection clearer.

1.3 *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal*, *Sir Degare* and translations

My main reason for choosing the three texts comes from precedence for discussing the three stories in relation to one another. Richard Firth Green, in his book *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* frequently mentions all three stories in the same chapters even comparing aspects of the stories. However, my approach differs from Green's. His approach is to establish how the texts contributed to fairy belief and its legitimacy; he establishes or confirms precedence. My approach uses Green's book as a platform to build on, I examine the three stories in order to find the connection between the fairies and wilderness in the texts, while at the same time finding that there are similarities and differences between them. Green does not directly address the issue of wilderness.

Sir Orfeo exists in three manuscripts: the first is Auchinleck MS (NLS Adv MS 19.2.1), a folio of 332 vellum leaves dated around 1330. The second is British Library MS Harley 3810, which consists of six texts, one of which being *Sir Orfeo*. It is dated around the sixteenth century. Thirdly and lastly is Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61. It is made up of forty-one texts, one of which being *Sir Orfeo*, believed to have been compiled in the fifteenth century. The version I am using is the Auchinleck MS version of *Sir Orfeo* as printed in the edition of *Sir Orfeo* by A. J. Bliss. I have inserted comments on version differences where it is relevant. My reason for choosing the Auchinleck MS. above the other manuscripts is because, Bliss comments in his introduction to the texts, 'As far as it is possible to judge, the A [Auchinleck] version is not far removed from the original and represents it with reasonable accuracy' (Arthur John Bliss 1954, xv). There is no known author of the Auchinleck MS. The story of *Sir Orfeo* is an adaption of the classic Greek *Orpheus* myth to romance form for a

Middle English audience. *Sir Orfeo* is the story of king Orfeo and his quest to take back his wife, Heurodis, after she has been kidnapped by the fairy king. Orfeo goes to the wilderness, a forest in order to live down the shame. In the forest he sees the fairies from time to time and one day spots Heurodis among them. He makes up his mind and follows the fairies to their own world and through his skill at harp playing, manages to convince the fairy king to give him Heurodis back.

Sir Launfal, also edited by A. J. Bliss, is based on the Old French *Lanval* by Marie de France, *Graelent* by an unknown author and *Landevale*, also with an unknown author. *Sir Launfal* itself is written by Thomas Chestre. As for the sources of *Sir Launfal*, there is only one: British Library Cotton MSS Caligula A. II. The manuscript is made up of two sections, with the first containing *Sir Launfal*. The edition used in this thesis is edited by A. J. Bliss, and also contains the *Landevale* and *Lanval* versions of the story. I have chosen to mostly focus on the Middle English *Sir Launfal* and have pointed out differences between *Sir Launfal* and *Landevale* where relevant. The story of *Sir Launfal* centres around one of Arthur's knights Sir Launfal, who is despised by Guinevere through no fault of his own and manages to waste all his money after initially going to his father's burial. Humiliated and degraded, Launfal leaves the town and heads to a forest. Launfal rests in the forest and is invited by two fairy ladies to meet their matriarch, Tryamour. Launfal and Tryamour marry and Tryamour grants Launfal wealth, protection and guidance in exchange for him keeping her hidden. Launfal lives in prosperity for a while, until he is falsely accused by Guinevere of saying that there was someone more beautiful than her. Launfal tells them about Tryamour and loses her gifts and love. Launfal is tried for the insult to Guinevere when Tryamour comes to his rescue and spirits him away to the fairy world.

Sir Degare is preserved in six incomplete manuscripts, which consists of the Auchinleck MS. (NLS Adv MS 19.2.1), British Library MS Egerton 2862, Cambridge

Octavian MS Ff.2.38, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson Poetry 34, Bodleian Library MS Douce 261 and finally, British Library Add MS 27879. The version used in my thesis is an amalgamation of these sources edited by Kenneth Eckert (2015). The Auchinleck MS forms the basis of this edition. The Auchinleck MS is dated to around 1330. The story of *Sir Degare* is an oedipal tale that ends much happier than its biblical progenitor. *Sir Degare* begins with the brutal rape of Degare's mother by a fairy knight in a forest. In order to spare her own father the shame, and spare herself the embarrassment, Degare's mother hides her pregnancy and gives the boy to a hermit with instructions to search for her when he comes of age. Degare grows up and leaves to find his mother and in a tournament for her hand (as he does not yet know that she is his mother) he wins and marries her. Degare finds out that she is his mother and is sent by his mother-wife search for his father. Degare goes to the fairy world and meets his father. After a short duel they reconcile and his father travels back with him. Degare and his mother's marriage is annulled and the story ends with the family restored.

As for the translations of the various works, they are done by me. Any mistakes or problems with the translations are solely my fault. In order to translate the stories, I have used a combination of the Middle English Dictionary (MED), the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), and the glossaries of the various texts that are included in their editions. The only story containing a translation is *Sir Degare*, however, I have written my own translation as independent as possible from the one in book. I have done so because of some disagreement on word-choice and to remain consistent with the translations of the other works.

1.4 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is the methodological basis of this thesis. I have used *Ecocriticism* (2004) by Greg Garrard as a springboard. The book offers a broad overview into various ecocritical approaches to wilderness and other environmental topics. Garrard gives a helpful definition of ecocriticism: '…the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the

relationship of the human and non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself' (Garrard 2004, 5). The relationship between the human and non-human, in this case the fairy, in terms of nature and wilderness, is the essence of this thesis. It is what ties every chapter and text together.

Examining wilderness in any substantial way brings about its own problems, especially in defining wilderness. Scholars disagree about the parameters of wilderness, whether wilderness is accessible at all to human or whether wilderness exists at all. Therefore, I would like to be extra clear in my use and definition of wilderness. The definition I will be using is Gillian Rudd's definition from her book *Greenery* in her discussion of wilderness and *Sir Orfeo*. Rudd's definition is that, '… when exploring the wilderness of late medieval texts, it will be useful to think of it [wilderness] as a place that both is regarded as wild, in that it is uncultivated land, and that it contains wildness, in the in the form of the untamed and unknown' (Rudd 2007, 92). Moreover, according to Rudd there is particular importance argues to the unknown in wilderness as she says that, 'the idea of the unknown is integral to the concept of wilderness' (2007, 92). I think Rudd's use of unknown is ultimately compatible with the unknown that I found in all three lays. Rudd's unknown borrows from Lorne Leslie Neil Evernden's concept of wildness. Evernden's book *The Social Construction of Nature* discusses wildness as a part of wilderness. Rudd's definition uses Evernden's example of wildness to explain the importance of the unknown. Evernden says that, 'wildness, otherness, is mystery incarnate' (Evernden 1992, 121). Moreover, Rudd explains that, 'the wilderness in these medieval texts becomes the place in which the mysterious can act as a palpable force, often being embodied in a being who is not necessarily bound by human rules' (2007, 92). This wildness, or otherness is an essential part of fairy identity. It allows fairies to skirt between the social norms and laws they would be expected to follow if they were part of human civilisation. Rudd's definition allows for the re-contextualising of fairy interactions

with the human worlds of each story. My thesis proposes viewing the fairies' interactions through the lens of ecocriticism and specifically through the lens of wilderness in order to better understand the medieval English people's relation to wilderness. Rudd's clarification of wilderness serves as a good summary of this section and of her views in general:

> Medieval wilderness in particular seems to exclude humans, or, more precisely, refuses to recognise those aspects by which we customarily seek to differentiate ourselves from rest of the world. Codes of conduct mean nothing and our habitual attitude of superiority is undermined by how difficult we find it to survive in such terrain as well as by the way other species take no account of us. It is thus that the wilderness 'confronts and confounds our designs', forcing us to confront and reappraise them likewise. Rather than being able to regard ourselves as the naturally dominant and successful species, we must alter our ways of being in order to enter the wilderness at all, for this conceptual wilderness has forms of life of its own, which themselves challenge the divisions between humanity and other species (2007, 92-93).

The wilderness 'confronting' and confounding 'our designs' is remarkably similar to fairy actions in each of the texts. The same goes for the fairies' disregard for human 'codes of conduct and our habitual attitude of superiority.' Fairies force humans to reappraise themselves when faced with their awesome power or by challenging human institutions. While the fairies might not be wilderness incarnate, they definitely interact with and in some cases represent wilderness. My thesis will explore for the first time how we can learn more about how fairies functioned in medieval literature by analysing them in relation to the concept of wilderness, and how we can learn more about the concept of wilderness by looking at fairies.

1.5 Chapter overview

The first chapter in my thesis will focus on *Sir Orfeo* and discussing whether we can find wilderness in the in the interactions between humans and fairies. This chapter will also serve as the springboard for further discussion on Otherworlds, humans and fairies in the subsequent chapters. In this chapter, I will first make the argument that the fairies introduce wilderness to the domestic sphere of Orfeo's orchard. The fairies use the trees in the orchard as conduits through which they can spread the influence of wilderness. Moreover, I will show how the fairies' wilderness-like influence forces the characters to re-evaluate their positions in the world, by looking at how both Heurodis and Orfeo is affected by the fairies. Secondly, I will look at Orfeo's interaction with the forest he exiles himself to. Orfeo leaves his kingdom after the fairies force him to confront his own powerlessness. The narrative presents the forest as a wilderness, but the forest ultimately proves to be closer to the domestic than the wild. Orfeo's civilising influence tames the animals inside and I raise the question of his ownership of the forest. The result of this inquiry is that Orfeo, as much as he tries to escape civilisation, he cannot, except when the fairies hunt in the forest. Thirdly, I look at Orfeo entering the Otherworld and the implication that the Otherworld is closer to wilderness than the forest he was just in. Orfeo's stay in the Otherworld leads him to encounter the fairies. The unknown, wild and untamed elements are on display in the Otherworld as Orfeo discovers that the strange realm contain, horrid imagery and illusions. The meeting with the fairies results in a display of the disruptive power of Orfeo's harp as he disrupts the fairy court and manages to take back Heurodis.

The second chapter in my thesis will look at the Otherworld and wilderness of *Sir Launfal*. I argue that when looking at the Otherworld of *Sir Orfeo* compared to the one found in *Sir Launfal*, there is a pattern of similarities. These similarities, however, are not enough to prove the wilderness of the Otherworld on their own. The next section of the chapter therefore

focuses on how the fairies, specifically Tryamour, allows me to make the case for wilderness in the Otherworld of *Sir Launfal*. The fairies set a precedence for re-evaluation in the characters they interact with, which leads me to look at how Launfal must re-evaluate his own position in the human world to find the fairies and the Otherworld. The civilisation is the other to wilderness' it and vice versa, which is why I discuss Launfal's movement from member of the dominant civilisation to its other. In the end of the chapter, I discuss how Launfal's escape from the human world into the forest and Otherworld epitomises the re-evaluative power of wilderness.

In the third chapter, I look at *Sir Degare* and how its narrative is a reversal of *Sir Launfal*'s project rejection by civilisation. Degare actively seek to become more integrated into civilisation in order to rid himself of his half-ness. I make the argument that, like *Sir Launfal*, *Sir Degare* plays with the traditional gender roles by reversing how it represents the fairy knight's body compared to Degare's mother's body. The discussion of bodily re-evaluation leads me to discuss the fairy knight's rape of Degare's mother. By the fairy knight raping Degare's mother, he actively attacks civilised institutions like succession and bodily freedom. The fairy knight's wilderness manifests in his malevolent behaviour. He others himself by acting aggressively against civilised institutions and as he disappears into the Otherworld, after acting wild and untamed, he disappears into the unknown. I argue that the fairy half that Degare inherits poses a threat as Degare could repeat his father's steps, however, Degare's childhood sets him up to join human civilisation by teaching him Latin and by making him Christian. Furthermore, I argue that the project of *Sir Degare* is made clear as Degare leaves more and more of his fairy heritage behind. Ultimately, Degare's only non-civilised connection is his father, which leads into my discussion of Degare's father as someone who must be tamed in order for Degare to become fully civilised.

Chapter 2: Wilderness disrupting civilisation in Sir Orfeo

This chapter will dive further into the concept of wilderness as used in ecocriticism, specifically in regards to *Sir Orfeo*. In order to do this, I examine the significant occurrences of forests, trees, nature and the Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo*. These are all places in which one can argue for the existence of a wilderness, but as I will demonstrate, one cannot find wilderness in any of these places. So, where does one search? Can one even find wilderness at all? The answer lies with the fairies and the Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo*. The fairies and their Otherworld project wilderness into civilisation. They disrupt and interfere in the wilderness' opposite, namely civilisation. The question then becomes: why are fairies and the otherworld responsible for projecting the echoes of wilderness?

Fairies in the story of *Sir Orfeo* take on a liminal role as they do in most fairy stories. They take part in both the Otherworld and *Sir Orfeo*'s human world. Fairies possess, or at the very least, represent something that evokes worry and fear in the characters of *Sir Orfeo*. Like the wilderness, the fairies' interactions with the human world is more akin to a natural force. Their actions are seemingly malign, but that is perhaps because they are not understood in their purpose. Like with wilderness, fairies are treated as if they are something unapproachable, yet fairies constantly interact with the human world. Their behaviour, their Otherworld is closer to the wild of wilderness than it is to the human world, yet it is not wilderness, not in truth. The wilderness is not to be found in the human world. My suggestion is therefore not to look for a wilderness that does not exist, but rather focus on the one that is suggested in the interactions with the fairies. The fairies and their Otherworld represent a clear connection to some kind of unknowable, unknown and wild power. Whether that power is wilderness or something else entirely is never made clear, but the ambiguity leaves it up to interpretation. If we cannot find wilderness in *Sir Orfeo*'s nature, perhaps we can find it in the

behaviour and implication of fairies and the Otherworld, and in turn, this might give better insight into the fairies and Otherworld.

The first step in examining the wilderness is to take a closer look at the 'ympe-tre' (grafted tree) and its purpose in the narrative. In examining the purpose of the *ympe-tre*, it will become clear that through natural elements, fairies can extend their influence into domestic areas not thought to be under any influence of the wild, unknown or untamed. Using this, I am establishing a clear link between wilderness and fairies. This link will establish a more overarching theme of mixing influences from civilisation, law and the Otherworld. I aim to introduce the concept of the Otherworld spreading wilderness by way of the fairies. Secondly, I will change focus from the singular *ympe-tre* to the multiple in the 'holtes hore' (shady woods). This section will highlight the betrayal of expectations when the reader of *Sir Orfeo* is told that Orfeo seeks refuge in the wilderness. The 'holtes hore' proves to not be as much a wilderness, rather than a replacement for Orfeo's previous lifestyle. By examining the forest through how Orfeo recreates his civilisation and performs his dominance through law it will become clear that the 'holtes hore' only serves as an echo of Orfeo's own home and court, not as a wild, unknown or untamed place. However, the re-introduction of the fairies will introduce the element of the wild, untamed and unknown as they appear in the 'holtes hore.' The re-introduction of fairies leads to the third and final section of the chapter, which focuses on Orfeo's journey through the fairy Otherworld. His journey into the fairy's realm reveals a place that fulfils all the requirements of being a wilderness, yet is deceiving in its appearance. Revealing that the Otherworld is no true wilderness, instead, the Otherworld casts the echoes of wilderness. The echoes of wilderness, obscures the civilising elements of the Otherworld so well that biblical elements are used in order to make it understandable to the characters. The Otherworld is shown to be wild, untamed and unknown as Orfeo carefully tries to manoeuvre his way through to get his wife, Dame Heurodis, back from the fairy king.

The forests in *Sir Orfeo* feature in the first half of the narrative, as the second half of the narrative focuses more on Orfeo in the fairy 'Otherworld' and subsequent return to his kingdom. However, nowhere are forests presented as a threatening presence to King Orfeo or any of the other characters. Nor do the forests fit definitions of wilderness in this. I will summarise the story of *Sir Orfeo* in short. *Sir Orfeo* follows the character of King Orfeo and his quest to bring his wife, Queen Heurodis, back from the fairy king. The fairy king kidnapped Heurodis after she fell asleep in the orchard. Orfeo exiles himself to a remote forest where he lives for ten years. Then, he gets the opportunity to get her back by following the fairy king's retinue back to their fairyland (Otherworld). Orfeo finds Heurodis amongst a collection of dead and maimed people ('the gallery'), but cannot take her away. Orfeo earns Heurodis back from the king by playing his harp, the only belonging he allowed himself to bring into his exile. Afterwards, he returns and reclaims his kingdom.

Middle English stories such as *Sir Orfeo* use the uncertainty brought on by the presence of wilderness in relation to forests in order to evoke images of danger and the unknown. When further examined, the association between forests and wilderness becomes less apparent, instead the association between the fairy Otherworld and wilderness is strengthened. I will examine two appearances of forests in Sir Orfeo, followed by the fairies manipulating the natural elements in the forests in order to bring the characters into the wilderness of the Otherworld. My focus will be on the echoes of wilderness cast by the Otherworld and its denizens, and the echoes of civilisation and law that Orfeo brings into the forests. The first instance of a forest is found in the orchard and the *ympe-tre.*

2.1 Regarding the *ympe-tre* and domesticity

The *ympe-tre* in the orchard is one of three prominent trees in the lay. The term *ympe-tre* is itself highly relevant to the symbolism present in *Sir Orfeo*. An *ympe-tre* is a grafted tree according to the MED (Middle English Dictionary). Its location in the orchard implies that it

has been selected specifically for its properties as a fruit tree. The *ympe-tre* itself plays no major role in the lay except as a conduit for the fairies to act through. The fairy introduces the element of the untamed and unknown to the tree. After Heurodis' encounter with the fairy king under the *ympe-tre*, the fairies introduce an element of the unknown into the calm and civilised orchard. Through the effort of the fairies, the *ympe-tre* leaves traces of the wild and untamed in the otherwise civil and controlled environment of the orchard. Yet, the *ympe-tre* and the orchard is not wilderness. They are the most domesticated version of a forest being influenced by wilderness.

Sir Orfeo's orchards are domesticated forests because of their careful cultivation in civilisation. I have used the term domesticated here, because it is in a sense, a gathering of trees, which have been carefully selected for their fruit or nut producing capabilities. It is a forest which has been planted for the purpose of leisure or food. Admittedly, calling an orchard a domesticated forest can be a somewhat controversial opinion. Gillian Rudd notes that orchards are 'closer in concept to a garden than to any form of woodland' (Rudd 2007, 48). I maintain that the trees making up the orchard constitutes a constructed forest, or domestic forest. Furthermore, changes and man-made interventions into other established forests do not diminish their status as forests. Many forests and holts were prepared for hunting by noble lords. Nobles also planted forests that would eventually serve as hunting grounds. While the orchard in concept may indeed resemble a garden, seeing as they were used for leisure, so were forests. The approximation of the domestic forest to the garden is further proof that the domestic forest is closer to civilisation than the supposed wild forest.

2.2 The shadow of the *ympe-tre*

In his article 'In the Shadow of the Ympe-tre: Arboreal Folklore in Sir Orfeo', Curtis R. H. Jirsa presents a Middle English tradition of the *ympe-tre* as dangerous. Jirsa places a lot of emphasis on the *ympe-tre*, being magical, or having a magical effect, thus giving much of the

agency to the tree itself. Jirsa identifies a long-standing tradition of tree shadows and their effect. The medieval works of Luca, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Nicholas of Lyra and translations of Pliny forms the basis of Jirsa's argument. He states that, 'I wish … to expose a range of elaborate and widely attested traditions that allude to the potency of tree shadows and their disruptive influence over the regular course of the natural world' (Jirsa 2008, 146). Jirsa's statement that the tree shadows have a way of 'disrupting the regular course of the natural world,' is a problematic statement, at least when it comes to *Sir Orfeo*. In *Sir Orfeo*, the tree shadow's influence is not unnatural at all. It may be supernatural, nevertheless, it is not one that disrupts 'the natural world.' The domesticated garden (orchard) is part of civilisation, so if any world is disturbed it would be the civilised one. The wilderness, projected through the *ympe-tre* by the fairies, contrasts with the civilised life of Heurodis, repulsing her, which I will discuss in its appropriate context later.

Jirsa's argument mainly bases itself on the fact that Heurodis sleeps underneath the *ympe-tre* which results in the eventual kidnapping. Furthermore, Jirsa demonstrates how misfortune in the shadow of trees relates to other medieval texts. His statement of 'disruptive influence' emanating from the *ympe-tre* is based on the folkloric tradition of people sleeping in the shadow of trees experiencing misfortune or death. I argue that he does not consider the fairies having any agency in *Sir Orfeo*. Jirsa's argument places the blame on the *ympe-tre.* Yet, the fairies are the ones pulling Heurodis, into the Otherworld unwillingly. The argument that the *ympe-tre* has a malevolent influence is further complicated when Orfeo finds Heurodis under another *ympe-tre* after ten years,

> Þer he seiȝe his owhen wiif, | Dame Heurodis, his lef liif, | Slepe vnder an ympe-tre
> (There he saw his own wife, | Dame Heurodis, his life, | Sleeping under a grafted tree)
> (405-407, Arthur John Bliss 1954)[1].

Orfeo spots Heurodis underneath an *ympe-tre* near a gathering of the dead and dying. This *ympe-tre* does not signal death and misfortune, despite the fact that Heurodis is lying surrounded by the dead and dying.[2] Ultimately, the *ympe-tre* unites Orfeo and Heurodis. Just as it was a centrepiece in the event that split them, it now is the centrepiece in their reunion. Instead of the *ympe-tre* casting a malevolent shadow, as Jirsa claims, it becomes apparent that it is not a malevolent shadow cast by a tree, it is just a shadow. Simply put, the fairies, by using the *ympe-tre* as a medium cast their influence through it. The *ympe-tre* does not serve a malevolent purpose. Heurodis sleeping underneath the *ympe-tre*, signals the beginning of a happy resolution for the *Sir Orfeo* story and with it, Orfeo's return to civilisation. The *ympe-tre* therefore need not be a symbol of death and separation; instead, the *ympe-tre* can be considered as a neutral agent in the story.

The neutrality of the *ympe-tre* can be seen when Heurodis is about to be kidnapped by the fairy king. When Heurodis is told to meet under the *ympe-tre* again, the day after by the fairy king in her dream: 'Loke, dame, to-morwe þatow be | Riȝt here vnder þis ympe-tre…' (Look, Dame, tomorrow you should be | Right here under this grafted tree…) (165-166). The *ympe-tre* is merely the instrument through which the fairy king projects the Otherworld. This is seen once more when Orfeo and his army prepares and Heurodis is suddenly snatched away ('oway y-tviȝgt') in the proximity of the *ympe-tre*:

[1] In future quotes from *Sir Orfeo* in this chapter, I will only list the line number as it is explicitly clear when I am using other works or articles.
[2] There are some version differences here. The Auchinleck MS presents a gruesome scene of the dead and maimed. The Harley MS presents Orfeo with people sitting under the wall of the castle, with the author guessing that they are probably dead. The Ashmole MS presents much the same scene as the Auchinleck, with the key difference being that there are other people sleeping under the same *ympe-tre* as Heurodis.

> Ich y-armed, stout & grim; | & wiþ þe quen wenten he | Ri3t vnto þat ympe-tre. | … | Ac 3ete amiddes hem ful ri3t, | Þe quen was oway y-tvi3gt, | Wiþ fairi forþ y-nome
>
> (Each armed, strong and awe-inspiring: | and with the queen he went | Right to that grafted tree. | … | Alas right in his midst | The queen was snatched away | Stolen away by fairies) (184-186, 191-193).

The wilderness is imposed in the presence of the *ympe-tre* by the fairies by them kidnapping Heurodis. Through the *ympe-tre* the fairies cause disruption. This disruption to Orfeo's kingdom is a challenge to the fabric of civilisation. The connection with the fairies and the *ympe-tre* can be seen on line 186. The line tells the reader that Heurodis returns to the *ympe-tre* and in the presence of that *ympe-tre* the fairies evoke their magic. Heurodis' kidnapping serves as an excellent example of the unexplainable. None of Orfeo's soldiers can find Heurodis, '– Men wist neuer wher sche was bicome' (– No man knew what had become of her) (194) and this time, although in the presence of the *ympe-tre* it is not the tree that causes her disappearance, but rather the fairies' magic. Orfeo's and by extension his men's lack of logical explanation cannot make sense of the sudden kidnapping. Wilderness, more specifically the unknown has been evoked, not by the *ympe-tre,* but through the fairies using it. The assigning of purpose to the *ympe-tre* brings with it a second problem. It is not just that the *ympe-tre* is neutral, but the assumption of the tree's intent completely ignores the autonomy of the tree. To illustrate this point I turn to another ecocriticist, William Cronon's discussion on wilderness.

2.3 The problem of intent

William Cronon, when arguing for a revised definition of wilderness, gives much the same intent to the forest or trees as Jirsa when he argues that,

> The tree in the garden could easily have sprung from the same seed as the tree in the forest, and we can claim only its location and perhaps its form as our own. Both trees stand apart from us; both share our common world. The special power of the tree in the wilderness is to remind us of this fact. It can teach us to recognise the wildness we did not see in the tree we planted in our own backyard (1996, 24).

While there may be some truth in this, Cronon attempts to avoid making assumptions on the tree's behalf while claiming that '…we can only claim its location and perhaps its form as our own' (24). Ultimately, Cronon makes a claim of the tree's intent by stating that the tree is reminding us of its separation from us. He assigns an active role to the tree that it might not have. Nevertheless, the *ympe-tre* of *Sir Orfeo* does not serve as a reminder of wilderness. It is instead a conduit through which the fairies act. The *ympe-tre* projects wilderness, but the fairies are the ones representing that wilderness. The author of *Sir Orfeo* makes no attempt to claim the intention of the tree and neither should we.

2.4 Virtue versus wilderness

The first encounter with the *ympe-tre* opens unremarkably, but turns into a demonstration of the disrupting powers of the Otherworld. In the immediate beginning there is no threat, in fact, it appears idyllic. Heurodis and the ladies of the court are there to enjoy nature in a controlled environment,

> To play an orchard-side, | To se þe floures sprede & spring, | & to here þe foules sing
>
> (To play by the orchard, | To see the flowers' growth and bloom, | and to hear the birds sing) (66-68)[3].

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all references in the thesis is to the Auchinleck MS. version of *Sir Orfeo*. Where relevant, I will draw attention to differences in the manuscripts.

There is nothing to imply the unknown, there is no threat and there are no wild elements to the orchard. It is completely within the control of the people who are currently using it. After enjoying themselves, Heurodis and the courtiers sit down, 'Vnder a fair ympe-tre' (70). When Heurodis falls asleep under the *ympe-tre,* she rests under the tree's shadow, presumably seeking shelter from the sunlight. She is not exposed to any danger in the physical sense; the *ympe-tre* is not doing her harm on its own. Instead, the fairies forcibly transport her consciousness while she sleeps. It is the *ympe-tre* that is the gateway for the fairies to enter the dreams of Heurodis.

The mental faculties serve as the utmost example of civility. Rationality is historically linked to civilisation and to what separates humans from animals. It is needed to actively participate as a productive member of society. Sleeping is an act of trusting one's logical and rational faculties that one will awaken in the same mental state as before one fell asleep. Heurodis, being a part of civilisation, being in a civilised and domesticated area, expects that she awakens in the same state of reason. Heurodis does not, however, which is what makes the contrast between Heurodis' civility versus her wildness so palpable. She has been forced into a situation that defies both reason and her ability to participate in her situation. This is precisely why I argue that Heurodis experiences the echoes of wilderness in her encounter with the fairies. Her domesticated, reasonable world is turned on its head. Instead, she is faced with the unknown, the wild and the untamed, the very antithesis of her civilised life. By examining how Heurodis is 'robbed' of her civility, this becomes much clearer.

In his article, 'Visible Nobility and Aristocratic Power in Sir Orfeo,' Jacob Lewis argues that '…in *Sir Orfeo*, the poet all but ignores Heurodis' body to focus on her noble virtues' (Lewis 2013, 17). Her virtues, what makes her fit for a noble and civilised life, are her defining characteristics. Her characteristics are on display in her introduction, as Lewis points

out in his article. Her virtue is what the narrator asks the reader to imagine when picturing Heurodis. There is no direct physical description; instead, the text tells us that,

> Þe king hadde a quen of priis | Þat was y-cleped Dame Heurodis, | Þe fairest leuedi, for þe nones, | Þat miȝt gon on bodi & bones, | Ful of loue & of godnisse ; | Ac no man may telle hir fairnisse
>
> (The king had a queen of good repute | Whose name was Dame Heurodis, | The fairest lady, of all time, | That ever walked on this earth, | She was full of love and good ; | Alas, no man could describe her beauty) (51-56).

As Lewis argues, that when, '…we as viewers are prohibited from seeing Heurodis directly, we cannot be affected by those "attributes of the beloved" [listing desirable physical attributes] and are this spared from the effects of *eros*' (2013, 17). Lewis describing Heurodis' introduction thusly, implies that Heurodis serves as a symbol of virtue. The specific focus of the passage is on Heurodis' virtue. As such, when the fairy king pulls her into the Otherworld and she is subjected to the echoes of wilderness it is her civilised virtue she risks losing.

Heurodis' virtue is obscured by a process of reduction after awakens underneath the tree. As she awakens by herself, the disruption of the fairies manifests as self-harm:

> Ac, as sone as sche gan awake, | Sche crid, & loþtli bere gan make: | Sche froted hir honden & hir fet, | & crached hir visage – it blede wete
>
> (Alas, as soon as she awoke, | She cried, and screamed in repulsion: | She rubbed her hands and feet, | and scratched her face – until it bled;) (77-80).

The line, 'Sche crid, & loþtli bere gan make,' (78) tells the reader that what Heurodis witnessed in the Otherworld was so disturbing that she wants to reject it with her entire being. Heurodis' mind forced into the Otherworld by the fairy king has been challenged by the

fairies. Her civilised values, when faced with fairies, falls apart. What she perceived as understandable and knowable suddenly becomes the unknowable and the unpredictable. Her contact with the *ympe-tre* leads to Heurodis rubbing ('froted') her hands and feet, and then injuring her face, '& crached hir visage – it blede wete' (80). The encounter with the fairies leaves Heurodis distressed, horrified and like a wild animal in distress, she has hurt herself.

Orfeo then approaches her body after it has been carried up to the castle. Only then is the reader given a detailed physical description. Orfeo and the narrator has up until that point been satisfied with the lack of physical description. It is after she has been driven mad and acted wild that Orfeo describes her features. I argue that this is done only because Orfeo needs to rationalise what he sees. The sudden transformation of Heurodis from a paragon of virtue to what she has become after the fairies' intrusion shakes the *status quo* of Orfeo's civilised values. Accordingly, this creates a clear contrast with the description of Heurodis in the introduction. Her description moves from, 'Ac no man may telle hir fairnisse' (Alas, no man could describe her beauty) (56), to

> Þi bodi, þat was so white y-core, | Wiþ þine nailes is al to-tore. | Allas! þi rode, þat was so red, | Is al wan, as þou were ded ; | & al-so þine fingres smale | Beþ al blodi & al pale. | Allas! þi louesome eyȝen to | Lokeþ so man doþ on his fo
>
> (Your body, that was so exquisitely[4] white, | Has been torn apart by your nails. | Alas! your complexion, that was so red, | Is now gone, as if you were dead ; | And also your small fingers | Are all bloody and so pale. | Alas! your lovely eyes too | Looks like a man's when he has seen his foe) (105-112).

This detailed description is what Lewis referred to as the 'attributes of the beloved.' The listing of Heurodis' physical traits means that describing her physicality is needed to express

[4] Found no good translation for y-core. Either 'to the core' or 'exquisitely.'

the difference between the civilised, virtuous Heurodis and the wild Heurodis that he now sees. Orfeo has to re-evaluate Heurodis because of her interactions with the fairies. Her altered appearance is a reminder of how wilderness forces one to re-evaluate their position and themselves. In this case, the fairy influence has disrupted the civilised world. This requires Orfeo to attempt to understand and categorise her physical appearance, whereas earlier there was no need for that.

The wilderness resists civilisation and the categorisations civilisation enforce upon its subjects, hence Orfeo's need for description of Heurodis' physical traits in order to attempt to understand her new appearance. Yet, despite the description, Orfeo finds nothing to understand about Heurodis' transformation from civilised to wild. Therefore, I argue that Orfeo exiles himself to the forest as a way gain an understanding of the wilderness that has escaped him thus far. Orfeo not understanding wilderness and the need for re-evaluation makes him attempt to seek out wilderness in the only place he can imagine the wild appearing freely: the forest. Thus, when Orfeo says, 'In-to wildernes ichil te' (I shall go to the wilderness) (212), Orfeo, seeks out the place he imagines that sort of 'savagery' occurs. In order to not only accept his loss but also attempt to understand, Orfeo willingly attempts to seek out wilderness.

2.5 Orfeo's 'holtes hore'

I argued, in the previous section, that it is not the *ympe-tre* that is the main factor for the disruption of Orfeo's and Heurodis' civility. Instead, it proved to be the fairies that exercise the wilderness in the domestic sphere. In this section, I turn to the civilisation imposed by Orfeo and the narrator in the 'holtes hore.' Before moving on, the word 'hore,' which follows 'holtes' on line 214, requires a quick explanation as to their meaning. 'Holtes' simply refer to a holt, a wooded area, while 'hore' refers to the colour grey, or to shade. I have interpreted this to mean a 'shady forest.'

In the forest, Orfeo's presence acts as a civilising element. To demonstrate this, I will once more turn to Gillian Rudd's definition of wilderness. She says, '… when exploring the wilderness of late medieval texts, it will be useful to think of it as a place that both is regarded as wild, in that it is uncultivated land, and that it contains wildness, in the in the form of the untamed and unknown' (2007, 92). Wilderness according to Rudd does not necessarily need to be free of humans, but it needs to remain unknown and if humans are there, they cannot cultivate the land. Despite Rudd's claims, historically it becomes difficult to argue that there were many uncultivated or unknown woods by the time *Sir Orfeo* is supposed to have been written (12^{th}-13^{th} century). According to Jean R. Birrell, the reality of English forest were that, 'the growing population demanded more arable land, which by 1300 was in short supply in many parts of England' (Jean R. Birrell 1980, 80). That was only the forest being cultivated and used as arable land; there was still logging, fuel, hunting and several other uses for the forest. For the sake of argument, let us assume that Orfeo's 'holtes hore' is not one of those cultivated forests. This still leaves us, as I will show, with a forest that may have been wild, untamed and unknown at one point, but no longer is. Orfeo's civilising presence turns the forest from potential wilderness by exercising further civilising influence.

2.6 Comparing lives – Forest *qua* civilisation

There is an undeniable presence of civilisation in the 'holtes hore;' in the supposed wild woods. The civilising elements that Orfeo and the narrator bring to the 'holtes hore' project civilisation. Orfeo's mock court and Orfeo's relatively unproblematic life due to his knowledge prior to entering the woods allows Orfeo bring the echoes of civilisation with him. The narrator laments the loss of everything that comes with civilisation through several comparisons of civilised life with Orfeo's forest living. The comparisons place civilisation in the 'holtes hore'. They both perform acts which bring the echo of civilisation to the 'holtes hore.'

Orfeo's stay in the forest removes any doubt that he is not in the wilderness. He may not be at ease, his life may uncomfortable and he may live off the nurture the forest brings him, even if it is meagre. Yet, instead of just being told of Orfeo's discomfort in the forest, the narrator immediately follows lines 238-240 up with,

> He þat hadde y-werd þe fowe & gris, | & on bed þe purper biis | – Now on hard heþe he liþ, | Wiþ leues & gresse he hi*m* wriþ.
>
> (He that had worn furs of various colours, | And on his bed had purple linen | – He now sleeps on hard heath. | He now dresses with grass and leaves) (241-243).

This is followed by three consecutive comparisons following the same stanza form. These four stanzas compare Orfeo's current situation to his previous life as king, with equal weight on his life as king and as exiled king. Due to the equal weight given to the lines the comparison brings equal parts of his civilised life into the forest. By equal weight I mean, the two first lines tell the reader what he is missing, whilst the last two tells the reader what he must endure in the forest. A comparison with equal weight would not be necessary if the reader was to feel pity, or the difficulty of Orfeo's survival, instead a greater focus on his miserable time the woods would serve that purpose much better. So, why give the two ends of the comparisons equal weight? The reminder of civilisation being given as much room as the lack of civilisation proves that Orfeo cannot escape the echoes of civilisation when he goes to the forest. The four comparative stanzas form a bond of between the civilised object and the forest object by repeating the lines, 'He þat hadde…' (241). The narrator compares Orfeo's civilised life with his forest life to highlight the missing splendour. By making the four comparisons, the narrator brings civilisation in the form of associations into the forest, forcing the reader to make the comparison. The civilised life therefore projects over the forest and Orfeo. As a result, there is no point where the forest become wild to the reader, and it becomes hard to imagine the uncivilised wilderness we are to assume the 'holtes hore' as.

Orfeo retains his civility and so does the reader. He might struggle for food and the narrator makes frequent comparisons to the easy life of civilised living, yet nothing damages Orfeo's resolve or his body. Although he does not live as comfortably in the forest as he did in the castle, Orfeo still lives.

In the four comparisons and onwards Orfeo encounters the 'wilde bestes' in 'holtes hore.' The supposed wild beasts do not prove threatening nor do they prove to be particularly 'wild'. The thought of wilderness as a place where beasts reside harkens back to earlier definitions of wilderness, namely that of 'wilddeoren'. A place for wild 'deoren', animals or beasts. In line 214, Orfeo states that he will live, 'Wiþ wilde bestes i*n* holtes hore' (214). The fact that they appear in the same line (214) gives the impression that while the wild beasts live in the forest and that it is the beasts in the forest that are wild, not the forest. Orfeo manages to survive in the forest with no hint at being threatened by the wild beasts. He even lives peacefully with serpents as the narrator explains in one of the comparisons, '– Now seþ he no-þing þat hi*m* likeþ, | Bot wilde wormes bi hi*m* strikeþ' (– Now he sees nothing that pleases him, | But the wild serpents glide by him) (252). Even serpents, often associated with biblical evil, simply goes past Orfeo. He has no problem with the other beasts of the forests as he plays his harp on sunny days and attracts the local wildlife either. When he brings out his harp,

> & harped at his owhen wille. | In-to alle þe wode þe soun gan schille, | Þat alle þe wilde bestes þat þ*er* beþ | For ioie abouten him þai teþ (geþe),[5] | & alle þe foules þat þ*er* were | Come & sete on ich a brere | To here his harping a-fine

[5] 'teþ' in the Auchinleck MS is probably a transcription error from 'geþe' which appears in the Harley MS 3810.

(And played when he wanted | the sound spread so throughout the woods, | that all the beasts that in that forest resided | they gathered about him in joy, | and all the birds there were | sat on every branch | to hear his lovely music) (271-277).

As soon as the sound spread throughout the forest all the beasts and birds joyously came to him to hear his playing. We do not find the untamed and unknown, nor do we find the 'wilddeoren,' contrary to that, Orfeo seem live in relative harmony with the creatures of the forest.

Orfeo's self-imposed exile from civilisation is not an actual exile, Orfeo remains within civilisation. Orfeo reveals to the shock and awe of the court that,

Ich ordainy min heiȝe steward | To wite mi kingdom afterward; | … | In-to wildernes ichil te, | & liue þer euermore | Wiþ wilde bestes i*n* holtes hore

(I grant my honourable steward | The command of my kingdom in my absence; | … | I shall go to the wilderness, | and live there forevermore | With the wild beasts in the shady woods) (206-207, 212-214)[6].

As Orfeo begins living in the forest he does not leave behind civilisation, the court, his life and his valuables. The narrator makes sure to emphasise all the things Orfeo abandons by leaving his kingdom once he enters the forest, yet he does not abandon them in truth.

2.7 The legal implications of forest living

The forest being wilderness is shown to be unfounded on a more meta-textual level as well. Orfeo, as the king, owns the forests and orchard, and as king, those forests are under what was known as forest law. Forest law was a set of laws that dictated who could hunt, farm, collect

[6] In this part of the text there are some differences. The Harley MS does not include a line about 'wilde bestes.' The Ashmole MS does include a line about the 'wilde bestes,' but it occurs after a line about 'holtes hore'. In the Auchinleck MS these lines are combined into one.

timber and so forth, from a forest. I have already discussed its history in the previous chapter. Regardless, forest law was very much in use during the writing of *Sir Orfeo* and Orfeo being a king, he would presumably have forest law instated in order to prevent poachers, loggers, farmers and so on, from exploiting the woods that he owned. It is never stated in the *Sir Orfeo* text, but forest law was so normalised at the time, that I feel no issue assuming it would be presumed to be in use even in the *Sir Orfeo* text. Birrell's article, 'The Medieval English Forest,' as discussed in the previous chapter, says that,

> Population increase inevitably put pressure on the forests, but they were protected and their use controlled throughout the Middle Ages by a system of forest law introduced by the Norman kings. Their original interest lay in protecting the deer for hunting, and they designated as royal forests, subject to forest law, areas suited for this purpose. These included some of the best stretches of woodland in the country but also many sparsely wooded areas and numerous existing settlements, complete with arable fields and pastures, which lay in the desirable hunting country (1980, 78).

One might say that the Forest law therefore projects civilisation in the forest in *Sir Orfeo* by being enforced in the forest.

The reader is not privy to the information of how far Orfeo travels, nor do we know more than that he travels through a forest and over a hill barefoot. The text itself spends very little time actually telling us how far Orfeo travels. I am assuming that it could not have been too far from his castle. There is no mention, for example, of him entering another land, yet. Therefore, when Orfeo leaves his castles and noble life, he leaves symbolic control to the steward. Orfeo himself remains king until he can be proven dead; as he tells his steward,

> & when ȝe vnder-stond þa*t* y be spent, | Make ȝou þan a parlement, | & chese ȝou a newe king | – Now doþ ȝour best wiþ al mi thing*e*

(And when you know that I am dead | You shall convene a parliament, | And you shall elect a new king | – Now rule well over all my things) (215-218).

Though not currently present in his court, Orfeo remains very much the king. He remains in his own territory. The very place Orfeo finds himself in is subject to his rule; it is his rightful property as king.

Similarly, Orfeo's legal ownership of the forest can be reflected as an ownership of the 'wild' beasts of the 'holtes hore.' This rings especially true for the animals gathering around him during the harp playing. Similar to how a court gathers around a king, Orfeo has traded his human court for an animal one. They gather around him as he plays his instrument and disperse afterward. Just as a king orating to his court, Orfeo orates through his instrument to the animals. The animals are also his subject in more ways than just through his music instrument. The animals are temporarily domesticated and turned 'half-wild,' just as Orfeo himself tries to become 'half-wild.' Due to forest law, the animals themselves are under ownership of Orfeo, but they are not truly domesticated. They do not keep his companionship, much as he does keep their companionship, as can be seen on lines 279-280, '& when he his harping lete wold, | No best bi hi*m* abide nold' (And when he would stop playing his harp, | No beast would remain by his side). In the sense of forest law, they are half-subject, half-wild. This is further proven due to them gathering under the sound of civilisation. Orfeo's harp is a manufactured instrument. It is another symbol of civilisation that Orfeo holds on to and it is this symbol of civilisation that gathers the animals. Through the music of civilisation, the animals become subjects and Orfeo, the harpist, become their king.

The harp deserves further exploration; it appears before Orfeo is introduced and is one of his defining features. As the narrator tells the reader,

> We redeþ oft & findeþ [y-write,] | & þis clerkes wele it wite, | Layes þat ben in harping | Ben y-founde of ferli þing
>
> (We often read and find, | And this the clerks know well | That lays played on the harp | Are fond of marvellous things) (1-4).

The harp must have been produced in a society that has the technological advancements and knowhow to make it. Orfeo's harp therefore takes on another dimension, that of being an instrument of civility. Simply put, the harp not only represents civilisation in its make, but also in the processes that it facilitates. Through the harp, the stories of great kings and of civilisations can be created. In addition, the harp, instead of being a civilising tool as it is in the 'holtes hore,' becomes a disruptive force in the fairy Otherworld. The harp, a symbol of civility, reveals that it can disrupt the Otherworld when Orfeo wins Heurodis from the fairy king, a reversal of Otherworldly disruption from earlier on in the story. The harp serves as the final say in whether the 'holtes hore' is a wilderness. If the 'holtes hore' was supposed to be a wilderness, it fails in being described as one.

2.8 Hunting for 'the hunt'

Orfeo's entrance into the Otherworld is as abrupt and unexpected to him as it is to the reader. After having spent 'ten ȝere & more' (ten years and more) (264), in the 'holtes hore' Orfeo suddenly spots the fairy king out on a hunt with his retinue. Within the hunting party he notices Heurodis, who notices him as well. This begins Orfeo's quest to reclaim Heurodis from the fairy Otherworld. Nevertheless, I would like to focus on the fairy hunting party, before transitioning to the Otherworld. As noted in the introduction to my thesis, 'the wild hunt,' or 'the hunt' is a common trope in fairy stories and *Sir Orfeo* is no exception to this. 'The hunt,' as I will refer to this trope hereafter, in the story of *Sir Orfeo* is an intrusive presence in the 'holtes hore.'

Orfeo encounters 'the hunt' as they are out on one of their multiple excursions from the Otherworld. What Orfeo takes not of is not just their appearances and behaviour, but also the strange sounds they are making. The reader is told that when 'the hunt' is on the hunt, they make sounds like '…dim cri & bloweing' (faint cries and horns) (285). The translation of the cries as faint, however, is contested. Seth Lerer suggests an emendation of the line based on the Harley MS and the Ashmole MS[7]. He says,

> I propose here an emendation to this word, one fully in keeping with the poem's setting at this moment and one that locates such a setting in a far more historically 'poetic' context than the alternatives offered by Bliss. I propose that the ancestor of these readings is dern(e), from Old English dyrne, 'secret' (Lerer 2012, 322).

Lerer offers a compelling historical literary basis for his emendation by giving several sources for the association of 'dern(e)' with the supernatural, the mysterious and the Otherworldly. Among these are Laȝamon's *Brut*, *Of Arthur and Merlin* and several others. The proposed emendation fits more with the mysterious tone of the scene. The effect of the word 'dern(e)' adds to the fairies' mystery in the human world. Their cries during the hunt are of an unknown and secret nature. The fairies also appear mysteriously, as the narrator tells the readers,

> Ac no best þai no nome, | No neuer he nist whider þai bi-come
>
> (Yet, they never took their quarry, | Nor did he know where they went) (287-288).

Their mysterious appearances during 'the hunt,' the fact that they seem to hunt without purpose and the secret sounds cause confusion. Their reason for being in the human world is obscured from the reader. The obfuscation happens two more times, when Orfeo spots a retinue of a thousand marching knights with their swords drawn who suddenly disappear (line

[7] The Harley MS and the Ashmole MS using 'dv*n*yng' and 'dy*n*ne,' respectively.

289-296), and knights and ladies that are dancing in the woods for no purpose with trumpeters, drummers and minstrels who walks past him (line 297-302). The arrival and disappearance of 'the hunt' seem more like a dream than reality. In the same way that Heurodis is exposed to the fairies through a dream, Orfeo is exposed through a dream-like sequence of strange encounters. It is when Orfeo finds himself in this strange state that he is able to follow the fairies into the Otherworld.

2.9 Entering another world

The Otherworld has more in common with the wilderness than the Earth realm's supposedly wild forests. In the Otherworld, civilisation is twisted and unrecognisable. The narrator and Orfeo's first impressions of the Otherworld is that of a strange and alien land,

> When he was in þe roche y-go | Wele þre mile, oþer mo, | He com in-to a fair cuntray, | As briȝt so sonne on somers day, | Smoþe & plain & al grene | - Hille no dale nas þ*er* non y-sene
>
> (When into the rock he had walked | Some three miles, maybe more, | He came into a beautiful land, | Bright like when the sun shines on a summers day, | Smooth and flat and entirely green | - There were no hills nor valleys to be seen) (349-354).

The narrator seem to describe a strangely featureless land. Nevertheless, the features the narrator describes are foreign to the reader. The Otherworld is land that is illuminated not by a sun, but by some unseen light source and is entirely green; lacking any stand-out landscape features. Contrasting this with the description of the 'holtes hore' reveals a strangeness and unknowability that is simply not found in human world of *Sir Orfeo*. Particularly interesting is the fact that the Otherworld is 'entirely green' which means that there is greenery in the seemingly featureless world, but the greenery is not described. This seemingly empty description of the Otherworld and its contrast with the description of the 'holtes hore' is

precisely why the use of wilderness, in relation to woods that have been civilised, needs to be reconsidered. After all, if the forest was the untamed, wild and unknown wilderness, why does the Otherworld fit that description better?

It in the unknown and the untamed of the Otherworld that we find the true wilderness. In a land that is seemingly geologically inactive, being 'Smoþe & plain…' (Smooth and flat) (353), a landscape alien to humans, far removed from the images of earth, we perhaps find the closest semblance of wilderness. The lack of descriptive ability in both the narrator and in Orfeo reveals a fascination with the indescribable.

The alien nature of the landscape of the Otherworld evokes images of Earth pre biblical Flood (or post Judgment) according to Ben Weber's article ''Smothe and Plain and Al Grene': *Sir Orfeo*'s Flat Fairyland.' He claims that *Sir Orfeo*'s Otherworld, 'belongs to a long tradition of flat Otherworlds, whether before the Flood or after the Judgement, in Christian thinking' (Weber 2011, 27). He argues that this is evident as the motif of a flat Otherworld, 'found poetic expression as early as the fourth century in the *De Ave Phoenice*, and has persisted long after the close of the Middle Ages' (Ibid.). Though he postulates that it is unlikely that the unknown author of *Sir Orfeo* would have any knowledge about the particular origins of the flat Otherworld. In doing so, he suggests that the 'smooth paradise' (Ibid.), as known to the author was, 'not necessarily tied to its exegetical origins' (Ibid.). The Otherworld therefore, by coincidence or on purpose becomes tied to the appearance of an Earth far removed in time and concept from the author at the time – an unknown world of what has been or what will be.

Furthermore, Weber brings up 'the crystal castle' (Ibid.), which is the first feature (besides the flatness and greenery) that grabs the attention of Orfeo as he enters the Otherworld. The narrator in *Sir Orfeo* describes the castle as,

Al þe vt-mast wal | Was clere & schine as cristal ; | An hundred tours & bataild stout ; | Þe butras com out of þe diche | Of rede gold y-arched riche ; | Þe vousour was auowed al | Of ich maner diuers aumal. | Wiþ-in þer wer wide wones, | Al of precious stones ; | Þe werst piler on to biholde | Was al of burnist gold

(All of the outermost wall | Was clear and shined like crystal ; | One hundred tower and strong battlements ; | The buttresses came out of the moat | Made of red gold and arching wonderfully ; | The vaulting was entirely adorned | With many kinds of enamel. | Within the castle were large dwelling-places, | All covered with precious gems ; | Even the simplest pillar one could behold, | Was covered in burnished gold) (357-368).

The crystal castle is a symbol commonly associated with New Jerusalem from Revelations. When John describes New Jerusalem, he describes it as,

et erat structura muri eius ex lapide iaspide ipsa vero civitas auro mundo simile vitro mundo
fundamenta muri civitatis omni lapide pretioso ornata fundamentum primum iaspis secundus sapphyrus tertius carcedonius quartus zmaragdus
quintus sardonix sextus sardinus septimus chrysolitus octavus berillus nonus topazius decimus chrysoprassus undecimus hyacinthus duodecimus amethistus
et duodecim portae duodecim margaritae sunt per singulas et singulae portae erant ex singulis margaritis et platea civitatis aurum mundum tamquam vitrum perlucidum

(And the building of the wall thereof was of jasper stone: but the city itself pure gold like to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper: the second, sapphire: the third; a chalcedony: the fourth, an emerald: The fifth, sardonyx: the sixth, sardius: the

seventh, chrysolite: the eighth, beryl: the ninth, a topaz: the tenth, a chrysoprasus: the eleventh, a jacinth: the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, one to each: and every several gate was of one several pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were, transparent glass) (Rev. 21:18-21 [Douay-Rheims]) .

The clear description of glass, gold and gemstones in New Jerusalem is very similar to the crystal castle in *Sir Orfeo*. If nothing else, it is at the very least a probable connection between the paradise-like Otherworld and the paradisiacal promise of the crystal castle in Revelations.

The crystal castle's interior betrays the paradisiacal associations when Orfeo enters the crystal castle only to spot Heurodis lying underneath an *ympe-tre,* surrounded by the dead and maimed. The sight is not one would associate with the heavenly New Jerusalem, nor is it one that is explained. A bizarre and grotesque display, which is described as such,

> Þan he gan bihold about al | & seiȝe liggeande wiþ-i*n* þe wal | Of folk þat were þider y-brouȝt, | & þouȝt dede, & nare nouȝt. | Sum stode wiþ-outen hade, | & sum non armes nade, | & sum þurth þe bodi hadde wounde, | & sum lay wode, y-bounde, | & sum armed on hors sete, | & sum astrangeled as þai ete; | & sum were in water adreynt, | & sum wiþ fire al for-schreynt. | Wiues þer lay on child-bedde, | Sum dede & sum awedde, | & wonder fele þ*er* lay bisides | … | Wiþ fairi þider y-come.
>
> (As he looked all around | And saw lying inside the walls | People who were tither brought, | And believed dead, they were not. | Some stood without heads, | And some had no arms, | And some had wounds that went through the body, | And some lay wounded, and bound | And some still armed on their horse, | And some who had choked when eating; | And some who had drowned in water, | And some who had who had shrunken in a fire. | Wives that lay on childbed, | Some were unwed and other

wed, | And many more lay beside them | … | Fairies had brought them here) (387-401, 404).

The horrific spectacle has often been used to compare the fairy Otherworld to a Hell-like place. I would like to suggest another reading of 'the gallery' as the collection of dead and maimed has been called. It might be a reference to the original story of *Orpheus and Eurydice* where Orpheus ventures into Hades. While the display in *Sir Orfeo* is grotesque, there is nothing to indicate that Orfeo is in a Hell-like realm other than the relatively short passage of 'the gallery.' My reading is that of death as natural. Death is part of the natural cycle, just as life is part of the natural cycle. Beyond death lies an unknown frontier. The people in 'the gallery' has not gone to a Heaven or a Hell instead they have gone to the fairy Otherworld. There are all manner of dead, without discrimination. None are given preference over the other. They are simply the dead and maimed. Even the virtuous Heurodis has ended up in the fairy Otherworld. It seems apt that the most unknown of unknowns, death, should be in the Otherworld. None of these characters could conquer death; they could not tame it. Additionally, death is a wild thing not under the control of man. I believe that it is not unreasonable to say that death is a kind of wilderness. In the Otherworld, we therefore find wilderness in 'the gallery.' Orfeo remains unmoved by the grotesque sight and as soon as he sees Heurodis 'the gallery' is forgotten.

2.10 Civilisation in the Otherworld

Before leaving the Otherworld behind, I would like to bring up the apparent civilisation we find in the Otherworld. After Orfeo sees Heurodis, he enters the fairy king's court in his minstrel disguise. On the throne sits the fairy king with his fairy queen beside him. The fairy Otherworld seem to follow the same rules for government and society that Orfeo himself follows. As Gillian Rudd points out in *Greenery*, '…the fairy court itself mirrors the human one, albeit in more splendid and artificial terms…' (2007, 102). While this may be partially

true, I again argue that this is done with a limited human world frame of reference. Orfeo enters the court and the narrator describes Orfeo's entrance as,

> Þan he seiȝe he þer a semly siȝt, | A tabernacle blisseful & briȝt. | Þer-in her maister king sete, | & her quen, fair & swete : | Her crounes, her cloþes schine so briȝt | Þat vnneþe bihold hem he miȝt
>
> (Then he saw a fair sight, | A baldachin wonderful and bright. | Therein the king sat, | and the queen, beautiful and sweet : | Her crown, her clothes shined so bright | That he scarcely could look at them) (411-416).

Orfeo's sees a regular court, but the queen shines so brightly that she is hard to look at. Like the splendid crystal castle, the courtyard and the aberrant landscape of the Otherworld, the court of the Otherworld has an element of the uncanny. Yes, the court is tangentially related to the human one in so far that it has a king and queen, however, as opposed to the human one, the court of the fairies betrays expectations.

The court of Orfeo is one that focuses on virtue, a distinctly civil concept. The court of the fairy king is distinctly focused on the objects therein. The introduction of Heurodis and the fairy queen highlights that difference. Heurodis is celebrated for her virtue and indescribable beauty. In comparison, the fairy queen's physicality is the first focus, then the reader and Orfeo is almost blinded by her clothes. As opposed to Heurodis, the fairy queen's virtue is obscured. The fairy queen's virtue (or lack thereof) is never a concern; instead, it is the physical that is in focus. Heurodis' civility, embodied in virtuous character differs from the fairy queen's lack of virtue. As opposed to the supposed wilderness of the 'holtes hore' where nothing is obscured, the element of the unknown is again provided in the presence of fairies.

To further complicate the supposed civility of the fairy court is Orfeo's performance in order to win back Heurodis. In a scene mirroring what happened in his animal court in the 'holtes hore,' Orfeo enraptures the entire castle with his playing. The narrator tells us that,

> Bifore þe king he sat adoun | & tok his harp so miri of soun, | & tempreþ his harp as wele can, | & blisseful notes he þer gan, | Þat al þat in þe palays were | Com to him forto here, | & liggeþ adoun to his fete, | Hem þenkeþ his melody so swete.
>
> (He sat down before the king | And took his harp that played such beautiful sounds, | And tuned his harp as well as he could, | And began playing blissful notes | Everyone in the palace | Came to him to hear, | And lay down at his feet, | They thought his melody was so wonderful) (435-442).

Compared to the lines of Orfeo's harping in the forest we clearly see a pattern of similarities,

> In-to alle þe wode þe soun gan schille, | Þat alle þe wilde bestes þat þer beþ | For ioie abouten him þai teþ (geþe),[8] | & alle þe foules þat þ*er* were | Come & sete on ich a brere | To here his harping a-fine
>
> (And played when he wanted | the sound spread so throughout the woods, | that all the beasts that in that forest resided | they gathered about him in joy, | and all the birds there were | sat on every branch | to hear his lovely music) (272-277).

Once he begins playing, everyone in both the palace and the forest gather around Orfeo. The supposedly wild animals of the forest perform a symbolic submission to his civilising instrument and the same pattern is repeated in the fairy king's court in the fairy Otherworld. Like the animals of the forest, the fairies gather around Orfeo, his sound spreads throughout the castle and they all think that his music is lovely. In addition, the emphasis in the crystal

[8] 'teþ' in the Auchinleck MS is probably a transcription error from 'geþe' which appears in the Harley MS 3810.

castle is that they came to 'hi*m*,' not vice versa. Just like the animals come to Orfeo in the forest, the fairies come as if summoned by him. Earlier on, I stated that the harp would be a disruptive element once again in the Otherworld and this is where it again shows its disrupting powers. The harp halts the goings-on in the entire crystal when he plays. The harp, as established, is a symbol of civilisation and in the crystal castle it functions the same way as it did in the forest. If then, the Otherworld and its inhabitants project disruptive wilderness, the harp projects disruptive civilisation in the meeting of the two, the harp wins out. The typical result of rational civilisation conquering the savage wilderness is re-enacted in the Otherworld. The learned and civilised Orfeo brings disruption to the fairy realm.

The parallel between animals and the fairies does not seem coincidental. Rudd brings an important point regarding the comparative nature of *Sir Orfeo* when she argues that,

> 'Explicit parallels are made between the fairy court and Orfeo's kingdom, not least through the use of the phrase 'castels and tours, / Rivers, forestes, frith with flours' which first describes the fairy kingdom as displayed to Heurodis during her ride with the fairy king (159–60) and is then repeated to evoke what Orfeo renounces when he enters the wilderness (245–6) (2007, 102).

Rudd's point is that this is evidence of the absence of a connection between fairies and the wilderness. Nevertheless, she argues that the parallel between the Otherworld and the Earth realm is what ensures that Orfeo masters his situation. Indeed, there is a parallel between Orfeo's earthly kingdom and the fairy Otherworld, however, the image that Heurodis is presented with proves to be deceptive. The only castle in the Otherworld that the readers are made aware of is the crystal castle, and the landscape of the Otherworld is strange and alien as previously described. Instead of the paradisiacal landscape the fairy king promised there is nothing to hint at the Otherworld being what the fairy king shows Heurodis. Instead, the

Otherworld is flat and featureless with only one castle visible, inside is a gallery of the dead and maimed. The beauty and magnificence Heurodis is promised is nowhere to be found.

2.11 The return of the king

After charming the fairy king, Orfeo leaves the Otherworld and faces the challenge of reclaiming his kingdom. Regaining his societal position proves to be a challenge he overcomes without much effort. As I have discussed in this chapter, Orfeo never really lost his position, he delegated some tasks, but in essence retained his mandate as king. Disguised as a beggar, Orfeo bluffs his way into his court and after presenting a story to test the loyalty of his steward he reveals himself as Orfeo and reclaims his court. Most interesting is that Orfeo's reclaiming of the throne is dependent on the one physical symbol of civilisation he brought with him when he left, namely that of the harp. His test of the steward's loyalty is based upon the harp and his entry back into the court is dependent on him having the instrument with him. None recognises his appearance due to his long hair, beard and skinniness. But when he re-enters society, he requires no transformation to reclaim his status. It is only after he is re-accepted that he is bathed and clothed in an acceptable manner,

> ¶Þo al þo þat þ*er*-in sete | Þat it was King Orfeo vnderȝete, | & þe steward him wele knewe : | Ouer & ouer þe bord he þrewe, | & fel adoun to his fet ; | So dede euerich lord þat þ*er* sete, | & al þai seyd at o criing : | 'Ȝe beþ our lord, Sir, & our king!' | Glad þai were of his liue ; | To chaumber þai ladde hi*m* als biliue | & baþed hi*m*, & schaued his berd, | & tired him as king apert
>
> (All that in there sat | Realised that it was King Orfeo, | And the steward knew him well : | Over tables he stumbled | And fell before his feet ; | Every lord that was there followed, | And while crying they all said : | 'He is our lord, Sir, and our King!' | They

were happy to see that he lived ; | The quickly brought him to his chambers | And bathed him, and shaved his beard, | And clothed him as a king) (575-586)

If he was so altered by his experience in the supposed wilderness in the forest, his fast recognition and acknowledgement as king makes little sense. Orfeo remains a product of civilisation from the beginning of the story until the very end. He does not lose his position as king and ultimately remains unchanged by the supposed wilderness. Through Orfeo, civilisation conquers the wild.

2.12 Chapter conclusion

The case for finding wilderness in *Sir Orfeo*'s forests proves impossible in the end. As I have argued, wilderness makes only a few appearances in *Sir Orfeo*. When wilderness appears, it is related to the appearance and disappearance of fairies. As I showed in the example of the appearances of the *ympe-tre*, the fairies use the tree to enter the Earth realm's domesticated areas and cast their influence through it. When they do, the disruption caused by the fairies come as unexpected and unwelcome in the domesticated sphere of the orchard. The effect of this can be seen when Heurodis injures herself and makes herself almost unrecognisable in an act of repulsion. Her most important character trait is her virtue, a trait based in civility and civilisation. The fairies reduce this trait and Orfeo, instead of using virtue to describe her when he sees her again re-evaluates because of the fairies' wilderness influence.

Next, Orfeo 'left civilisation behind' when he ventured into the 'holtes hore.' It becomes clear when Orfeo reaches the woods, he has not really left civilisation behind. Orfeo, being king and not having given up his mandate, brings up the implication of ownership of the forest. Common to the Middle English period is the use of Forest Law. I then discussed Orfeo's mock court, which he assembles from supposedly wild animals in forest. His instrument of civility, his harp, brings the animals together.

Orfeo leaves the human world and he enters the fairy Otherworld. In the Otherworld, he encounters a flat, strange and featureless plane. The description of the Otherworld reveals a reverence and fascination with the strange and unknown. The Otherworld and the crystal castle evoke images of a paradise-like place, but this illusion is quickly betrayed when Orfeo enters the castle and discovers that it contains a gallery of people in a perpetual state of dying. The castle and the Otherworld are revealed to be a false paradise. Orfeo's and the narrator's description of the Otherworld and the castle serve as proof that they are closer to wilderness than the 'holtes hore.' The unknowability, danger and wild, brutal danger the gallery represents seem to be a closer match to wilderness than the forest in the Earth-realm.

Orfeo wielding the harp subdues the fairies in a performance that mirrors narratives of civilisation conquering wilderness. Lastly, when Orfeo leaves the Otherworld, he does not need to re-adjust to civilisation because he never left it. His symbol of civilisation, the harp, allows him to effortlessly re-join his own court and the civilised life of a king. Thus, if he was supposedly changed by his ten years in the 'holtes hore' he seems to not have changed so much that he could not easily become a king again.

Chapter 3: The Kind Wilderness of *Sir Launfal*

In contrast to *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* portrays the fairy kingdom and the fairies therein in a much more positive light. Instead of the threatening fairies of *Sir Orfeo,* we find a helpful and kind fairy that provides for the human character of Launfal. This chapter will focus on the fairies and the Otherworld of *Sir Launfal*. Moreover, I will compare to the Otherworld of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*. This comparison will help uncover the obfuscated nature of the Otherworld and its relationship to the wilderness. After having looked at the Otherworld of *Sir Launfal*, I will pivot over to its inhabitants; the fairies. I will focus on Tryamour, Launfal's fairy lover, in order to demonstrate that the fairies of *Sir Launfal* exercise transgressing power in relation to the norms of human civilisation. Tryamour's marriage to Launfal reverses the traditional gender roles in the act of marriage. Additionally, Tryamour's role in the story takes on meaning beyond the transgression as I argue that she is representative of wilderness itself. Tryamour's power and independence contrasts with Launfal's loss of power and status. Launfal is continually rebuffed and undermined by members of a civilisation he is part of. This continued rejection is what leads Launfal to seek civilisation's 'other' in the wilderness of the Otherworld. The result of Launfal coming back to civilisation after meeting Tryamour and spending a day in the Otherworld is an accusation and further rejection of his being. Because of this, Launfal chooses to leave the human world and instead join Tryamour for a more permanent stay in the Otherworld. Launfal's rejection from civilisation serves as proof that the Otherworld is not just a fairyland but also in a more direct fashion an 'other-world;' a world which is hosts the 'other' to civilisation's 'it.' I aim to prove that the link between fairies, their Otherworlds and wilderness, holds up to scrutiny.

3.1 Summary of *Sir Launfal*

I have included a summary of *Sir Launfal*, just like I did with *Sir Orfeo*, as I think that by including the summary it will be easier to appreciate the whole of my argument. The story of

Sir Launfal begins with Launfal at the court of King Arthur, where he holds the position as a trusted advisor to Arthur. Guinevere shows distaste for Launfal at her wedding feast. After Launfal's father dies, he asks Arthur for permission to travel to his father's burial, and Arthur happily sends him away with a large sum of gold and two knights as his guards. Before Launfal arrives home, he comes to the town of Caerleon and asks the mayor for lodging. He is given a home by an orchard and spends a year there. The year passes and Launfal has spent all his money. Launfal, now destitute, sends his knights back to Arthur and leaves for the woods. In the woods, Launfal encounters the fairy Tryamour and they marry. Tryamour gives him her hand in marriage and a bag of infinite gold, but only on the condition that he never tells her name or tells anyone about her. He is also given a pennon which ensures that he cannot be injured or have his armour dented when jousting. Launfal agrees and returns to Caerleon. He pays his debt and a tournament is held in his honour. He wins the tournament and becomes the envy of many knights. Sir Valentine another knight taunts Launfal's manhood and challenges him to a joust in Lombardy which Launfal swiftly wins. Launfal then is invited back to Arthur's court and returns to a celebration in his honour. Guinevere tries to seduce Launfal, but he rejects her because he says loves someone queenlier than her. Guinevere tells Arthur that Launfal has besmirched her honour. When Launfal then searches for Tryamour, he realises that he cannot find her and that he has broken his promise. Arthur then challenges Launfal to produce the person queenlier than Guinevere. Tryamour arrives with her retinue and Launfal leaves with her to the Otherworld.

3.2 Comparing Otherworlds

In the previous chapter, I concluded that the Otherworld and the fairies were closer to the wilderness than the forests, both domestic and wild. Therefore, one of the most pertinent questions when examining the representation of wilderness in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* is whether the Otherworlds are comparable to one another in their respective incarnations. I am

making the argument that, by establishing the differences and similarities between them, it will become evident that the aesthetics delineate similar worlds, yet allows for very different interpretations of wilderness. The examination of the Otherworlds will reveal that wilderness in connection to the Otherworld is not limited to malicious fairies.

The only mentions of anything specifically being an Otherworld in *Sir Launfal* is when Launfal leaves the human world. The narrator tells the reader that,

> Þe lady rod dorþ Cardeuyle | Fer ynto a jolyf jle, | …| Þus Launfal, wythouten fable, | Þat noble kny3t of þe Rounde Table, | Was taken ynto Fayrye
>
> (The lady [Tryamour] rode through Caerleon | Onto a splendid island | … |Thus Launfal, that is the long and short of it, | That noble knight of the Round Table, | Was brought into Fairyland) (1021-1022,1033-1035, Chestre 1960)[9].

This does not leave the reader with much understanding of what the Otherworld contains. In fact, the actual description of the Otherworld is more or less non-existent. The difference is significant when compared to *Sir Orfeo*'s Otherworld, which is described thusly:

> When he was in þe roche y-go | Wele þre mile, oþer mo, | He com in-to a fair cuntray, | As bri3t so sonne on somers day, | Smoþe & plain & al grene | - Hille no dale nas þ*er* non y-sene
>
> (When into the rock he had walked | Some three miles, maybe more, | He came into a beautiful land, | Bright like when the sun shines on a summers day, | Smooth and flat and entirely green | - There were no hills nor valleys to be seen) (349-354 Arthur John Bliss 1954).

[9] In future quotes from *Sir Launfal* in this chapter I will only list the line number as it is explicitly clear when I am using other works or articles.

The seemingly lacklustre description in *Sir Launfal* leaves much to the imagination as opposed to *Sir Orfeo*'s Otherworld. *Sir Orfeo*'s Otherworld is bright and the reader is what it looks like inside. It is bright, flat and green. Comparatively, the explicit mention of *Sir Launfal*'s Otherworld is simply the fairy world, nothing more, nothing less. The mention of the Otherworld in *Sir Launfal* is not very evocative of the green plains of *Sir Orfeo*. There is one hint that the forest that Launfal enters is the Otherworld. This would make it consistent with green spaces, in particular forests, serving as entry points into the Otherworld.

Launfal's visit to Tryamour in the forest show a similarity between the aesthetics of the Otherworlds of *Sir Launfal* and *Sir Orfeo*. Launfal enters the forest, guided by two fairies and the narrator describes the tent as,

> …wrouth, forsoþe, ywys, | All of werk of Sarynsyns, | Þe pomelles of crystall; | Vpon þe toppe an ern þer stod, | Of bournished gold, ryche & good, | Jfloryshed wyth ryche amall; | Hys eyn wer carbonkeles bryȝt– | As þe mone þe schon anyȝt, | Þar spreteþ out ouyr all. | Alysaundre þe conqueror, | Ne Kyng Artour yn hys most honour, | Ne hadde noon scwych juell
>
> (…wrought, in truth, I know, | All of it the work of Saracens, | The finials were of crystal; | Upon the top there stood an eagle, | Of burnished gold, rich & beautiful, | Inlaid with rich enamel; | His eyes were carbuncles so bright– | They shone like the moon at night, | That spread its light over everything. | Alexander the conqueror, | Nor King Arthur at his most regal, | Had never known of any such jewel) (265-276).

It is clearly not a regular tent, as it is decorated in gold and crystal, and the canvas weaved by the faraway Saracens.[10] The pavilion tent that Launfal visits shares some of the same aesthetic themes as the castle in *Sir Orfeo*. I shall repeat the quote for comparisons sake,

[10] Saracens is a Medieval generalised amalgamation of the population in the Arab nations.

Al þe vt-mast wal | Was clere & schine as cristal ; | An hundred tours & bataild stout ; | Þe butras com out of þe diche | Of rede gold y-arched riche ; | Þe vousour was auowed al | Of ich maner diuers aumal. | Wiþ-in þer wer wide wones, | Al of precious stones ; | Þe werst piler on to biholde | Was al of burnist gold

(All of the outermost wall | Was clear and shined like crystal ; | One hundred towers and strong battlements ; | The buttresses came out of the moat | Made of red gold and arching wonderfully ; | The vaulting was entirely adorned | With many kinds of enamel. | Within the castle were large dwelling-places, | All covered with precious gems ; | Even the simplest pillar one could behold, | Was covered in burnished gold) (357-368 Arthur John Bliss 1954).

The castle has crystal walls, while the tent has crystal finials[11]. The castle is exquisitely decorated, just as the canvas of the tent. In addition, the theme of burnished gold on the pillars of the castle and the burnished gold on the eagle is similar, as is the mention of enamel serving as decoration. The similarities in aesthetics makes the Otherworlds of *Sir Launfal* and *Sir Orfeo* appear similar. However, the contents of the Otherworld are what differentiates them. Launfal is not met with the same threatening possibilities as the castle in *Sir Orfeo*'s insides implied. It is the approach to the fairy denizens of *Sir Launfal*'s Otherworld that marks the major difference in their approach to the wilderness; with the most prominent being Tryamour's and Launfal's marriage.

3.3 The nature of marriage

Sir Launfal features a reversal of the traditional gender roles in the marriage between Launfal and Tryamour. The wilderness is a place of transgressions and a place where codes of conduct are broken and Tryamour's marriage to Launfal is precisely one of these breaks with the

[11] Decorative blunt or sharp objects at the ends of the tent poles that prop up the canvas.

civilised code of conduct. Instead of Launfal being the one proposing marriage, it is Tryamour who asks for Launfal's hand in marriage and it is she that sets the condition for their marriage. In addition, she provides for him and has the opportunity to take away his wealth. What traditionally would be the man's role in a marriage and a relationship is reversed. The wilderness facilitates, as Gillian Rudd argued, that,

> Rather than being able to regard ourselves as the naturally dominant and successful species, we must alter our ways of being in order to enter the wilderness at all, for this conceptual wilderness has forms of life of its own, which themselves challenge the divisions between humanity and other species (2007, 92-93).

It is precisely this kind of re-evaluation that Tryamour facilitates with her presence. Her marriage to Launfal is one where she is dominant and she sets the condition in order for Launfal to enter the Otherworld. He is invited because she wants to marry him, not vice versa.

In the wilderness, it is Tryamour that provides, protects and nurtures Launfal. Tryamour becomes more than just the fairy character, she becomes the very measure by which we evaluate Launfal and the other humans in the lay. She provides, protects and nurtures as long as the trust between the two is not broken. Benefitting from any resource is not without limit nor is Tryamour's favour. By reading Tryamour as a nurturing, protective figure she serves as an analogue to Mother Nature. She, is prone to exploitation in the same way that the Earth is. Tryamour sets the limits for of how much she can be exploited before her resources and indeed, she herself disappears. The union between Tryamour and Launfal is one which mirrors the proverbial 'knife's edge' that humanity balances on. Too large an exploitation of our resources (Tryamour's gifts) or a breaking of the contract of balance between humans and Earth, and Mother Earth becomes unavailable. The lay already highlights the fragile balance between humanity and the use of Earth's resources in Launfal's

wasteful spending habit. The money he was given should have lasted his entire journey, but his act of wasting the money that gets him ostracised and in trouble.

Launfal loses his protection, his way to sustain himself as a result of betraying his promise to Mother Nature. Launfal must beg Tryamour for forgiveness, but he cannot. It is Tryamour that forgives Launfal, not the other way around. Launfal, having betrayed nature in the form of Tryamour, cannot ever find her unless she chooses to reveal herself to him. As civilisation betrays and subsequently loses nature, he cannot ask for forgiveness, instead, she has the mercy to forgive him. Tryamour's forgiveness of Launfal offers him an eco-conscious choice. Launfal can choose to remain in the human world without access to Mother Nature, and remain part of civilisation; or Launfal can go with Mother Nature. Launfal chooses the latter. The narrative becomes a romance between humans and nature. I believe that even if there might be a pastoral reading of this romance, it is in essence subverting the pastoral trope by making Tryamour, not only a physically dangerous character but also a politically dangerous character. Tryamour could easily have been written as a non-threatening, 'safe' character, but she is not. She is not simply an idealised woman; she is an agent in the story that walks the line between objectified and active. She can walk that fine line due to her 'otherness.'

3.4 Tryamour's independence gives proof of her 'otherness'

Tryamour can not only be read as a Mother Nature figure but also as representing aspects of wilderness, the 'other' to civilisation. Her arrangement with Launfal and her setting the rules for their relationship is in opposition to traditional, civil marriages. Their union does not follow the norms of civilisation. Instead their marriage follows the rules of Tryamour and by extension, the Otherworld. Launfal's marriage to Tryamour forms a union between the Otherworld and Launfal's human world, and a metaphorical union between humanity and wilderness. This, however, is not the limit of Tryamour's significance. Tryamour also

represents the unknown, wild and untamed found in the wilderness in a more direct manner. When Launfal is rescued by Tryamour, the narrator describes how she uses magic on Guinevere,

> And blew on her swych a breþ | Þat neuer eft myȝt sche se
>
> (And blew such a breath | That she [Guinevere] might never see again) (1007-1008).

She uses her magic powers to fulfil a wager between Launfal and Guinevere unprompted; a bet she could not have known about as she was not there while it was made. Her breath holds the power to cause Guinevere to lose her sight. Tryamour then immediately leaps from Guinevere to her own palfrey in the next line. Her supernatural feats occur unprompted, including that she somehow knew to rescue Launfal. Her supernatural feats, the gifts she gives Launfal and her assertiveness add to the air of the unknown and untamed.

I am using the term untamed here as a way to state that she is 'the other' to the civilised 'it.' While I have discussed wilderness as being something which is untamed, unknown and wild, the term untamed without context may be seen as restrictive and only applicable to animals or as a way to objectify women as a 'something' that must be tamed. By untamed, I mean that which is 'the other' to the dominant view of domestic.

Furthermore, the untamed aspect of Tryamour can be seen and is further proven by the use of male gaze in the lay. In her article 'Objectification, Empowerment, and the Male Gaze in the Lanval Corpus,' Elizabeth S. Leet argues that:

> Although the male gaze has often been cited as a sign of the visual dominance male onlookers exert on female bodies, the fairy monarchs carefully design their powerful physical entities in order to liberate their chosen consorts and retreat to their private fairy realms (Leet 2016, 76).

Leet's argument that the fairy monarchs design their looks adds to the dangerous, untamed and wild elements of the fairies. It allows the fairies to navigate political and social situations that normally would be inaccessible to them. It grants the ability to transgress the boundaries of their expected roles. It would be easy to reduce the fairy ladies of *Sir Launfal* saying that they are acting and limited by dominant male roles, but the text states something completely different. Tryamour walks the line between objectified and acting agent in the lay, as can be seen in the following lines:

> A softe pas her palfray fond, | Þat men her schuld beholde; | … | ' Syr, hydyr J com for swych a þyng, | To skere Launfal þe knyȝt
>
> (Her palfrey found nice path, | So that men could look at her; | … | ' Sir, I came hither in order, | To acquit Launfal the knight) (962-963, 992-993).

Leet claims that the 'The ladies of Sir Landevale and Sir Launfal experience reduced interiority in favor of outward displays of verbal, human agency' (2016, 80). This is evident when Tryamour rides into Caerleon, as Leet points out in her article. Tryamour accepts and uses the male gaze to exercise political power which far exceeds Launfal's. The quote above demonstrates the dichotomy of Tryamour's character, she is both objectified by the population of Caerleon and has the political acumen to hold a discourse on an equal level to the men. In her conclusion, Leet also argues that,

> Each fairy lady is both objectified and empowered. Each fairy [in the Lanval corpus] rescues a destitute knight stranded in a mystical valley gives him money and helps him avoid a conviction at trial even after he violates her sole request. Yet, while her aid serves his purposes, she also actively pursues him, uses her exorbitant wealth and physical beauty to ensure a future with the man she loves, and finally takes him into her own fairy kingdom as her consort. The Lanval myths conclude at this moment of

> retreat from the mortal world, as the temporary object of the male gaze takes her prize into fairyland, disappearing from our view forever (2016, 85).

Tryamour's agency and control over the various situations she is involved in makes her an oddity. She clearly is not bound by the conventional norms of civilisation and is able to act outside them given her power. As Leet states, she removes herself from the gaze forever. Unrestricted by civilisation, Tryamour embodies the wild, untamed and unknown aspects of wilderness. She is beyond human, specifically male control, in a society which expects a passivity of women; this makes her untamed. Tryamour can be said to be wild in her power: she has the ability to cause grave injury and again, for emphasis, she remains outside the control of civilisation and its norms. What is wild if not that outside our control? Tryamour's ability to make Launfal reassess his own societal position and her power to interfere in the human court of Arthur make her disruptive to human civilisation. She holds the power to make herself unknown and known, existing outside the control of civilisation. Tryamour's powers are unexplained and she poses a threat to civilisation directly by her appearance, undermining Arthur's rule in injuring Guinevere. Her appearance is proof of Launfal's claims and the other nobles' claims of Guinevere's infidelity. She introduces the element of an unknown future for Arthur's rule, or at the very least Guinevere's role in it. Through Tryamour and the fairies, the Otherworld is pushed closer to the wilderness. The first half of this chapter has so far established that the fairies, Tryamour in particular, are the ones pushing the wilderness of the Otherworld to the forefront. This wilderness differs from the one in *Sir Orfeo* as it is more driven by the fairy denizens of the Otherworld. The difference between the wildernesses allows for a different interaction between humanity and the Otherworld. We see this manifest in the way Launfal can establish an amicable relationship to the Otherworld, yet the relationship is one that follows the tenets of wilderness. Launfal must be re-evaluate himself and his relationship to wilderness.

3.5 Launfal's rejection from society pushes him into the wilderness

Launfal's escape into the forest is not just an escape from the shame of his poverty, but also an escape from civilisation. In order to illustrate this point, this and the next section is dedicated to setting up Launfal's rejection by civilisation. It is important to discuss this, as it shows that Launfal has been rejected by human civilisation, which facilitates a re-evaluation of himself. Launfal experiences several rejections by civilisation that drives him to escape. The first is Guinevere's slight. Launfal attempts to act honourable and virtuous, in accordance with the norms of society, but is punished when Guinevere does not give him a gift. After the wedding feast Guinevere hands out gifts and we are told that,

> Þe queen yaf yftes for þe nones, | Gold & seluer & precyous stonys, | Her curtysaye to kyþe; | Euerych kny3t sche 3af broche oþer ryng, | But Syr Launfal sche yaf noþyng. | þat greude hym many a syde
>
> (The queen gave gifts believe me, | Gold & silver & precious gems. | To make her courteousness known; | She gave every knight a brooch or ring, | But she gave nothing to Sir Launfal. | That grieved him greatly). (67-72)

While not enough to drive Launfal to seek the wild just yet, as the text itself says, Guinevere not giving him anything serves to lessen his status in comparisons to the other knights. Launfal receives nothing for no apparent reason. Guinevere not giving Launfal a ring or brooch while giving every other knight one, is also a way to isolate him. By giving the other knights a ring, she creates a sort of communal bond between the knight. Launfal is excluded from the bond, and as a result is already pushed outside the social bonds of the other knights. The text even states a few lines earlier that Launfal and other knights do not like her (44-45), but no other knight receives this treatment from Guinevere, nor does Launfal treat her badly. The various slights serve to diminish Launfal's status, while also making his move towards wilderness more logical.

The second slight happens when the mayor of Caerleon mocks Launfal as he arrives in the town. The mayor of Caerleon makes a mockery of Launfal's social status by diminishing his importance. He prioritises the seven unnamed knights, which he does not know when will arrive. Launfal is a knight of Arthur's court and respect that he believes he deserve is not reciprocated by the mayor. The narrator tells the reader that,

> Þe meyr stod & beþoȝte hym þere | What myȝt be hys answere, | And to hym þan gan he sayn: | ' Syr, .vij. knyȝtes han her jn ynom(e). And euer y wayte whan þey wyl come, | Þat arn of Lytyll Bretayne
>
> (The mayor stood & was deep in thought | What might be his answer, | And then he said to him: | 'Sir, seven knights are coming this way I know. | And ever I await their arrival, | They are from Brittany) (109-114)

Sir Launfal, a knight of Arthur's court, is given lower priority than the seven unnamed knights, a clear slight of Launfal's honour. Launfal himself acknowledges the slight in the form of a self-deprecating comment to his companions.

> Now may ye se–swych ys seruice | Vnþer a lord of lytyll pryse !– | How he may þerof be fayn.
>
> (Now you see – such is the service | Under a lord of little fame!– | How could he be happy with that.) (118-120)

Launfal, despite his generous and honourable nature, is rejected by the mayor and is himself aware of his lack of reputation. Yet the frustration of not having his status as a knight of Arthur's court, or being a knight in general, taken seriously by the mayor is a clear rejection. This is evident in the self-deprecating comment, as he makes light of own reputation within earshot of the mayor. As he begins riding away, he is not offered a place in the mayor's

manor as he asked for, but is instead given housing by the mayor's orchard. Launfal is pushed towards the domestic, but natural landscape of the orchard.

Launfal's third slight, when he has spent all of his wealth and his civil status is further reduced from unimportant knight to pauper, is that he is not invited by the mayor to celebrate Trinity Sunday. The mayor knowing that Launfal is too poor and unimportant does not invite him. Launfal is then invited by the mayor's daughter, but explains that he cannot join her:

> ' Damesele,' he sayde, ' Nay! | To dyne haue J no herte: | Þre days þer ben agon, | Mete ne drynke eet y noon, | And all was for pouert. | Today to cherche y woulde haue gon, | But me fawtede hosyn & schon, | Clenly brech & scherte; | And for defawte of clodynge | Ne myȝte y yn wyth þe peple þrynge– | No wonþer douȝ me smerte!
>
> ('Damsel,' he said, 'No! | I do not have any inclination to dine: | Three days have passed, | Since I drank or ate. | And all because I was too poor. | Today I would have gone to church, | But I have no st|ockings and shoes, clean breeches & shirt: | And since I have no clothes | I dare not mingle with the people– | No wonder I am in pain!) (194-204).

This slight by the mayor leads Launfal to ask the mayor's daughter if he might borrow a saddle and bridle for his horse (205-206), implying that he has sold his old saddle and bridle some time ago, further illustrating his poverty. The shame of his poverty and the fact that he cannot attend civil functions as a knight drives him to seek the isolation of the forest.

3.6 Launfal's diminishing status only enhances his redemption

In addition to the slights, there is a change in Launfal's position from honoured advisor and knight to pauper without aim or societal status. I argue that Launfal undergoes a change from participant in society to a person whose status has been diminished by others. I have already presented the slights and their effect on Launfal. However, Launfal undergoes additional

diminishing of status by certain characters throughout the plot. As I mentioned in the previous section, the purpose of this and the previous section is to highlight how civilisation rejects Launfal. The rejection is so strong that forest and the Otherworld become preferable to human society. Launfal seeks the forest only after he is too poor for anything but rags and his status amongst his fellow humans become unsalvageable. His adherence to his knightly code makes him too proud to seek help from the other knights. This is made clear when the plot reaches the point where Launfal sends his two knights away. When the two knights return in tatters, Guinevere's rhetoric is disrespectful and dismissive, in fact can be described as malicious:

> Þan seyde Quene Gwenore, þat was fel, | ' How fayrþ þe prowde kny3t, Launfal ? | May he hys armes welde ?
>
> (Then said Queen Guinevere, who was spiteful, | 'How fare the proud knight, Launfal? | Can he wield his arms?) (157-159)

Guinevere's dialogue is interesting, because it hints that she can see through the lie the two guards are about to tell on Launfal's behalf. Not only that, but the lines reveal an attempt to undermine Launfal's status in Arthur's court. When she asks, on line 158, 'How fayrþ þe prowde kny3t, Launfal,' her question is meant sarcastically. Guinevere has seen the poor state the knights returned in and knows that something has happened to Launfal in order to send his guardian knights back. The emphasis in the line lies on 'prowde,' but is underlined by 'Launfal.' Instead of Guinevere using the knightly honorific 'Sir,' she instead elects to only call him Launfal; reducing him from knight to mere man. This makes the 'prowde kny3t' ring hollow, seeming to be more a mockery of Launfal. When she then follows it up with line 159, 'May he hys armes welde,' the mockery becomes apparent. On the surface Guinevere asks if he is in good health. However, the previous disregard for Launfal's status and sarcasm gives the question a double meaning. Launfal, having no means to provide for his knights, cannot 'wield his arms' in the form of his soldiers. Launfal cannot provide them with clothing, food

or shelter. Guinevere, seeing through the situation, asks the knights whether Launfal is broke. Whether the knights understand this, we are never told, but their lie conveniently skirts around the fact of Launfal's poverty. Their lie is enough to convince Arthur, but Guinevere is unsatisfied:

> Þe quene hyt rew well sore, | For sche wold wyth all her myȝt | Þat he hadde be boþe day & nyȝt | Jn paynys mor & more
>
> (It [the knights' lie of Launfal's wellness] made the queen very bitter | For she wanted with all her might | That he was both day & night | In more & more pain) (177-180)

Guinevere's less-than-subtle hate for Launfal manifests in the four lines. It also confirms the previous questions of Launfal's status and 'health,' as mockery in an attempt to expose Launfal to the rest of the court. While that attempt to disgrace Launfal's character does not work for Guinevere, her attempt after Launfal has married Tryamour almost succeeds.

When Launfal meets Guinevere again, his rejection of her advances leads to the final attempt at diminishing his status. Guinevere attempts to seduce Launfal, but he claims that he has a wife and that his wife's status is much higher. Launfal tells Guinevere that,

> Hyr loþlokste mayde, without wene, | Myȝte bet be a queen | Þan þou, yn all þy lyue!
>
> (Her ugliest maid, without a doubt, | Might well be more a queen | Than you, in all of your life!) (697-699)

Launfal's insult of Guinevere that, Tryamour is more a queen than her, is both an insult to Guinevere's looks and an insult to her mandate as queen. Tryamour's influence has changed Launfal from his obedient self, who did not challenge Guinevere when she disrespected him, to Launfal being disruptive. Tryamour's wilderness-like influence has made Launfal rebellious. Guinevere responds by storming out the room and telling Arthur that Launfal has,

unprovoked, shamed Guinevere by bragging. However, the other knights vouch for Launfal's character, if he can prove that he is married. At this point, presenting Tryamour is impossible as speaking about her to Guinevere has made her disappear, just like she promised. Launfal's status diminishes once more.

Tryamour's disappearance makes all the status maintaining gifts she gave him disappear together with her, indicating that Launfal has not only lost access to her, but also the access to the items which allowed him to act disruptive. Launfal himself confirms this when he looks at his items,

> He lokede yn hys alner, | Þat fond hym spendyng, all plener, | Whan þat he hadde nede, | And þer nas noon, forsoþ to say, | And Gyfre was yryde away | Vp Blaunchard hys stede. | All þat he hadde before ywonne, | Hyt malt as snow aȝens þe sunne | … | Hys armur, þat was whyt as flour, | Hyt becom of blak colour
>
> (He looked in his purse, | That let him spend, as much as he wanted, | When he had needed, | And there was nothing in it, truly, | And Gyfre har ridden away | On Blaunchard his steed. | All that he had won, | Had melted as snow in the sun | … | His armour, that was white as flour, | It had become black) (733-740, 742-743)

His wealth is gone, his servant is gone, his horse is gone, his winnings are gone and his pure white armour has turned black. All the symbols of status, which gave Launfal importance and relevance in Arthur's court, are gone. This is arguably the largest reduction in status all at once, and perhaps the biggest reason for Launfal deciding to leave civilisation behind.

The final diminishing of Launfal's status is his friend and king's rejection of his friendship and companionship. Up until Guinevere accusing Launfal of shaming her, Arthur has been nothing but friendly and welcoming to Launfal. Arthur's friendship and kindness

disappears immediately as Guinevere accuses Launfal; perhaps revealing that their friendship was only superficial. Regardless, Arthur sends some knights to

> …brynge Launfal anoonryȝtes | To be hongeþ & todrawe
>
> (bring Laufal immediately | To be hanged and drawn) (725-726).

This punishment is never dealt out. Twelve knights confirm Launfal's story, that the queen insulted him because of his rejection, and instead Launfal's trial is extended so that he can present Tryamour and prove his claim of her beauty and queenliness. On the day of the trial, noblemen suggest that because of Launfal's previous deeds, he should be banished from the country. Nonetheless, Guinevere whispers in Arthur's ear that,

> Syre, curtays yf [þou] were, | Or yf þou louedest þyn honour, | J schuld be awreke of þat traytour | Þat doþ me changy chere– | To Launfal þou schuldest not spare: | Þy barouns dryueþ þe to bysmare– | He ys hem lef & dere
>
> (Sire, gracious as you are, | Or if you love your honour, | I should have my vengeance on that traitor | That did sour my mood– | You should not spare Launfal: | Your barons want you humiliated– | He is to them loved and dear) (918-924).

Before Arthur can respond Tryamour shows up. This passage highlights the fact that Arthur might have banished Launfal, but Guinevere wants vengeance. It is not hard to imagine that Arthur would take Guinevere's side as he so did previously. Launfal suffers his final rejection by Arthur and Guinevere. The mildest punishment Launfal would have received is one of metaphorical and actual rejection by society, a removal from the courts and social connections he had made as Arthur's advisor for ten years. The other punishment is a traitor's death. Both alternatives label Launfal as an outsider. Launfal ultimately decides that even if, after Tryamour rescues him, he could remain in the human world, his possible disillusionment or love for Tryamour is greater than the civilised bonds of society. If Launfal were to choose to

stay, he would once more conform to the codes of conduct and rules that human society expects of him, but in choosing to go with Tryamour, Launfal picks defiance. His choice to leave defies both the legal expectations and the social convention that he is expected to follow.

3.7 Launfal seeks the forest

Launfal's retreat from Caerleon comes as a result of his lack of status and as a result of escaping further shame by associating with a society that rejects him. Launfal seeks a forest, much like Orfeo did, in order to remove himself from society, though Launfal's stay is considerably shorter. The narrator explains that,

> He rood toward þe west.[12] | Þe weþer was hot, þe vnderntyde; | He lyȝte adoun, & gan abyde | Vnder a fayr forest; | And, for hete of þe wedere, | Hys mantell he feld togydere, | And sette hym doun to reste; | Þus sat þe knyȝt yn symplyté, | Jn þe schadwe, vnþer a tre, | Þer þat hym lykede best
>
> (He rode towards the west. | The weather was hot, that morning; | He dismounted, & began to stay | Under a fair forest; | And, because the weather was hot, | He folded his mantle, | And sat down to rest; | Thus sat the knight so plain, | In the shadow, under a tree, | This was what he liked the most) (219-228).

Launfal leaving Caerleon is a relief. This is made clear by line 226-228. Lines 219-228 also reveal another meaning – he does not just seek the forest for escape, but also for the simplicity it brings. He is driven to seek a different way of living, to escape the complexity of civilisation. Launfal's attempt at living in the city came with all the politeness and courtesy that is expected of him as a knight, however, when he 'Hys mantell he feld togydere (He

[12] "The west" is often used when talking about going towards the Otherworld. For example: in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Arthur's body is taken west to Avalon. This also happens in *Sir Degare*, where Degare has to find his fairy father in the west.

folded his mantle) (224) by the forest, nothing is expected of him. He has no debt there; no need to be anything more. I also want to comment on the folding of the mantle. The mantle of a knight may carry some religious iconography or embroidery, thus when Launfal folds his mantle and puts it away, he also removes himself further from civilisation by ridding himself of his mantle. Moreover, the mantle is a product of the civilisation from which he came. Launfal putting the mantle away is a conscious action taken to rid himself of his civilised identity. Instead of being reduced and diminished based on social norms or other external factors, Launfal takes a conscious step in shedding his civility. In addition, the transition from the cold night in the city (presumably the reason he wore the mantle in the first place) now transitions more warm presence of the forest. The mantle serves as a metaphor for leaving the burden and coldness he endured in the city behind. This claim is strengthened by line 226 when the narrator tells the reader that, 'Þus sat þe kny3t yn symplyté' (Thus sat the knight so plain) (226). He is plain, he has stripped away his more complex social identity.

Furthermore, we again encounter the phenomenon that resting under a tree leaves one open to interference by otherworldly powers. Just like with *Sir Orfeo*, the first fairy encounter occurs in the presence of a tree. In this case, Launfal has taken refuge from the warm weather by resting under the shade of the tree. In *Sir Orfeo*, Heurodis slept under a tree when the fairy encounter happened. As opposed to *Sir Orfeo*'s first fairy encounter *Sir Launfal*'s is much more innocuous:

> He saw come out of holtes hore | Gentyll maydens two: | … | Launfal began to syche; | Þey com to hym ouer þe hoth; | He was curteys, & a3ens hem goth, | And geetted hem myldelyche
>
> (He saw that out of the shady woods came | Two gentle maidens: | … | Launfal began to sigh; | They came towards him over the heath; | He was courteous, & walked to meet them, | And greeted them gently) (231-232, 249-252)

The two fairies he meets are benign, and Launfal's encounter with them is more amicable than in *Sir Orfeo*. Instead of being surprised by his encounter with fairies, Launfal greets the fairies as if it was a completely normal occurrence. The fairies approach him as if he was the reason they came out of the woods to begin with. My point in highlighting this passage is that through the ritual of being rejected, having his status decreased and rejecting civilisation, Launfal is more closely aligned to the fairies. Furthermore, Launfal's name holds significance in his rejection. The name 'Launfal' is probably derived from Lanval or Lamwell and can be broken into two parts 'laun' and 'fal.' According to A.J. Bliss, the connection that is '…the termination being associated with OF *vals, vaus* 'valley'. The first element is clearly Breton Lan (Welsh Lian) 'sanctuary' < landa' (1958, 81). Launfal, would therefore mean sanctuary valley. The name of the protagonist himself therefore seem to hint towards seeking shelter in nature. Launfal reaches the forest and partially lives up to the meaning of his name (Sanctuary Vally). He finds a natural sanctuary with the fairies in the forest. This is the first of two escapes in the story, the second, more permanent escape occurs at the end, when he joins Tryamour in the Otherworld. Furthermore, Launfal's name may indeed also foreshadow the ending of the story. At the end of *Sir Launfal*, Launfal leaves the human world with Tryamour seeking shelter in the Otherworld. Sanctuary valley may therefore refer to the Otherworld, the world that Launfal finds accepting by the end of the story.

3.8 Launfal escapes the human world

Sir Launfal is unique among the three stories this thesis discusses as it is the only one where the main character does not return to some sort of human society. The narrator tells the reader that Launfal has left the human world behind and gone to the Otherworld:

> Þat noble kny3t of þe Rounde Table, | Was take ynto Fayrye; | Seþþe saw hym yn þys lond noman, | Ne no more of hym telle y ne can

(That noble knight of the Round Table, | Was brought into Fairyland; | Ever since none saw him in this land | Nor could I tell you more of him) (1034-1037).

Launfal is done with society, the courts, the friendly knights and barons who all helped him possibly escape death. In his book *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, James Wade argues that,

> When Tryamour—in another form of diegetically arbitrary adoxic mercy—simultaneously frees Launfal from both her supernatural banishment and his ban within the human world, he opts to follow her to her fairy realm where he is to reside indefinitely. Such a move poses the idea that there is space for fulfillment [*sic*] outside the chivalric world (Wade 2011, 141-142).

It is the conscious abandonment of a society that Launfal knows for an unknown world he knows practically nothing about. Wade goes on to argue that if Launfal enters the Otherworld, 'there remains the notion that, in the end, the fairy realm may not be able to provide him with all that he desires' (2011, 142). This is a possibility: that Launfal can enter the Otherworld and not find that which fulfils his desires, and maybe he one day would wake up to regret his decision. Launfal joins Tryamour and he is proven innocent, and Arthur himself admits to this,

> Kyng Artour seyde, wythouten oþe, | 'Ech man may yse þat ys soþe, | Bryȝtere þat ye be
>
> (King Arthur said, beyond a doubt, | 'Each man can see that it is true, | That you are more beautiful) (1003-1005).

Launfal's innocence is proven. If he chooses to go with Tryamour, he surely knows what he is giving up. Thus, when Launfal leaves the human world, he makes the decision aware of the cost. Launfal, who has been mistreated by humans, by civilisation, chooses to abandon it. He leaves it behind for the wild, unknown and untamed. The human world cannot provide him

with that escape, instead chooses that which is closest; that which closest resembles the opposite to the civilisation that abandoned him so easily.

3.9 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the Otherworld of *Sir Launfal* is less obvious in its appearance than the Otherworld of *Sir Orfeo*. I made this argument to demonstrate that the aesthetic similarities between Otherworlds are not sufficient for deciding whether they are close to wilderness. I found that the deciding factor for Otherworlds relation to wilderness was its inhabitants.

Tryamour, the most prominent fairy of *Sir Launfal*'s Otherworld, demonstrates through her marriage with Launfal that she forces him to make a re-evaluation of his own position in civilisation; Tryamour's presence creates an upset in the code of conduct that is expected of her. She also uses her formidable power to gain purchase in the political world of human civilisation, but instead of using it as a platform to appeal for Launfal's innocence, she uses it as tool to disrupt the court of king Arthur. Tryamour's independence from the human world allows her to transgress its rules and act outside it. She embodies her otherness by being unburdened with the expectations of civilisation and uses it cause disruption. Launfal is driven towards that otherness because he is rejected by civilisation and made into an other.

I argued that, Launfal suffers several reductions of his status and his life is made more difficult by uncooperative and mean humans. Guinevere excludes him from the other knights by not giving him gifts, while also undermining him when she is at court and has become poor, making snide remarks of his status. Launfal inflicts some reduction on himself when he spends all of his money, yet his treatment by other people, both before and after remain malicious. Launfal is driven to re-evaluate himself and escape from civilisation to avoid the judgements that society and the people in it would put on him.

Chapter 4: *Sir Degare*'s quest for civilisation

In the story of *Sir Degare*, the connection between fairy and wilderness is once again evoked by the fairies' behaviour and the Otherworld they inhabit. This chapter will focus on the story of Degare a half-fairy knight and his quest to become civilised. His journey to be reunited with his parents is a tale of going from the wild to the civilised. I read the story of Degare as an almost reversed *Sir Launfal*. Whereas *Sir Launfal* is the story of a man finding the wilderness more palatable than civilisation, *Sir Degare*'s protagonist is left outside the society to which he belongs and returns through a series of trials. In doing so, Degare brings his fairy father with him from a forest in the far west, thus bringing him from the forest (and the Otherworld) into civilisation. As I will argue, Degare bringing his mother's rapist home for a 'happy' ending is both strange and disturbing. Whether intentionally or not, the author, by forcing the traditional romance ending on the bizarre situation.

I analyse *Sir Degare* through three main arguments. The first argument will focus on the rape by Degare's fairy knight father of his mother and intrusion and debasement of she suffers by hand of the fairy knight. However, this rape also represents the fairy knight extending the reach of the wilderness into civilisation. The scene almost mirrors Heurodis' dream invasion in *Sir Orfeo*, but the implications of the rape in *Sir Degare* goes beyond simply imposing wilderness in civilisation. Instead, the rape is a challenge to the very root of civilisation itself by the fairy knight threatening the line of succession in the kingdom and challenging the king's ability to protect the kingdom itself. Secondly, I want to argue that Degare's unique upbringing and the beginning of his quest sets him up as closer to nature than his later self. Degare's use of natural objects as weaponry and his near invulnerability is more reminiscent of his fairy parentage than the human, when he is offered a chance to join civilisation, he loses his connection to wilderness. Thirdly, I argue that Degare's journey into the Otherworld is further proof the fairy Otherworld's connection to wilderness, by looking at

the transition from the human world to the Otherworld and the inhabitants of that Otherworld. Fourthly and lastly, I argue that Degare's connection to his fairy father is the last remnant of his wilderness, which last through the story until his father is brought into civilisation.

4.1 Summary of *Sir Degare*

Before moving on to the rest of the chapter, I would like to quickly familiarise the reader with the plot of *Sir Degare*. *Sir Degare* begins almost like *Sir Orfeo* with the group of women relaxing underneath a tree, but differs in that Degare's mother gets lost in the woods. Degare's mother encounters a fairy who rapes her, impregnates her and then disappears leaving her with a broken sword and asking her to tell their son that he should find his father. Degare's mother carries Degare to term and then, in order to hide him from her father, leaves him in the care of a hermit. After growing up, Degare leaves to find his mother. He encounters an earl being attacked by a dragon and dispatches the dragon with ease. Degare is given a steed, a sword and a servant with which he rides into the town where his grandfather's castle is and fights him for the hand of his mother (unbeknownst to him). He unknowingly marries his mother only to suddenly remember that he needed to check whether she was his mother. After Degare reconciles with his mother, she sends him out to find his father. On his way to his father, he rescues a woman living in a strange castle who promises herself to him if he can save her from an evil knight. Degare defeats the knight and returns to his quest for his father. He finally finds his father and after a duel, his father recognises him. Degare's father offers him eternity in what might be the fairy Otherworld, but Degare declines and instead offers to bring his father back with him. Degare returns to his grandfather's kingdom with his father and annuls his marriage to his mother.

4.2 *Sir Degare*'s gender-role reversal

The introduction of Degare's father sets the precedence for how the story of *Sir Degare* treats fairies and the fairies' relationship to civilisation for the rest of the lay. Degare's father is a

dangerous and mysterious entity. His very aggressive action of the rape challenges the very ideas of law and conduct. The lay's opening presents us with Degare's mother, his grandfather the king and their court going to visit the queen's grave. During the travelling Degare's mother and a few other women stop to relieve themselves in the forest they are travelling through. Afterwards, they become lost in the woods and the other women fall asleep under a tree. However, in a reversal of Heurodis' kidnapping in *Sir Orfeo*, Degare's mother does not fall asleep, but walks around,

> And herknede song of wilde foules. | So fer in þe launde ȝhe goht iwis | Þat ȝhe ne wot nevere whare ȝe is
>
> (And listened to the wild birds' songs. | So far into the land she went | That she did not know where she was) (80-82, Eckert 2015)[13].

Her attempts to get back result in her becoming even more lost. She wanders so far away that she does not recognise anything. She becomes frustrated and wonders whether she will die there when she spots the fairy knight.

The introduction of the fairy knight features an interesting reversal of the typical trope of describing the attractive features of women. I discussed the trope in the *Sir Orfeo* chapter, when Heurodis is described by her physical traits. For convenience I shall reiterate the quote from Jacob Lewis' article, '…we as viewers are prohibited from seeing Heurodis directly, we cannot be affected by those "attributes of the beloved" [listing desirable physical attributes] and are this spared from the effects of *eros*' (Lewis 2013, 17). In the same vein, Degare's mother's traits are not described beyond that she is,

[13] In future quotes from *Sir Degare* in this chapter I will only list the line number as it is explicitly clear when I am using other works or articles.

> But a maidenchild fre and fair. | Her gentiresse and here beaute | Was moche renound in ich countre
>
> (But a young maiden noble and fair. | Her gentility and beauty | Were well-known in every country) (20-22).

The 'attributes of the beloved' that Lewis mentions in his article is equally absent in the description of Degare's mother. She is described as being noble, fair, gentle and beautiful. The focus is firstly on her nobility, then on her looks, but they are non-specific. All the reader can gather is that she is beautiful, nothing more. Meanwhile, the knight is described and objectified in the way that Lewis' 'attributed of the beloved' normally is used on women in romance. The fairy knight is described thusly:

> Gentil ȝong and jolif man | A robe of scarlet he hadde upon. | His visage was feir his bodi ech weies | Of countenaunce riȝt curteis | Wel farende legges fot and honde. | Þer nas non in al þe kynges londe | More apert man þan was he
>
> (A young gentle and handsome man | Who wore a scarlet robe. | His face was fair and so was his body | The splitting image of nobility | The same could be said of his shapely legs, feet and hands. | There was none in the land | More elegant than him) (95-101).

His body being described in detail with the beauty of specific limbs in focus the image of the fairy knight evokes the *eros*, as Lewis called it, that is usually reserved for women in romance stories.

This also draws similarities between the reversed gender roles of *Sir Launfal*'s fairy, Lady Tryamour. Tryamour, as Elizabeth S. Leet argued in her article, 'Objectification, Empowerment, and the Male Gaze in the Lanval Corpus,' is able to change herself to gain advantage in a given situation. Leet says that, '…the fairy monarchs carefully design their

powerful physical entities in order to liberate their chosen consorts and retreat to their private fairy realms' (Leet 2016, 76). Now, there are some key differences between Leet's argument and what is done in *Sir Degare* and I do not mean to imply that she at all argues that this is a universal principle for fairies. However, I do find the part where the fairies 'carefully design their powerful physical entities' (2016, 76) to be particularly relevant to the story of *Sir Degare*. The fairy knight has clearly made his appearance such that it is attractive to Degare's mother, as the narrator exclaims,

> Þen segh hi swich a siȝt! | His visage was feir his bodi ech weies | Of countenaunce riȝt curteis | Wel farende legges fot and honde. | Þer nas non in al þe kynges londe | More apert man þan was he
>
> (Then she saw such a sight! | Towards her came a knight | … | His face was fair and so was his body | The splitting image of nobility | The same could be said of his shapely legs, feet and hands. | There was none in the land | More elegant than him) (93-94, 96-101).

Her encounter with the fairy knight is in some ways similar to Orfeo's meeting with Tryamour. The fairy knight seems to have change his appearance to seduce Degare's mother and Tryamour looks the way she does to appeal to Launfal, both with the intention to seduce their human counterparts. The big difference is of course the intent behind both seductions. Tryamour turns out to be a kind fairy and her seduction of Launfal is positive, while the fairy knight's seduction is more sinister. The viewing pleasure that is given by the handsome fairy knight is only an illusion to hide his malevolent nature.

4.3 Fairy rape

The fairy knight's petty deception turns into direct contempt when he rapes Degare's mother. What I mean by this is that although the rape of Degare's mother is gruesome, it also has a

secondary purpose; that purpose being to challenge the legal fabric of Middle English civilisation in a violent fashion. The fairies that I have discussed so far in the thesis have all challenged the civilisation and, in both cases, they have gone after kings. The fairy king in *Sir Orfeo* challenged the Orfeo's ability to protect his land and his wife by disrupting both with wilderness, seemingly at random. The severity of the fairy king's attack is still not as disruptive as the fairy knight in *Sir Degare*, Orfeo could have remarried. Tryamour, on the other hand represented a different wilderness in her defiance of civil norms. Her attack on Guinevere is a challenge to Arthur, but not in a way that threatens to unravel his kingdom. The fairy knight, however, represents malevolent and directed wilderness in his attack on civilisation. He purposefully goes after Degare's mother and reveals his true intention when he says,

> Iich have iloved þe mani a yer | And now we beȝ us selve her. | Þou best mi lemman ar þou go | Weþer þe likeȝ wel or wo
>
> (I have loved you for many years | And now there is only us here. | You better be my lover before you go | Whether you want to or not)

This abrupt change in the fairy knight's behaviour, from handsome saviour to brutal rapist is jarring. The impression that we are left with is that of dissonance between what the characters see and what they actually are looking at; what looks safe and comforting may very well be threatening and dangerous.

The act of the rape may seem to be a contrived plot device so that Degare does not know who his mother is, but upon closer examination this is not the case. In her book *Stolen Women in Medieval England : Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500*, Caroline Dunn explains that, 'Female sexuality was often deemed the possession of a male guardian, and, if he could not protect a woman's chastity, then she could lose it' (Dunn 2012, 52). The fairy

knight's rape of Degare's mother has legal implications beyond just being a heinous act. The act of the rape challenges the king's power as a 'guardian' of his daughter. The fairy knight actively challenges the king's power to protect. By this, I do not mean to reduce Degare's mother's role as a victim, but as Dunn clarifies that, 'It would be going too far, as we shall see, to assert that medieval women were possessions, but women were measured not by their own qualities but by the power and status of male relatives' (2012, 52). Degare's mother is very much defined by her relation to the king, as the narrator states,

> And þo þe maiden of age wes | Kynges sones to him speke | Emperours and dukes eke | To haven his doughter in mariage | For love of here heritage. | Ac þe kyng answered ever | Þat no man schal here halden ever | But ȝif he mai in turneying | Him out of his sadel bring
>
> (And though the maiden came of age | To him came Kings' sons | Emperors and dukes also | To ask for her hand in marriage | To ensure her heritage. | The king only answered | That no man should ever marry her | Unless they in a tournament | Could throw him from his saddle) (26-34).

Degare's mother's status is very much decided by her father as he acts as her actual guardian in front of suitors and her position of princess being tied to his status as king. So, when the fairy knight commits the rape, it is in direct defiance of the king's edict and in challenge of his power as a guardian. Simply put, the fairy knight challenges the king, and by extension civilisation, by raping Degare's mother.

4.4 The consequence of the rape

Degare's mother is the kingdom's future as the heir apparent and will be the one who gives birth to the next king or queen of the kingdom, thus when the fairy knight with a cruel irony says,

> ‘Lemman’, he seide, ‘gent and fre | Mid schilde I wot þat þou schalt be. | Siker ich wot hit worht a knave
>
> (‘My love,’ he said, ‘noble and free’ | I know that you will bare my child. | I am certain that it shall be a boy) (119-121).

His use of the word ‘fre,’ is notable because it has multiple meanings. The word ‘fre’ may refer to ‘Of a person: free in rank or condition, having the social status of a noble or a freeman’ (*MED* 2020). This would be the case here as Degare’s mother is a princess, so she is a noble, however, the fairy knight’s statement carries double meaning in this case. The fairy knight has robbed Degare’s mother of freedoms by forcing himself on her. Thus, one can read ‘fre’ as ‘a free person’ (*MED* 2020), which would insult to injury as the fairy knight has decided that she is pregnant and has taken away her choice in the matter. Moreover, if the first definition of having noble status is the intended meaning, the fairy knight’s rape complicates Degare’s mother’s legal status as noble. His rape of her is a challenge to the power of the king. Dunn explains that in Middle English society,

> Medieval legal commentators and scribes depicted the alleged loss of virginity in various terms. The predominant terminology conveys loss, rather than bodily harm. Often the offender was accused of stealing the victim’s virginity; thereby he ‘abstulit ei virginitatem suam’ or ‘rapuit ei virginitatem suam’. Modern editions sometimes translate the latter as ‘raped her virginity’, but the use of ‘abstulit’ in other texts clarifies that the perpetrator is stealing a possession, the treasure or maidenhead, from the woman (2012, 57).

Thus, while the fairy knight performs a violent act towards Degare’s mother in the rape, he also commits, by contemporary legal definitions, a theft. Per the legal definition, the virginity of women was entrusted to their guardians and virginity is considered a property in many

cases. Simply put, the fairy knight's intrusion in the affairs of humans is not just disruptive and challenging to the power of the kingdom, but is also directly violating the legal bonds of civilisation. The act of the rape becomes an act of contempt for civilisation, its legal system and norms. I have argued so far that wilderness can be said to be the opposite of civilisation; the unknown, untamed and wild. Fairies also radiate a wilderness-like atmosphere about them, wherever they go and wherever they extend their influence, always in the presence of civilisation. The fairy knight seems to oppose civilisation, he acts wild in the sense that he does not conform to the norms and laws of human society and he acts untamed as he does not submit to the social hierarchy or limits by human society.

4.5 The known unknown of Degare's parentage

The fairy knight does represent an extension of the unknown, albeit in a more roundabout manner. He is unknown at first, merely appearing as a helpful and handsome knight, but after revealing his true nature by raping Degare's mother he seems to abandon much of what makes him obscured. The fairy knight lays bare his intention when he tells Degare's mother that he has loved her for many years (line 109) and that she should,

> Tak him þe swerd and bidde him fonde | To sechen his fader in eche londe. | … | ȝit peraventure time biȝ | Þat mi sone mete me wiȝ | Be mi swerd I mai him kenne.
>
> (Give him my sword and ask him to attempt | To search for his father in every land. | … | If perchance the time comes | That my son should encounter me | I shall recognise him by my sword) (126-127, 133-135).

The fairy knight is much more open with his intent than the other fairies that I have discussed in the previous chapters. The fairy knight makes no attempt to hide from the humans, in fact he invites his civilised half-human son to find him by giving Degare's mother the broken sword. There is no guarantee Degare would go find his father, however, it is set in a romance

story and the handing over of the sword is heavy-handed foreshadowing. *Sir Degare*'s story is one of familial reunion after all. But the fairy knight might not be as clear as an initial reading leaves one to believe. The fairy knight simply disappears leaving Degare's mother in the forest, retreating into obscurity with no evidence of him existing, except for the child that Degare's mother becomes pregnant with. Effortlessly, Degare's father makes the transition from the unknown to known, back to unknown only to return once more to the known to complete Degare's character arc. Other fairies I have examined hitherto in the thesis have also made transitions from unknown to some sort of known, with Tryamour being the closest. However, they inevitably must make themselves unknown again because they cannot remain in human civilisation without giving up on their Otherworldly power and identity. Simply put, just as other beings like the animals of *Sir Orfeo* or orchards and forests (domesticated forests) of both *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*, fairies too run the risk of becoming affected by human civilisation, something which I have argued most of them resist. Nevertheless, the fairy knight breaks with this pattern.

Degare's fairy father is an untamed, unknown and wild entity who must be tamed in order to legitimise Degare's quest, his claim to the throne and his place in civilisation. Degare needs to bring his father into civilisation because Degare stands on the precipice of being a fully civilised person. Degare cannot achieve his project of civilising without conquering his father. Kenneth Eckert discusses the taming of the fairy knight in his article 'Absent Fathers and Searching Sons in Sir Degaré.' He argues that,

> What is interesting is the sustained expressiveness with which Degaré, with increasing intelligence, retraces and replays his father's actions on his way back to him. At first the princess's gloves and letter mechanically whet Degaré's decision to leave the hermitage, and his decisions are meaningful but unconscious (Eckert 2018, 39).

I want to extend Eckert's argument a bit further. Degare performing his father's actions is a way to justify the fairy knight's actions earlier in the lay so that the fairy knight may join in the familial unit later on. Degare's father returns with him to the human world and as a result, he is redeemed as Eckert describes it, '…consistent with Degaré's 'taming' of his father by conveying him into a Christian domain. In the final scenes of epilogue nothing marks him as non-human or enchanted anymore' (2018, 41). Eckert puts the word taming between quotation marks, but I would argue that there is an actual taming of the Otherworldly fairy knight. The fairy knight, has hidden in a forest to the far west, unknown, unrestricted by the gazing eyes of the reader and of the restrictions of civilisation. But as Degare shows up, a man of Christianity and as a knight, he brings with him the burden of civilisation. When he finally reaches the forest where his father is, by pure happenstance, he must conquer his father because his father represents the antithesis of his own existence.

4.6 Degare's fairy parentage

To understand why Degare ends up as the redeemer of his family and of civilisation in the end of the story, I want to take a closer look at his upbringing. Degare is left with a hermit who sends Degare to live with a wealthy merchant family for ten years and if he survived past ten years he was to return to the hermit and live with him for another ten years. During his twenty years of growing up, in the merchant family he becomes,

> Wel inorissched god and hende. | Was non betere in al þat ende
>
> (Well nourished, kind and handsome. | There was none better in all the land) (282-283).

The description of his body is similar to the initial description of his father with the focus being on his handsome and perfect looks:

> Þer nas non in al þe kynges londe | More apert man þan was he

(There was none in the land | More elegant than him) (100-101).

The hermit teaches Degare '…clerkes lore' (clerical knowledge) (293) and the result of his upbringing is a pious and strong Degare. The focus on Degare's piety and the upbringing in civilisation are perhaps the biggest difference between Degare and his father. His similarity to his fairy father in his natural looks and strength, and his Christian, civilised education belonging to his human mother makes Degare the bridge in the family between the two worlds.

Moreover, Degare's name, like Launfal's, holds meaning pertinent to the story. Degare's name reflects his half-fairy, half-human nature. The hermit gives Degare his name and the narrator take special care to describe its significance:

> In þe name of þe Trinite. He hit nemnede Degarre. | Degarre nowt elles ne is | But þing þat not never whar it is | Or þe þing þat is negȝ forlorn also
>
> (In the name of the Trinity. | He was named Degare. | Degare means nothing other | Than a thing that is always lost (unknown) | or a thing that is almost lost) (259-263).

The name has significance beyond the fact his mother left him on the doorsteps of the hermitage. Degare is also a person who is in a constant state of not belonging. Degare's name carries the meaning of being always or almost lost, a liminal thing that exists just on the edge of the known. He is after all only half-human. This half-ness is also reflected in the act of naming him. He is named 'In þe name of þe Trinite' (In the name of the Trinity). By giving Degare his name by invoking the Trinity, the hermit inducts Degare into the Christian civilisation of Middle English England. Thus, while his name represents his half-ness, so does the naming itself. The half-ness of his name is then reflected in his actions when he leaves for his quest to reunite his family.

4.7 Degare's nature connection

As soon as Degare leaves the hermitage, he displays a link to the natural world in his weapon of choice, an oak club. The act of chopping down the oak reflects the way he will tame his father later on. The narrator describes Degare chopping down and wielding the oak tree in detail:

> He hew adoun boþe grete and grim | To beren in his hond wiȝ him | A god sapling of an ok. | Whan he þarwiȝ ȝaf a strok | Ac wer he never so strong a man | Ne so gode armes hadde upon | Þat he ne scholde falle to grounde
>
> (He chopped down a great and stout tree, | Which he could carry with him, | It was an Oak sapling. | When he gave the sapling a swing | There was no man | Nor any weapons | That would not fall to the ground) (331-337).

The choice of an oak club as a weapon is significant because the logical choice would be a steel sword. Eckert, who also provides notes on the *Sir Degare* text in the version used in this thesis, suggests that, 'Degare declines a knight's gear in favor of an oak club as a sign of humility… Oaks had significance both as objects of worship in the pagan Celtic world and as Christian symbols of faith and virtue' (2015, 259). The choice of weapon is not only significant as symbol of Degare's faith and humility, but also of his fairy heritage. Degare being half-fairy and half-human is reflected in his choice of weapon by association. The weapon holds significance in the two realms, as does Degare's parentage. There is also importance behind Degare choosing a natural weapon as his first. So far in this thesis I have associated fairies with, spreading the wilderness, the untouched natural world, in both a metaphorical and actual form, Degare is no exception. Degare eschews the manufactured weapons of civilisation. He chooses a natural weapon and upon swinging it, the narrator tells the reader that no one could defeat him while wielding the club. While Degare, like his father possesses the supernatural strength of fairies, it is specifically when he swings the oak club

that we are told of his unrivalled power. It is almost as if the power inherent in the oak tree, the unending potential inside the living things in nature is channelled by Degare. Like the other fairies in the other stories in the thesis and his father, Degare possesses the ability to channel the power of the natural world. At this early point in the story, Degare is at his closest in terms of his fairy heritage; however, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Degare must give up on his fairy half in order to become the civilised redeemer of his family.

4.8 Degare begins abandoning his fairy heritage

Degare's quest for familial reunion is one that ends with both Degare and his father abandoning the Otherworld and the fairy life. Leaving his fairy heritage also means leaving the wilderness aspects of his fairy-half behind. The first signs of Degare leaving his fairy half behind occurs when Degare makes his way to his grandfather's castle and unbeknownst to him, marry his mother. As previously stated, Degare sets off from the hermit's abode with only an oak club in hand. He almost immediately stumbles upon his first heroic encounter in the form of an earl and his knights fighting a dragon. The narrator tells the reader how Degare easily dispatches the dragon,

> He tok his bat gret and long | And in þe forehefd he him batereȝ | Þat al þe forehefd he tospatereȝ. | He fil adoun anonriȝt | And frapte his tail wiȝ gret miȝt | Upon Degarres side | Þat up so doun he gan to glide. | Ac he stert up ase a man | And wiȝ his bat leide upan | And al tofrusst him ech a bon | Þat he lai ded stille as a ston.
>
> (He took his great and long club | And battered the dragon's forehead | So hard that he crushed the dragon's skull. | The dragon stumbled immediately | And swung his tail with great power | Into Degare's side | So hard that he knocked him upside down. | But Degare got back up | And with his club he beat the dragon | An broke all the bones in its body | So that the dragon was completely dead) (387-397).

Degare, with his oak club is strong enough to beat the dragon completely to death. The earl and his knights could not handle the dragon with their armour and manufactured weapons. This is made all the more impressive when one recalls the description of the dragon as, 'And harder than stele ywys he was' (And he [the dragon] was harder than steel) (365E). Degare's oak club crushes the dragon without breaking. Degare also demonstrates his bodily power in this encounter by escaping unharmed. He is struck so hard that he flips in mid-air, yet is not hurt. Due to the supernatural gifts that the fairies have consistently been given or have given to others in both this story (Degare's father) and the other stories, I do not think that it is unfair to assume that Degare wins at least partially because of his half-fairy parentage. This assumption is strengthened by my earlier comparison of Degare's father's physique and Degare's own similar physique.

In addition to Degare defeating the dragon, the earl bequeaths some gifts to Degare that all are exemplary of human civilisation, all manufactured:

> And ȝaf him a stede ful god | And noble armure riche and fin | When he wolde armen him þerin. | And a palefrai to riden an | And a knave to ben his man. | And ȝaf him a swerd briȝt | And dubbed him þer to knyȝt
>
> (And gave him a strong steed | And exquisite armour, strong and finely crafted | For when he would need it. | And a palfrey to ride | And a man to serve him. | And gave him a bright sword | And knighted him on the spot) (423-429).

Degare accepts the gifts, but in doing so he also must abandon his club. As opposed to his father, Degare also dresses himself in armour, armour which one would think Degare did not need seeing as he could withstand a blow from the dragon that would have killed a lesser man. By abandoning his club, his natural sturdiness and finally, being knighted, Degare becomes assimilated into human civilisation. That said, being knighted in itself is not

necessarily a sign of human civilisation, his father was a fairy knight, after all. But, Degare's transformation is compound. He is not just becoming a knight. He chooses to leave his club behind, a club which could slay dragons (when manufactured steel could not) and represents his half-ness. He also chooses to put armour on, when he did not need to. He effectively leaves his fairy heritage behind, becoming Sir Degare the human knight.

Further evidence of Degare leaving his fairy half behind is his duel with his grandfather. In the jousting duel with his grandfather, Degare fights on equal ground with his grandfather, when his previous encounter was him slaying a dragon. He barely manages to knock his grandfather out of the saddle after a long match:

> He smot þe kyng in þe lainer | He miȝt flit noþer fer ne ner. | Þe king was strong and harde sat. | Þe stede ros up biforn wiȝ þat | And sire Degarre so þriste him þan | Þat maugre whoso grochche bigan | Out of þe sadel he him cast | Tail over top riȝt ate last
>
> (His struck the king between the plates in his armour | So that he [the king] could not move from the spot. | The king was strong and would not be thrown. | The king's steed reared, however | And Sir Degare gave a final thrust | So that no matter who began the grudge | Degare pushed the king out of his saddle | And the king fell head over feet at last) (588-595).

One might even make the argument that Degare only manages to win because the king's horse rears. Degare's duel with his grandfather is a far cry from his supernatural feat of strength in the battle with the dragon. The stark difference between pre-knight Degare and knight Degare over what amounts to about two hundred lines is strange. One could attribute the inconsistency in power to dramatic tension, or that his human grandfather was as strong as him; a twenty-year-old man. Nevertheless, I believe that the drastic change in power is, as I have suggested earlier, Degare leaving behind his fairy heritage by leaving his club behind

and with it his nature connection. It is after Degare is accepted into the social hierarchy by being knighted and receiving the manufactured items that what he can accomplish is limited. Just like it is Degare's mission to tame his father, he himself must be tamed by civilisation before he can take part in it.

Degare's change can be seen as a kind of allegory for the change that civilisation puts wilderness through. Only after he has been deemed domesticated, his wild, untamed and unknown sides removed can he be considered part of civilisation. Degare abandons the wild by leaving his club, he abandons the untamed by limiting his strength, and he abandons the unknown when his parentage is revealed to his grandfather and mother. However, Degare's true transformation cannot be complete without the final unknown of his character also being domesticated – namely his fairy father. In order to do so, he must find his father and bring him out of the Otherworld, thus redeeming his father and his family, and legitimising his own transition.

4.9 Venturing into the Otherworld

In the last chapter I mentioned that deciding definitively whether Degare enters the Otherworld is a more complicated question than with the other stories. By this I meant that there is no clear threshold crossed as in *Sir Orfeo* or even the less obvious threshold of *Sir Launfal*. Instead, the transition into the Otherworld is almost seamless with only a few hints that there even is a crossing into an Otherworld. Degare's venture into the Otherworld arguably begins when he searches for his father. The narrator describes Degare's journey as he sets off from his grandfather's castle,

> So longe he passede into west | Þat he com into þeld forest | Þer he was biȝeten som while.

(He rode westwards for so long | That he came to an old forest | The same forest he had been conceived in long ago) (748-750).

As with the other fairy stories, reaching the Otherworld often requires a journey westward and, in this case, Degare ends up in the forest where his father first appeared to his mother. Moreover, Degare's return to the forest he was conceived in emphasises that his project of civilising himself is nearing completion. The final part of Degare's fairy heritage allows him to pass into the forest. I discussed how fairies can manifest in nature in the previous chapters, and use it as portals to the Otherworld. It is not a far reach to say that the forest Degare rides through also serves as the portal to transport him into the Otherworld, as his father used it twenty years before. Even stranger is that the forest is so enormous that he rides through it for several days, and while doing so,

No quik best he fond of man. | Ac mani wilde bestes he seghȝ

(He saw no signs of tame animal. | Alas, he saw many a wild beast) (753-754).

In his ride, he sees wild beasts, as he describes them, they are given no further descriptors and remain unknown, another sign that he has entered the Otherworld. The animals as well as the forest itself remains unknown, untamed and wild in the eyes of the now civilised Degare. This is made clearer by the fact that Degare, like his mother, '…nist never bi wiche side.' (…did not know where to go) (759). He becomes lost in the forest, whereas his fairy father could come and go as he pleased. Degare has, as discussed previously, is attempting to leave his fairy heritage behind. Thus, like his human mother, Degare now also human, becomes lost when crossing to the Otherworld because he has left his fairy heritage behind. Degare then reaches a castle that at first glance seem empty,

Þe bregge was adoune þo | And þe gate open also | … | He passed up into þe halle | Biheld aboute and gan to calle | Ac neiþer on lond ne on heȝ | No quik man he ne seȝ. | Amidde þe halle flore | A fir was bet stark an store

(The bridge was lowered | And the gate stood open | … | He went into the hall | Looked around and shouted | Alas, whether he searched high or low | He could not see any man alive. | In middle of the hall floor | A fire burned bright) (770-771, 778-783).

The strange entrance into the seemingly empty castle only serve to enhance the uncanny nature of this part of the story. A castle which has its bridge lowered and its gate open, with a roaring fireplace adds to the strangeness of the place and serves as a further hint that Degare might not be in the human world anymore. In the beginning of this chapter, when mentioned the subtle transitions between Otherworld and the human world, it was this kind of transition I meant. It is far more subtle than the mountain portal in *Sir Orfeo* or the invitation into the forest by fairies in *Sir Launfal*.

4.10 Familial reunions

Degare reunion with his father is an attempt to legitimise Degare's quest and redeem his family by reuniting his family. Degare meets his father in a forest valley and the two decide to fight before they know each other's identities. Degare, armed with precious gifts he has been given by the lady in the castle, while his father is only described as having an azure and gold shield. Degare's father initially accuses Degare:

'Velaun, wat dost þou here | In mi forest to chase mi dere

(Villain, why are you here | In my forest to hunt my deer) (1032-1033)?

As discussed in *Sir Orfeo*, forest law gave kings rights to protect their land from poachers. I shall reiterate Jean R. Birrell's explanation from chapter two for convenience, 'Their [the

forest laws] original interest lay in protecting the deer for hunting, and they designated as royal forests, subject to forest law, areas suited for this purpose' (Jean R. Birrell 1980, 78). The implication of Degare's father claiming that it is his deer, either makes him a king or a warden of some sort. Due to him being referred to as the fairy knight and not a fairy king, I choose to interpret it as if he is some sort of warden. Or, perhaps, Degare's father could be lying. He has not been above deception before and there is no reason to think that he is not being deceptive now as well.

Regardless, Degare's father successfully manages to talk Degare into a duel. A duel that neither of them win. Degare finds out that the knight is his father and, in that moment, Degare's father offers him a way to give up on human civilisation and embrace his fairy heritage. The narrator tells us that Degare's father,

> …he him to his castel gan lede | And bad him dwelle wiȝ him ai
>
> (…began leading him [Degare] to his castle | And asked him to live there forever) (1097-1098).

Degare's father offers him immortality in the fairy Otherworld, unchaining him from human civilisation. But Degare must decline. In order for Degare to become fully human and integrated, he must take the final unknown of his life, his father, with him to civilisation. Degare's own life has been a civilising project, going from unknown, wild and untamed as he leaves the hermitage to becoming a knight in the social hierarchy, using manufactured weaponry and instead of his natural sturdiness, using armour. What remains of his fairy nature is his father and neither Degare, his family nor the story would come to a satisfying conclusion if Degare does not bring his father into civilisation.

4.11 Chapter conclusion

My reason for arguing that *Sir Degare* is a sort of reversal of *Sir Launfal* is its project of civilising. In the first sections of this chapter, I explain that the fairy knight's actions set the tone for how the characters treat the fairies and the wilderness for the rest of the lay. The fairy knight's very appearance is transgressive as it flips the gender roles in bodily description. The deception, however, is two-fold. Firstly, it sets up the untrustworthiness of the fairies, and second, it makes the reveal that the fairy knight is a rapist that much more offensive. It is not just a betrayal of Degare's mother's trust, but also forces re-evaluation of gendered descriptions. Moreover, the fairy knight's rape is a breach of both the expected code of conduct and a legal challenge to the succession of the throne and to the king's abilities as a ruler. The fairy knight spreads the disrupting power of wilderness into the domestic sphere of *Sir Degare*.

I argued that, Degare himself, is born and raised with civilised virtues, but cannot escape his fairy half due to the similarities in his appearance and that Degare's father also represent the antithesis of Degare. The fairy knight seemingly does what he wants, whereas Degare adheres to the codes of conduct and the laws of the land. However, Degare cannot be completely civilised he is half uncivilised fairy. Degare, therefore, must go through the process of shedding his fairy half by wearing manufactured items to be closer to the civilised person.

Lastly, I argued that Degare as he reunites with his father, tames him and domesticates him so that he may complete his project of civilising. Degare's father is the final unknown in his life, his father is his fairy connection and must therefore be civilised for Degare to join human civilisation proper.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In my introduction I explained that the goal of my thesis was to argue that wilderness is found to a lesser extent in the actual wild spaces in the stories, except when in the presence of fairies in *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* and *Sir Degare*. Moreover, I argued by looking at fairies and their relationship to wilderness, it will give new insight into how we read fairies in Middle English literature. My approach the thesis is interdisciplinary, but mainly used ecocriticism in order to provide close reading and analysis that highlighted the complex relationship between wilderness, humans and fairies. I chose to discuss the three texts separately in their own chapter to emphasise their unique approaches to wilderness, but also to more easily facilitate a comparison in my conclusion.

I first began with discussing wilderness in *Sir Orfeo*. I concluded in the chapter that it ultimately proved impossible to find wilderness in the forest, where Orfeo claims it is. This chapter is partially a rejection of Rudd's argument that the fairy Otherworld is not a wilderness. Instead, I point out that in these texts, one only finds wilderness present when fairies are in the stories. My argument is divided into four branches. Firstly, I argue that during the scene where Heurodis sleeps under the *ympe-tre*, she is exposed to wilderness through the fairies' disruptive presence. They appear in the domesticated forest of the orchard and in doing so introduce wilderness to a place that was believed to be under control of humanity. The disruption actively defies human civilisation and in doing so, the fairies affect Heurodis, whose civilised virtue they taint. I use Jacob Lewis' article 'Visible Nobility and Aristocratic Power in Sir Orfeo' to demonstrate how this turns Heurodis from a person who is described by her virtue into a more objectified person. When Rudd described wilderness, she stated that it, '…the wilderness 'confronts and confounds our designs', forcing us to confront and reappraise them likewise' (Rudd 2007, 102). Just like we often objectify wild animals and

wild nature, Orfeo objectifies Heurodis after she has been in contact with the wilderness by proxy (fairies).

In the second and third branch of my argument, I looked at Orfeo's journey into the 'holtes hore' (shady woods). Orfeo entered forest under the pretence that he had left civilisation behind, however as I proved, Orfeo never really left civilisation behind. The narrator makes use of comparisons to enforce the idea that Orfeo left civilisation, but the comparisons instead bring civilisation into the forest by acting as a reminder. That which is compared is given its analogue in civilisation, making them equivalent to the civilised object instead of their wild, natural states. I also argued that Orfeo does not leave civilisation in a legal sense. By using the historical research of Jean R. Birrell's article, 'The Medieval English Forest,' I establish a legal precedence for Orfeo's ownership of the forest. I argued that in addition to Orfeo's potential ownership of the forest, he establishes a mock court by gathering animal with his harp. The harp and the music are both products of a civilisation, and as such, Orfeo gathers his mock court under the banner of civilisation.

Lastly, Orfeo goes into the fairy Otherworld and reveals a fascination with the Otherworld that is similar to the fascination with otherness that Rudd argued for in her definition of wilderness. Furthermore, the Otherworld itself reflects pre-flood Earth from before human dominion or post Judgement that would a wasteland (wilderness) without humans. The Otherworld is more evocative of the ideas of wilderness than the forest was, contrary to human controlled civilisation, a wild, unknown and untamed world; a world beyond human control and perhaps even understanding. In the Otherworld, Orfeo encounters a castle which enforces the idea of the untamed and wild danger of the Otherworld by its macabre content of a gallery of the dead. Finally, Orfeo manages to escape the Otherworld with his wife by taming and subduing the fairy king with his civilised instrument.

After discussing *Sir Orfeo*, I moved on to *Sir Launfal* a text which I applied a more comparative analysis to. The chapter is split into two main arguments, the first is comparing the Otherworlds of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal* in order explore what makes *Sir Launfal*'s wilderness unique. By doing so I wanted to set up the argument that the natural connections of fairies and wilderness in *Sir Orfeo* was not a unique situation. In both of the stories I found that traveling to the Otherworlds required the connection to a green space. Moreover, the aesthetic similarities between the Otherworlds were similar. I found that if given closer scrutiny, the wilderness is revealed. The strange invitation and location of the Otherworld reveal a subtle unease as the reader does not know what awaits Launfal in the forest. This makes the Otherworld in *Sir Launfal* at least unknown. But as I discussed earlier, fairies themselves are instrumental in projecting the wilderness. This is seen in Tryamour, the fairy matriarch of *Sir Launfal*, as she takes on aspects that challenge and non-conformist in Middle English society. She sets the term of their marriage and is the provider for all of his wealth and power. I argued that she becomes a Mother Nature figure in the story by highlighting Launfal's dependence on her wealth and nurturing. Her function in the story becomes a metaphor for the relationship between humans and wilderness. Her freedom from the constraints of civilisation and her independence allows her to embody the wild, untamed and unknown of wilderness.

The second part of my analysis of *Sir Launfal* focuses on how Launfal is rejected by civilisation and escapes into the wilderness. Launfal's rejection happens through several slights against his character and through his own mistakes. Launfal is slighted by Guinevere for rejecting her advances and is slighted by the mayor of Caerleon who diminishes his status by implying that he is unimportant. Initially, this seems unrelated to the wilderness, however, there is a clear connection. Launfal's escape from civilisation allows him to avoid conforming and clearly sets him in a position where he is not above the fairy matriarch Tryamour.

Launfal's path to the wilderness differs in that it makes him accept it. Launfal, having lived in civilisation and been having become an other in it, seeks to find a place to belong. Launfal tries to find respite near a forest, and is then invited by fairies into the Otherworld inside the forest. James Wade posits that, 'Such a move poses the idea that there is space for fulfillment outside the chivalric world' (Wade 2011, 142). This idea of fulfilment outside chivalry is counter to the knightly world Launfal lived in. Launfal's invitation into the wilderness gives him the power to transgress the knightly virtues and societal norms. In the end, *Sir Launfal* leaves the ending relatively open. Launfal joins Tryamour in the Otherworld, but after they disappear, the reader is left with little evidence for what happens after. Launfal enters a wild, unknown and untamed place where the reader cannot follow him.

Lastly, my analysis turned to *Sir Degare*, which serves as the antithesis to *Sir Launfal*'s narrative of leaving the human world for the Otherworld. *Sir Degare* is, as I argued, a story in which the half-fairy, half-human protagonist Degare conquers wilderness. I divided my argument into three branches. The first is dedicated to Degare's mother meeting a fairy knight while lost in the forest and the subsequent rape. The traditional gender roles, when Degare's mother meets the fairy knight are subverted. Instead of Degare's mother being objectified, it is the fairy knight that is objectified, or othered, by her. I draw comparisons between the description of the fairy knight and Tryamour in their desire to change their appearance in order to put themselves in positions of power. But the appearance veils the fairy knight's true intentions. The fairy knight's sudden change in behaviour contrast with Tryamour's. Tryamour's wilderness is one that defies social norms, while the fairy knight attacks civilisation. The fairy knight's attack serves as a challenge to the legal fabric. I use Caroline Dunn's book *Stolen Women in Medieval England : Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500* in order to demonstrate the legal implication of the rape. The fairy knight raping Degare's mother is an attack on her father, the king's ability as a ruler. The rape of Degare's

mother also challenges the future fabric of the kingdom by impregnating her with a half-fairy, half-human person. The kingdom which would have an obvious heir in Degare's mother's son is seemingly ruined at this point in the story. The fairy knight's disruptive wilderness-like presence interferes in the civilised processes of that society. He does not conform to the laws or norms. The fairy knight makes his retreat into the unknown as he retreats from the readers eyes and mind when he leaves Degare's mother in the forest. Degare's father hides in his wild, untamed and unknown Otherworld until Degare show up to tame him, and subsequently bring him into civilisation. Degare does this to legitimise his own birth right and membership in society.

The second branch of my argument is based around Degare's own character. Degare's half-ness is from early on in the story explored in the comparisons between himself and his father. He is taught Latin, the cultured language of society. His education and his looks enhance the half-ness of Degare. The combination of his fairy side and his human side allows him to be a part of both the fairy wilderness and the civilised world.

Lastly, I argued that Degare undergoes a transformation to rid himself of his half-ness and join human civilisation fully. He is at his closest to his fairy side immediately after leaving the hermitage. He makes a club by chopping an oak tree and with that club manages to slay a dragon. After slaying the dragon, he is given a sword, armour and a horse. He leaves his club behind and in doing so, he leaves his supernatural strength and bodily power. By doing so, Degare chooses manufactured weapons and tools over his natural connection. By the time he reaches the duel with his grandfather, the king, Degare barely wins. Degare allows himself to be tamed and the result is him losing his connection to his fairy heritage further. Degare's change from half-fairy, half-man to civilised man is one that is allegorical for the domestication of wilderness by humans. Nevertheless, Degare is still connected to the fairy world by virtue of his father, so in order to completely transition to a civilised member of

humanity, he must tame his father and bring him into civilisation. Degare heads into the Otherworld in search of his father and makes the transition from human world to Otherworld in a more subtle way than in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*. He enters through the forest where he was conceived and, in that forest, he finds a castle. Degare saves the castle owner from being taken by an evil knight and rides off to find his father. Degare encounters his father in a forest valley and fights with him, but before any of them can come to any harm. Degare's father recognises the sword Degare holds and they reconcile. Degare's father offers him immortality in a castle in the Otherworld, but Degare must go back to civilisation in order fulfil his project of fully becoming part of the civilised world. Degare manages to convince his father to return with him and as such completes his journey of both civilising himself and wilderness.

In sum, my analysis of the three lays was undertaken to make the point that wilderness, is inherently connected to fairies in the stories by arguing that whenever fairies enter the stories, there is a definite increase in the unknown, untamed and wild elements. In my introduction, I introduced Gillian Rudd's thoughts on wilderness, how wilderness broke the 'code of conduct' and how it made us re-evaluate ourselves. For convenience I shall repeat it here:

> Medieval wilderness in particular seems to exclude humans, or, more precisely, refuses to recognise those aspects by which we customarily seek to differentiate ourselves from rest of the world. Codes of conduct mean nothing and our habitual attitude of superiority is undermined by how difficult we find it to survive in such terrain as well as by the way other species take no account of us. It is thus that the wilderness 'confronts and confounds our designs', forcing us to confront and reappraise them likewise. Rather than being able to regard ourselves as the naturally dominant and successful species, we must alter our ways of being in order to enter the wilderness at all, for this conceptual wilderness has forms of life of its own, which

themselves challenge the divisions between humanity and other species (Rudd 2007, 92-93).

I reiterated it here so that the connection between fairies and wilderness becomes more apparent. In *Sir Orfeo*, the fairies encroach on areas conquered and domesticated by attacking Heurodis in the orchard. They use the *ympe-tre* as their gateway into her dreams and as a device to steal her away later. In *Sir Launfal*, by looking at Tryamour's immense power and the way she reverses the gender roles in their marriage agreement, we can see that she exercises a break in the code of conduct expected in the human world. In *Sir Degare* the fairy knight commits a similar act when he appears in the forest that the king was riding through. The fairy knight attacks civilisations foundation in raping Degare's mother, he commits an act of disruptive behaviour that throws entire line of succession into chaos. The fairies in each of the stories break with the code of conduct and forces the reader to re-evaluate the characters superiority. Orfeo's encounter with fairies makes him spend ten years in a forest reappraising himself, while Launfal becomes more defined by his relationship to Tryamour than to his relationship to anything on the human world. Degare spends the entire lay trying to reappraise himself as a fully human being, his fairy heritage leaves him with the task of doing so.

Furthermore, the Otherworlds are great unknowns in every lay that has been discussed in this thesis and while we get the occasional glimpse into them, by the end of the lay they remain dangerous, unknown and wild places on the fringe of the human world. Neither *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Launfal* nor *Sir Degare* manage to conquer or domesticate the Otherworlds. Orfeo enters the Otherworld fascinated by the unknown and when he finds the castle, he discovers the danger that lurks at the fringe in 'the gallery.' In the end, he leaves with Heurodis and the Otherworld sinks back into the unknown. Disappearing into fringe-territory once more. Launfal's encounter is perhaps the most positive. In *Sir Launfal* it is not so much the Otherworld itself that is dangerous, but rather the inhabitants that hold the power. Tryamour

herself being a representative of the subversion of the superiority of the characters in *Sir Launfal*. Degare enters the Otherworld in the same forest he was conceived, as has been established by his father appearing there, it is a place of danger and uncertainty.

Ultimately the discussion of wilderness and fairies reveal contradictory attitudes towards wilderness. While the fairies and the wilderness of the stories possess immense power and transgressive abilities, there is the undeniable element of the human characters trying to exercise civilising elements in the presence of fairies. *Sir Orfeo*'s domestication of the forests and his taming of the animals of the forest with his instrument serve as disruptive elements to wilderness, yet Orfeo's kingdom and his power is challenged by the disrupting wilderness encroaching on his domestic sphere. In *Sir Launfal*, the attempt at civilising fails. Tryamour prevents the civilising project of domestication and traditional hierarchical roles. At the same time Launfal's rejection from civilisation makes pushes him towards the fringe. While in *Sir Degare*, the project of civilising is an unequivocal success. Degare manages to domesticate his fairy father and abandons that which connects him to the wilderness in the process. Nevertheless, the contradictory attitudes towards wilderness prove that the discussion of domestication and how far our interventions into wilderness should go is not a new debate. It has been and will probably remain a relevant discussion as long as long as we are fascinated with the wild, unknown and untamed. Wilderness as a tool of analysis in ecocritical scholarship opens up for further discussions of the relationship between human, non-human and everything in-between. It gives us the ability to talk about the liminal beings in literature in an ecocritical-based theoretical frame.

5.1 Future research

As for further research, I believe by that expanding the corpus of Middle English texts that are examined by the lens of ecocriticism, we can better understand Middle English perspectives on nature and in this case wilderness itself. I would also like to see further exploration of

fairies and their relationship to nature, natural phenomena and the like. Understanding why Middle English authors used fairies and how they were connected to the influence of wilderness, both positive and negative, will perhaps open up to a more inclusive reading of non-human, non-animalistic characters. Furthermore, the exploration of how Middle English lays frame their narratives surrounding natural phenomena and places gives us a greater insight into our predecessors understanding of those things. The field of ecocriticism is still relatively new and thus is very much evolving and gaining an understanding for why we created stories about creatures who possessed a greater closeness to nature than our selves is a topic that deserves further research. Moreover, the western ideas of fairies, which has a history of at least two thousand years can surely reveal changing attitudes in our relationship to nature by examining the fairies' connection to nature. A more comprehensive ecocritical study of fairy history and natural connections will, I believe, reveal a fascinating link between our own perceptions of environmental consciousness at different points in history.

Bibliography

Bliss, A. J. 1958. "The Hero'a Name in the Middle English Versions of "Lanval"." *Medium Ævum* 27 (2): 80-85. https://doi.org/10.2307/43626729. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43626729.

Bliss, Arthur John. 1954. *Sir Orfeo*. Edited by A. J. Bliss.*Oxford English Mongraphs*, edited by F. P. Wilson J. R. R. Tolkien, Helen Gardner. London: Oxford University Press.

Challoner, Richard. 2008. *The Holy Bible : Douay-Rheims version : the Old Testament first published by the English College at Douay, A.D. 1609, and the New Testament first published by the English College at Rheims, A.D. 1582. With annotations and references by Bishop Challoner. Biblia Sacra juxta Vulgatam Clementinam : plurimis consultis editionibus diligenter præparata a Michaele Tweedale*. London: Baronius Press.

Chestre, Thomas. 1960. *Sir Launfal*. Edited by C. S. Lewis.*Nelson's Medieval and Renaissance Library*, edited by A. J. Bliss. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.

Cronon, William. 1996. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1 (1): 7-28. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3985059.

Dunn, Caroline. 2012. "Rape." In *Stolen Women in Medieval England : Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500.*, 52-81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eckert, Kenneth. 2015. "Sir Degare." In *Middle English Romances in Translation: Amis and Amiloun | Athelston | Floris and Blancheflor | Havelok the Dane | King Horn | Sir Degare*, edited by Kenneth Eckert, 249-278. Leiden: Sidestone Press.

---. 2018. "Absent Fathers and Searching Sons in Sir Degaré." *Studia Neophilologica* 90 (1): 32-43. https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2017.1399447. https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2017.1399447.

Evernden, Lorne Leslie Neil. 1992. *The social creation of nature*. Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Garrard, Greg. 2004. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.

Green, Richard Firth. 2016. *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church.Middle Ages series*. Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Jean R. Birrell. 1980. "The Medieval English Forest." 24 (2): 78-85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4004501.

Jirsa, Curtis R. H. 2008. "In the Shadow of the Ympe-tre: Arboreal Folklore in Sir Orfeo." *English Studies* 89 (2): 141-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/00138380801912909. https://doi.org/10.1080/00138380801912909.

Leet, Elizabeth S. 2016. "Objectification, Empowerment, and the Male Gaze in the Lanval Corpus." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 42 (1 Special Issue: Genderand Status in the Medieval World): 75-87. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24720617.

Lerer, Seth. 2012. "Sir Orfeo, line 285: An Emendation." *Notes and Queries* 59 (3): 320-322. https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjs115. https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjs115.

Lewis, Jacob. 2013. "Visible Nobility and Aristocratic Power in Sir Orfeo." *College English Association. CEA Critic* 75 (1): 16-21. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1350285894/fulltext/BACA1D48039B418APQ/1?accountid=8579.

Middle English Dictionary, s.v. "fre," accessed on May 21, 2020, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED17599

Rudd, Gillian. 2007. *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*. In *Manchester medieval literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press,. http://dx.doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719072482.001.0001.

Wade, James. 2011. *Fairies in Medieval Romance*. In *The new Middle Ages*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weber, Ben. 2011. "'Smothe and plain and al grene': Sir Orfeo's Flat Fairyland." *Notes and Queries* 58 (1): 24-28. https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjq252.
https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjq252.