

Performing Romance: Arthurian Interludes in Sarrasin's *Le roman du Hem* (1278)¹

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Although Arthurian romances were popular in the Middle Ages, few records depict actual circumstances of their performance. *Le roman du Hem*,² which presents itself as an eyewitness account of a tournament at Le Hem in 1278, is therefore an invaluable document, for it describes five interludes based on characters and motifs of Arthurian romance. These interludes are entertainments presented during the festive banquet and at intervals between the jousts. In them, storytelling shifts towards dramatic enactments where those attending the tournament play scenes derived from Arthurian romance. There are allusions to Arthurian themes in tournaments beginning in the early thirteenth century.³ *Le roman du Hem*, however, provides that which we lack for much of medieval performance of narrative: a richly detailed description of circumstances and contents of performance and the responses of participants and spectators.

Le roman du Hem is a romance-length poem of some 4600 verses composed in 1278 by a poet named Sarrasin. Sarrasin says his book was commissioned by “la roïne Genievre” (line 373) [Queen Guinevere],⁴ referring to the sister of Aubert de Longueval, the lord whose domains lay near Le Hem and who organized the tournament with his neighbor Huart de Bazentin. It is one of the first known

¹ It is a pleasure to thank Laurie Postlewait for the invitation to present this material at “Public Performance/Public Ritual,” The Seventeenth Barnard Medieval and Renaissance Conference, 12 February 2000, and Karen Fresco and C. Stephen Jaeger for inviting me to discuss it at a seminar of the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program, University of Illinois, 20 February 2003.

² Sarrasin, *Le roman du Hem*, ed. Albert Henry, Travaux de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Bruxelles 9 (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1939).

³ See Roger Sherman Loomis, “Chivalric and Dramatic Imitations of Arthurian Romance,” *Medieval Studies in Memory of A. Kingsley Porter*, ed. Wilhelm R. W. Koehler (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1939) 79–97 and his “Arthurian Influence on Sport and Spectacle,” *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford, Clarendon, 1959) 553–9. In his lyric-narrative poem *Frauendienst* (c.1255), the Styrian diplomat and knight Ulrich von Liechtenstein records a jousting tour of 1240 where he assumed on occasion the identity of King Arthur and attributed names of Arthurian characters such as Lancelot and Gawain to knights in his entourage or those who jousted with him. I thank Carola Dwyer for summarizing, translating, and commenting on passages from the Arthurian portion of Ulrich's *Frauendienst* (ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler, *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik* 485 [Göppingen, Kümmerle, 1987] stanzas 1402–1604).

⁴ Translations throughout are mine.

examples of the French festival books written to commemorate courtly celebrations in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.⁵ It is also (with Jacques Bretel's *Tournoi de Chauvency* of 1285⁶) one of the earliest extended accounts of a historical chivalric festivity in France, although descriptions of tournaments are common features of romances.⁷

Le roman du Hem narrates the events of a tournament which included jousting (running courses to break lances) but not the kind of open-field *mêlée* encounter between two sword-wielding teams⁸ that was prohibited at that time by the French king. It was held on the feast of Saint Denis, 8–10 October, 1278 at Le Hem in Picardy, a tiny village on the Somme River, which was the scene of fierce fighting in the First World War. Now fishermen sit quietly along a bend in the river next to fields which must have been filled with the tents, horses, wagons, and households of the hundreds of persons who rode across northeastern France and Flanders to participate in three days of jousting and feasting. Juliet Vale's historical study of the tournament at Le Hem includes a map of the geographical distribution of participants which gives some sense of the distances knights and ladies traveled to attend this grand party, whose guests of honor included the Duke of Lorraine and two members of the royal family of France, Robert, Count of Clermont, sixth son of Louis IX, and Robert II, Count of Artois, cousin to King Philip III.⁹

In his tournament book, Sarrasin describes two kinds of performances: “les joustes qu’il vit molt dures” (line 4601) [the mighty jousts he saw] and “aventures” (line 4602) [adventures], that is, the interludes in which Arthurian fictions were performed and which provided important roles for ladies as well as knights and professional entertainers (such as dwarves) in their households. The full program of jousts and interludes at the Le Hem tournament is summarized in the accompanying Table.

⁵ On the production of Sarrasin's book, see my companion piece to this article, “A Contract for an Early Festival Book: Sarrasin's *Le roman du Hem* (1278),” *Performance and Ritual in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Acts and Texts*, ed. Laurie Postlewaite, Ludus: Medieval and Early Renaissance Theater and Drama (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2005).

⁶ Jacques Bretel, *Le tournoi de Chauvency*, ed. Maurice Delbouille, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège 49 (Liège, Vaillant-Carmanne, 1932). See Nancy Freeman Regalado, “Picturing the Story of Chivalry in Jacques Bretel's *Tournoi de Chauvency* (Oxford, Bodleian MS Douce 308),” *Illuminations: Medieval and Renaissance Studies for Jonathan J. G. Alexander*, eds. Susan L'Engle, Gerald B. Guest, and Erik Inglis (London, Harvey Miller-Brepols, forthcoming).

⁷ See the examples cited by: Albert Henry (Sarrasin xii–xiii); Larry D. Benson, “The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes and *L'histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*,” *Chivalric Literature: Essays on the Relation between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. Larry D. Benson and John Leyerle (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980) 1–24; and John W. Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France: The Romances of Jean Renart and Gerbert de Montreuil, 1190–1230* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) *passim*.

⁸ On *mêlée* tournaments in history and romance, see Baldwin 69–79.

⁹ Juliet Vale, “The Late Thirteenth-Century Precedent: Chauvency, Le Hem, and Edward I,” *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context 1270–1350* (Woodbury, Suffolk, Boydell, 1982) 4–24 and Appendices 1–9.

Table

Program of jousts and Arthurian interludes (in bold) at Le Hem (1278)

Day 1 October 8

Queen Guinevere arrives with her court at Le Hem and presides at the banquet.

Interlude 1 (banquet hall): Soredamors enters on horseback, led by a dwarf. She asks the Queen for a champion to free her lover, imprisoned by Alise. Sir Kay mocks Soredamors.

Day 2 October 9 Feast of Saint Denis. 48 pairs of jousters named.

Queen Guinevere presides over the jousts in the grandstand.

The Tale of the Knight of the Lion: Robert d'Artois, disguised as the Knight of the Lion, rescues four damsels held prisoner by the Lord of the Castel du Bois.

Interlude 2 (banquet hall): The Lord of the Castel du Bois and his six knights enter the banquet hall on horseback, preceded by a lion. They yield to the Queen in the name of the Knight of the Lion. Sir Kay mocks them.

38 jousts including Aubert de Longueval vs. Baudouin, Châtelain d'Arras; Sir Kay vs. Jehan des Jestes (comic interlude?); Robert, Count of Clermont vs. Huart de Basentin.

Interlude 3 (jousting lists): Entry of the Knight of the Lion preceded by the lion, the four rescued maidens singing on horseback, and musicians. Comic byplay before the Queen between Sir Kay and Mademoiselle Sueffre-Paine. Fortrece, the Queen's lady in waiting, admires Robert d'Artois who jousts with Aubert de Longueval, then joins Queen in stand.

Interlude 4 (jousting lists): Entry of the Duke of Lorraine, borne in the air in a *capele*, from which four maidens deliver him. The Duke jousts with Gautier de Fouilloy. 3 jousts.

Interlude 5 (jousting lists): A damsel, whipped and insulted by a dwarf, enters bare-back on a thin white nag. She is thus punished by her lover Robillart de Coupigny for declaring that the knights of Queen Guinevere's court are the best in the world. Her lover is defeated by her champion, Wautier de Hardecourt. Sir Kay mocks the vindicated maiden who chooses to leave with her lover.

4 jousts.

Day 3 October 10 57 pairs of jousters named.

Queen Guinevere presides over the jousts in the grandstand.

56 jousts including Aubert de Longueval vs. Wautier d'Antoing; Robert d'Artois vs. Pierre de Baffremont; Huart de Basentin vs. Landegrave [a German prince]; the Count of Clermont vs. Erart de Brienne. 18 jousts are conducted by torchlight as night begins to fall.

The Count of Clermont and Robert d'Artois conduct Queen Guinevere back to her court.

20 more jousts by torchlight; Sarrasin can name only 1 pair of jousters.

Performance of narrative is complex in *Le roman du Hem*, where Arthurian stories are enacted at three levels: first, in the form Sarrasin adopts for his poem; second, in the overall setting of the tournament itself, as well as in the content of the five interludes; and third, in a lengthy narrative interpolation, the tale of the Knight of the Lion, which Sarrasin sets within his chronicle of the tournament. Scenes playing out the end of this interpolated narrative, moreover, are performed in Interludes 2 and 3.

Romance motifs provide an encompassing Arthurian frame for Sarrasin's poem and all the events he reports.¹⁰ Indeed, Sarrasin specifically takes as his model Chrétien de Troyes, citing “[le] remant que Crestiens / Trova si bel de Perceval” (lines 478–9) [the fine romance that Chrétien made about Perceval] as well as *Le roman de Troie*, the adventures of the Grail, and stories of the Knights of the Round Table (lines 472–87). Stating that the *Le Hem* enterprise surpasses the Grail quest in Chrétien's *Perceval* (lines 476–93), Sarrasin maintains an Arthurian setting throughout his report of the chivalric festivities. He represents the tournament planning session as a conversation between the Lords of Longueval and Bazentin and an allegorical figure, “Dame Courtoisie” (line 274) [Lady Courtesy]. It is she who urges them to announce the tournament in England, “De coi li Graaus nous enseigne / Que li rois Artus en fu sires” (lines 324–5) [for the *Grail* tells us King Arthur ruled there]. It is she who mingles praise of Edward I¹¹ with a cascade of motifs from Arthurian narrative—the marvels of Merlin, the noble deeds of Lancelot, Gawain, and the Knights of the Round Table (lines 326–37). And finally, it is she who announces that Queen Guinevere will preside over every event.

Performers in the five interludes enact characters, dialogue, and stories of Arthurian fictions that would have been familiar to those present in *Le Hem*, for they are drawn from well-known romances by Chrétien and from the *Prose Lancelot*. Queen Guinevere is accompanied at every moment by her seneschal, who plays the role of the Arthurian character Keu (Sir Kay), and who supervises the laying out of barriers in the jousting lists and the setting up of banquet tables. Sir Kay adds comedy to every scene in which he appears in *Le roman du Hem*, where he insults all comers and is constantly reproved by the Queen. He jousts on Day 2, shouting the famous line that welcomes Lancelot to the tournament at Noauz in Chrétien's *Chevalier de la charrette*: “Or est venus qui aunera” (line 1906) [Now is come one who will take the measure of others]¹²—loudly enough

¹⁰ By giving his tournament book an Arthurian setting, Sarrasin inverts the practice found in three earlier romances that famously incorporate real names of contemporary persons into their depictions of fictional tournaments: Jean Renart, *Le roman de la rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, ed. Félix Lecoy, *Classiques français du Moyen Age* 91 (Paris, Champion, 1962); Gerbert de Montreuil, *Le roman de la violette ou de Gerard de Nevers*, ed. Douglas L. Buffum, *Société des anciens textes français* (Paris, Didot, 1928), and his *Continuation de Perceval*, eds. Mary Williams and Marguerite Oswald, *Classiques français du Moyen Age* 28, 50, 101, 3 vols. (Paris, Champion, 1922–75). On the relation between history and literature in depictions of tournaments, see Benson and Baldwin 14, 31–48, 61–86, 260–7, and 345n36.

¹¹ On the “Arthurian-based activities” of Edward I, see Juliet Vale 19–22.

¹² See Sarrasin 137.

to be heard by his partner and by the ladies in the grandstand, who enrage Sir Kay by their teasing. The repeated term *la roïne* and the ongoing antics of Sir Kay constantly remind the reader of *Le roman du Hem* of the reigning Arthurian fiction. Would the imposing crowned figure of Queen Guinevere—seated with Sir Kay at the high table at the banquet and in the grandstand erected at the lists—have had the same effect on participants at the tournament? Would the knights and ladies have experienced themselves as more than spectators—as actors within the Arthurian frame or even as characters in the interludes? All salute the Queen with reverence, as does the Count of Clermont:

Et li quens, l'escu en cantel,
S'em passe devant la roïne,
4236 Si le salue et si l'encline
Et ele li rent son salu.

[And the count (of Clermont), shield raised, / passes before the Queen. / He salutes her and bows to her / and she returns his greeting.]

Although Sarrasin mentions the “vaillant roi Artu” (line 486) [brave King Arthur], it is the Queen and other female figures who initiate and maintain the overall Arthurian fiction and who play leading roles in the five interludes, which are clustered at the banquet on Day 1 and towards the end of the jousting on Day 2 (see the Table). The Queen is said to enter with a train of seven hundred knights, ladies, and maidens (lines 520–2); she presides at the banquet and in the grandstand at the jousting lists; she plays a role in four of the five interludes. Queen Guinevere’s presence transforms the whole feast into a performance of romance, casting participants as members of her court.

The interludes bring the reigning Arthurian fiction into dramatic prominence. In Interlude 1, a damsel named Soredamours enters the banquet hall on a horse led by a dwarf. She is brought before the Queen, who is seated under a canopy at the high table. Sir Kay greets the damsel rudely—“On devroit le chevalier tondre / Qui pour vous en peril se met” (lines 614–15) [Any knight who risks danger for you should have his head shaved]—and the Queen reproves Sir Kay publicly. The ensuing dialogue between Soredamours and the Queen has a double function: Soredamours’ speech carries her story forward: she requests a champion to rescue her lover from Lady Alise, who has imprisoned him. The Queen’s thoughtful pause and her ringing response engage participation by spectators in the performance of Soredamor’s story:

“S’il a en vostre court vassal
640 Qui viegne, armés sur son ceval,
O moi, pour mon ami rescourre.” / . . . /
Madame Genievre se taist;
Quant pensé ot, si respondi
656 Que toute la cours l’entendi:
“Damoisele Soredamours,
A moi arés vous bon secours
Et as chevaliers de ma court.”

660 A ces paroles en acourt
 Devant la roïne tes cent,
 Qui tout se metent en present
 De cele besoingne furnir.

[“Is there a knight in your court / who would come armed and mounted / with me to rescue my lover?” / . . . / Lady Guinevere is silent; / when she had thought a while, she responded / so that all the court heard her: / “Damsel Soredamours, / you will receive good succor from me / and the knights in my court.” / At these words some one hundred knights / rush forward before the Queen. / All of them offer / to undertake this challenge.]

The role of those present in the hall has been redefined: one hundred of the knights at the banquet do not remain outside the performance, but rise as one to play their part in the interlude.

Why do spectators rise to act out a role in this performance? First, its fictional motifs are deeply familiar to the audience. They are a textual community,¹³ in the sense that all are readers or hearers of Arthurian romance.¹⁴ The Queen’s loud appeal on the maiden’s behalf is the cue for knights to enter the performance: the audience knows it is a cue, because they have read romances. How do the knights at the banquet know it is *their* cue? Is their participation prearranged, or do they experience themselves as characters within the Arthurian frame of the tournament? Does the Queen pause for dramatic effect or to signal the knights to prepare their entrance? Sarrasin casts a spell of fiction over his representation of this scene, blurring the boundary between entertainment and belief for his reader.¹⁵

In what sense does this interlude constitute a performance of narrative? Although it does not enact a preexisting scene from any one particular romance, it is clearly modeled on themes common to many. The proper names, character types, and motifs in Soredamours’ story are a medley of borrowings from several Arthurian romances.¹⁶ Soredamours is a maiden in Chrétien’s *Cligès*; Arthurian romances abound in damsels in distress and ladies who imprison knights. In Chrétien’s *Chevalier au Lion*, Lunette goes to Arthur’s court to seek a champion; in the *Prose Lancelot*, the Lady of Malehaut falls in love with Lancelot who is her prisoner. These names and motifs—known to all—are enough to sustain the narrative thrust of the performances which Sarrasin describes in such extraordinary detail.

The story is enacted rather than told, however, first through a processional

¹³ Brian Stock, “Textual Communities,” *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983) 88–240.

¹⁴ Elspeth Kennedy, “The Knight as Reader of Arthurian Romance,” *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Honor of Valerie M. Lagorio*, eds. Martin B. Schichtman and James P. Carley (Albany, State University of New York Press) 70–90.

¹⁵ On the relation between participants and onlookers in court festivities, see Susan Crane, “Wild Doubles in Charivari and Interlude,” *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) 142.

¹⁶ See the examples cited in Sarrasin liii–lvi.

movement as Soredamours is led up to the Queen's table, then through carefully wrought speeches delivered by persons performing three character roles: Sir Kay (27 lines), Soredamours (24 lines), and Queen Guinevere (19 lines). Finally, the action of one hundred knights rushing forward completes the staging of this romance episode. Moreover, the narrative performed in this interlude is linked to the next day's jousts by an additional scene at the banquet's end in which a horn sounds outside the hall from the castle bridge, a dwarf announces that the knight whom Lady Alise imprisoned has arrived, and Sir Kay demands that the Queen grant him the honor of the first joust on behalf of Soredamours (lines 668–701).

Just as the shared knowledge of Arthurian romance invited spectators to cross the boundary between reality and performance of narrative, so too the physical world of Le Hem lay very close to the fictional realm of Arthur. Everyday material elements served as sets, costumes, and props in the interludes. The sets—the banquet hall and high table well lit by torches (line 1437)—were already in place. Props and costumes were simple and ready at hand: a horse, a canopy, a crown. It is likely that trained performers were on hand, such as the dwarf whom the victorious knight in Interlude 5 claims as his prize, for such entertainers were valued members of noble households such as that of Robert d'Artois.¹⁷

In his poem, Sarrasin does not draw a clear line of demarcation between the past world of Arthur and the present of Le Hem in 1278. Nor does he present any of the interludes as fictions: they begin without explanation or transition. Indeed the dramatic action of Interlude 5 on Day 2, that of the damsel whipped by a dwarf, continues during the joust which it appears to provoke (lines 3018–239). In this interlude, played in the jousting lists, Sarrasin does not confer Arthurian names on the actors, but similarities in plot and props between Interludes 1 and 5 recall romance motifs.¹⁸ A maiden enters, mounted bareback on a thin white horse and bearing a lance and a sword hanging from her neck. She is whipped and insulted repeatedly by a dwarf riding a piebald nag and wielding a knotted scourge. Her lover, a proud knight named Robillart de Coupigny, rides behind her. He has ordered this cruel punishment because the maiden has asserted that the best knights in the world are to be found in Queen Guinevere's court. The maiden's lover has sworn she will be whipped until he is defeated by one of the Queen's knights. Wautier de Hardecourt, one of the knights present among the spectators (that is, in "Queen Guinevere's court") accepts the challenge and thus enters the performance. As the knights clash, the dwarf continues to beat and insult the damsel:

3120 Et se donnent mout tres grans cols:
Sour les escus qu'il ont as cols
Convint les lances peçoier.

¹⁷ Carol Lynne Symes, "The Makings of a Medieval Stage: Theatre and the Culture of Performance in Thirteenth-Century Arras," diss. Harvard University, 1999, 357 and 363. On the role of aristocratic households in festive interludes, see Crane 140ff.

¹⁸ There are reminiscences, in this scene, of the damsel whipped by a dwarf in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* (lines 138–271) as well as the episode of *Le chevalier au lion* cited by Albert Henry (Sarrasin liv).

- Et tous jours convint convoier
 La damoisele son ami,
 3124 Et li nains tous jours après li,
 Ferant, frapant a cascun pas:
 “Loudiere, ensi n’ira il pas
 Com vous quidiés, mais autrement.” / . . . /
 Et li autres chevaliers faut.
 Et dont dist la pucele en haut,
 Si que ses amis l’oï bien:
 3144 “Encor n’ai ge menti de rien,”
 Dont sot il bien qu’ele vaut dire.
 De courous et de duel et d’ire
 Art li chevaliers et esprent.
 3148 La lance meïsmes reprent
 Dont il avait devant fali,
 Et dist, se il n’abat celui,
 Qu’il pardonra son maltalent
 3152 S’amie et de l’amendement
 Ert en madame la roïne.

[(The knights) give each other great blows: / their lances strike against / the shields that hang from their necks. / And still the damsel / stays close to her lover, / and still the dwarf follows her / beating and hitting her at every step: / “You filthy whore, you’re not going to get / what you’re hoping for, but something else!” / . . . / The other knight (the damsel’s lover) fails. / Whereupon the maiden says loudly, / so that her lover will hear her well: / “I haven’t yet told any lie.” / And he knew well what she meant. / The knight flames up and burns / with rage and sorrow and chagrin. / He picks up the very lance / with which he had failed / and says that if he cannot defeat his adversary / he will forgive his girlfriend’s offense / and make amends / to the lady Queen.]

Sarrasin notes in Interlude 5 how the damsel projects her voice in performance, loud enough to be heard by her lover (and by the spectators in the Queen’s grandstand). The maiden’s words inspire the proud knight to redouble his efforts—that is, his joust is motivated by the narrative action of the interlude. Wautier triumphs in the next joust, delivering the damsel who gives him the sword hung round her neck. He claims the dwarf as his prize, but courteously lets the maiden choose to remain with her lover; the damsel, the dwarf, and the two knights ride off ceremoniously together as Sir Kay jeers from the window of the grandstand—“Que plus ferés femes de max / . . . / Plus ara a vous d’amitiés” (lines 3228, 3231) [The more you mistreat women, . . . the more they’ll love you]—until the Queen shoos him off to set up the banquet tables.

These Arthurian interludes are more than mere entertainment; they serve at times to motivate jousts and also to spotlight guests of honor. Thus, in Interlude 4 on Day 2, the Duke of Lorraine makes his grand entry into the lists (lines 2906–24). Sarrasin describes a scene in which a mysterious and beautiful “capele” [mantle] moves forward “en air vers les tentes” (line 2909) [through the air towards the tents]. It is perhaps a canopy drawn on a float or borne by a horse;

it represents a prison from which the Duke is delivered by four maidens; he then goes on to break lances with Gautier de Fouilloy. The knight imprisoned by enchantment is a familiar theme in Arthurian romance, but Sarrasin does not further develop this interlude with proper names or dialogue. Instead—crossing the line between performance of romance and financing of tournaments—he goes on to report the Duke’s failure to contribute to the feast, in contrast with the liberality of the Counts of Clermont and Artois (lines 2970–9).

The most complex set of Arthurian performances recorded in the *Roman du Hem* features Robert d’Artois in a starring role as the Knight of the Lion. It includes an extensive narrative interpolation of more than 800 verses (lines 716–1517) and Interludes 2 and 3 (see the Table). The narrative tells how the Knight of the Lion delivered four handmaidens of the Queen who were imprisoned by the Lord of the Castel du Bois when they went to deliver tournament invitations. Has Sarrasin added this tale to fatten his book or was it addressed to the participants at Le Hem as Juliet Vale believes?¹⁹ It could well have been recited from memory or read aloud before the related scene in Interlude 2 was played out at the banquet.²⁰

It is hard to place the performance of this narrative within the feast, however, because the sequence in Sarrasin’s poem is confused. In her speech stating the overall program of the tournament, Lady Courtesy announces that the scene in which the Lord of the Castel du Bois and his six knights yield to Queen Guinevere (Interlude 2), will be the first *aventure* performed at the banquet on Day 1 (lines 420–428). But the tale of the Knight of the Lion, which ends with this scene, is awkwardly cobbled into the *Roman* at the beginning of Day 2. Just as Queen Guinevere is waiting to see Sir Kay begin the jousting, Sarrasin breaks off his account and begins the tale with a common storyteller’s phrase:

712 La roïne et toutes ses jens
 S’en va as loges assëoir,
 Qu’ele veut la joste vëoir
 Du senescal mesire Keu.
 716 Mais s’il vous plaist entendre un peu,
 Je vous dirai d’une aventure.

[The Queen and all her attendants / go to their seats in the tribune, / for she wants to see the joust / of her seneschal, Sir Kay. / But if it please you to listen a while / I will tell you about an adventure.]

The tale is a fine piece for an audience that enjoys listening to romance. It is enlivened by picturesque praise of the Knight of the Lion whose chivalrous thoughts are reported in interior monologue. There is a pretty tableau of the four maidens,

¹⁹ Juliet Vale 13–14.

²⁰ It took me about a half-hour to read the narrative of the Knight of the Lion out loud to myself. At 802 verses, the story is somewhat longer than what Carol Symes calls the typical “attention unit” of 300–500 verses (Symes 76n86, citing Michel Rousse, “*Le Jeu de saint Nicolas*. Tradition et innovation,” *Arras au moyen âge: Histoire et littérature*, eds. Marie-Madeleine Castellani and Jean-Pierre Martin [Arras, Artois Presses Université, 1994] 153–62).

hair streaming down over their white chemises as they ride along carelessly on a fair morning carrying their invitations. There are scenes of elegant etiquette, much appreciated by thirteenth-century courtly audiences. The drama of the maidens' rescue is increased by the description of a squire who dashes back and forth between the Knight of the Lion and the four damsels who watch the combat from the battlements. Listeners might have admired the Knight of the Lion's noble refusal to accept the magic shield that the maidens offer him and which would protect him from harm. They would have reveled in the thunderous blows of his combat with the Lord of the Castel du Bois that make the earth quake and the castle shake so hard that tiles fall off the roof, and the way the Knight of the Lion kneels before the weeping maidens, his armor still dripping blood and sweat, to beg forgiveness for having delayed so long in coming to their rescue.

Perhaps most entertaining for the audience at Le Hem, as for readers of Sarrasin's *Roman*, is the way the tale plays with the framing fiction, which pretends to conceal the true identity of the Knight of the Lion while gradually revealing Robert d'Artois. The story tells how the maidens beg to learn their rescuer's name:

- 1236 Cardoneuse escrie trest poins:
 "Sire, que nous diiés vo non!"
 Et il li escrie: "Je non." / . . . /
 1268 "Ce poroit bien estre li quens
 D'Artois, qui chi nous vient requerre."

[Cardoneuse calls out, "Isn't it time / Sir, for you to tell us your name?" / And he replies, "Not I!" / . . . / (Aiglentine says,) "That must be the Count / of Artois, come to rescue us."]

His true identity is not disclosed, however, until the climactic moment in the combat when a lance blow knocks off his helmet, exposing his face. The squire courteously pretends not to recognize him, but runs to tell his lord, while Robert hastily attempts to hide his face:

- Si li dist: "Sire, vous avés
 1312 Jousté, et si ne le savés
 Au conte d'Artois vraiëment." / . . . /
 1320 Li sires du castel s'en rit
 Et vient au chevalier tout droit.
 Se main devant son vis tenoit,
 Pour Diu prie c'on li aport
 1324 Son hiaume, sans plus de deport. / . . . /
 "Volentiers vostre non saroie,
 Se demander le vous osoie."
 Et li quens li dist en apert:
 1332 "Mon parin ot a non Robert."
 Et li chevaliers, com courtois,
 Li dist: "Vous estes quens d'Artois."

[(The squire) says, "Sire, you have / jousted, without realizing it, / with the Count of Artois himself. / . . . / The Lord of the Castle laughs / and goes

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straight to the knight. / (The knight) held his hand before his face / and calls
in God's name for someone to bring / his helmet, without more delay. / . . . /
"Willingly would I learn your name / if I dared ask it." / And the Count says
to him openly: / "My godfather was named Robert." / And the knight says
courteously, / "You are the Count of Artois."]

This teasing story celebrates Robert d'Artois, who retains all the prestige of his historical princely self, and, at the same time, gleams with the glory of an Arthurian hero as he rides out of the narrative and into the tournament.

Although Sarrasin does not mark any shift from narrative to performance mode, the plot of the interpolated tale of the Knight of the Lion leads directly to the description of Interlude 2, where the seven knights yield to the Queen at the banquet. Sarrasin's account is packed with information about how the interlude itself was actually performed:

Maint tortin i avoit ardant.
Durement les va regardant
Tuit li chevalier de la court;
1440 Et li lyons devant eus court,
Tous jours as piés de lor chevaux.
Mesire Ques li senescax
Se pourvoit de çou qu'il doit dire.
1444 Cil qui des compaignons fu sire
Vint devant la roïne, as dois,
Et li lyons, qui fu courtois,
Devant la roïne s'estut
1448 Tous cois c'onques ne se remut,
sour le table mist son musel.
Et li chevaliers du castel
Salue la roïne et dist:
1452 "Madame, sans nul contredit,
Nous venons metre en vo prison
De par le Vassal au Lyon."

[Many torches were blazing. / All the knights of the court / are looking at
them intently, / and the lion runs before them / always at the feet of their
horses. / Sir Kay the seneschal / prepares his lines. / The lord of the company
of knights / came before the Queen, at the canopied table, / and the lion, who
was courtly, / remained before the Queen / quite still, and never moving, /
putting his muzzle on the table. / And the Knight of the Castle / salutes the
Queen and says: / "My lady, without resistance / we have come to yield to
you / in the name of the Knight of the Lion."]

Sarrasin depicts a scene lit by torches where spectators eagerly gaze at the seven knights who ride forward on horseback, all costumed in identical armor. He spotlights Sir Kay for a moment as the seneschal reviews his lines. Indeed, Sir Kay has a big speaking role in four interludes, providing comic relief throughout. After the knights yield to the Queen, Sir Kay addresses them in thirty-eight lines of "cox" [blows], insults mocking the virility and strength of each:

[1479] “Venés vous femes demander? / . . . /
 Et cis rous la, qui est si grans,
 Aroit tost fait un home cous.
 1484 Et cil la aroit tost rescous
 Plain hanap de vin, au besoing, / . . . /
 1488 Et cil la est mout enfonsés
 De car, je croi qu’il soit mout mous.”
 Et si dist sour cascun ses cox
 Mesire Quex, dont il fet mal.

[“Have you come to get dames? / . . . / Watch out that Big Red there / doesn’t
 cuckold you. / And that other fellow can rescue / a beaker full of wine, if
 need be. / . . . / And Fatso over there / is a real softy.” / Thus Sir Kay heckles
 each of them / which is very rude of him.]

The lion, of course, is the *pièce de résistance* of this processional performance. Although the lion plays no role in the interpolated narrative of the Knight of the Lion,²¹ he gives a notable performance in Interludes 2 and 3 where he parades through crowds with courtly courtesy, poses without moving during speeches, and growls with alarm during the joust when Aubert de Longueval’s lance crashes against the shield of Robert d’Artois (lines 2842–3). Rather than a real beast from a menagerie or a mechanical wonder like those in the later Burgundian court feasts,²² it is likely that the lion was played by an actor wearing a lion’s mask and hairy costume similar to those depicted in the *Fauvel* charivari of Paris in BnF MS Fr. 146 (1317).²³ Robert d’Artois had taken the lion as one of his emblems well before the tournament at Le Hem, adopting a lion’s head for his seal in 1274 in place of the Artois coat of arms.²⁴ Did Robert d’Artois and the minstrels in his household organize and perform the whole episode of the Knight of the Lion—tale and interludes—as his contribution to the feast? He is warmly praised by Sarrasin for his courtesy, his generosity, and for his joy in tournaments (lines 3926–46).

Interlude 3, the entry of the Knight of the Lion, occurs later on Day 2, concluding the narrative action of the tale interpolated earlier. It is the most fully developed of all the interludes in *Le roman du Hem* and is a primary document of rare interest for historians of medieval performance (see the full text in the

²¹ In the tale, the Knight orders the lion to accompany the seven knights to Le Hem (lines 1420–1) and there are two references to “cil qui li lyons maine” (lines 733, 1293) [he who leads the lion].

²² I thank Jesse Hurlbut, for sending me the results of his survey of chronicle mentions of real and mechanical lions in late-medieval Burgundian festivities (presented in his paper “Bringing the Burgundian Court to Life: Animals, Pageantry, and Automaton,” Thirty-ninth International Congress on Medieval Studies, 9 May 2004, Western Michigan University); they include a carefully chained live lion protecting a statue at the Feast of the Pheasant in 1454 and a roaring mechanical lion at a fête at Ghent in honor of Philippe-le-Bon and Isabelle of Portugal in 1457.

²³ See Nancy Freeman Regalado, “Masques réels dans le monde de l’imaginaire. Le rite et l’écrit dans le charivari du *Roman de Fauvel*, ms. B.N. fr. 146,” *Masques et déguisements au moyen âge*, ed. Marie-Louise Ollier (Montréal, Presses Universitaires de Montréal, 1988) 111–26, figs. 1, 2, 4.

²⁴ I thank Brigitte Bedos-Resak for giving me information about Robert’s seals (see her article, “The Arthurian Legend in the Arts: The Knight and Lion Motif on Some Medieval Seals,” *Avalon to Camelot 2* [1987]: 30–4).

Appendix). In addition to the lion, there are eleven characters including seven speaking roles (two are comic figures) as well as four maidens singing, and musicians playing trumpets and tabors. The performance space extends from the gate of the lists to the Queen's grandstand.²⁵ The Knight of the Lion enters on horseback, preceded by the lion, the musicians, and the four damsels he has rescued, who are mounted on palfreys and dressed alike in finely pleated white chemises with large brooches. The Knight pauses at the gate while his written request for permission to join her court is brought to the Queen in the grandstand. His letter, sealed with a mirror, is carried by a loathly damsel, Mademoiselle Sueffre-Paine [Miss Long-Suffering], a giant figure dressed in a yellow and black cape and kerchief, who is jollied along by Sir Kay, as she passes: "Welcome, fair maiden! Are you she for whom so many knights have died?" (lines 2717–19). The processional movement of the entry is articulated first by this pause, next by the formal reading of the letter by the Queen's chaplain in the grandstand, and then by a twenty-line speech in which Sueffre-Paine relates her exchange with the Queen to the Knight (and to spectators stationed far from the grandstand). Finally the procession advances into the lists to the music of drums, trumpets, and the maidens' singing. There is further byplay among the spectators about the identity of the Knight, who is admired by the ladies in the stand. Fortrece, the Queen's handmaiden, exclaims: "What a warrior! I never saw anyone who looked more like Robert d'Artois!" (lines 2807–9). The interlude ends with a joust between the Knight of the Lion and his host, Aubert de Longueval, which earns him the right to enter the service of Queen Guinevere and join her in the stand, that is, to remain in the Arthurian fiction.

Performance of romance in this interlude thus serves to affirm the noble, courtly identity of Robert d'Artois. In his transparent disguise as the Knight of the Lion, Robert shifts between real and fictional roles, but he is glorious in each.²⁶ Similarly, Sarrasin highlights the title or real name of male performers in the other interludes—Wautier de Hardecourt, Robillart de Coupigny, and the Duke of Lorraine—as carefully as he records the names of each of the 189 knights in the jousts.²⁷ Other than the dwarfs, the only male performer never identified by his real name is Sir Kay, who seems to be a knight serving in the Longueval household.

The jousts and interludes use different means to emphasize ideal chivalric performance. In his account of the jousts, Sarrasin is instructed to show each knight successfully breaking his lances. The Queen's handmaiden Fortrece tells him: "Di le bien et si lai le mal" (line 3953) [Say the good and leave out the bad]. In contrast, four out of the five interludes depict negative examples of chivalric comportment corrected by the Queen's knights. Knights such as Robillart de

²⁵ On the use of scaffolds in this interlude, see Juliet Vale 14.

²⁶ Similarly in his *Frauendienst*, Ulrich von Liechtenstein dubs his companions with Arthurian names but emphasizes their real identity: "von spiegelberc her Lanzilet, / her Heinrich war sin reher nam" (stanza 1430, lines 3–4) [Lord Lancelot von Spiegelberg, / his true name was Lord Heinrich (trans. Carola Dwyer)].

²⁷ On the *Roman du Hem* as a roll of arms, see Juliet Vale 22–3 and Regalado, "A Contract."

Coupligny seeking honor in the tournament could evidently accept to play “bad guys” in the interludes, for these performances of Arthurian narrative test and confirm the values of chivalry at Le Hem.

Although *Le roman du Hem* celebrates the historical identity of the knights present at Le Hem, Sarrasin does not reveal the real names of the ladies attending the tournament or playing roles in the interludes, or even that of Queen Guinevere.²⁸ Women are central, however, in each of the five performances of narrative: the Queen, Soredamors, Sueffre-Paine, Fortrece, and all the many maidens. Moreover, women are an indispensable presence in the order of the tournament itself: Lady Courtesy emphasizes that each knight must bring a lady or damsel to honor the queen.²⁹ Omission of the real names of women in *Le roman du Hem* thus seems both deliberate and puzzling. In contrast, the historical identity of ladies is carefully marked throughout the analogous festival book, *Le tournoi de Chauvency*, where they are named and shown conversing, singing, dancing, and miming in the 1285 tournament.³⁰ Does Sarrasin draw a veil over the real names out of some notion of respectful courtesy? Or does he do so in order to focus attention entirely on the women’s role in the performances of narrative? The historical identity of the ladies (unlike that of the knights) is entirely absorbed by their performance in the romance fictions that reign in Sarrasin’s poem.

The issue of identities points to the meaning of the performances of narrative in Sarrasin’s book. The interludes open a window into a world where knights and ladies add luster to their historical identity by playing romance roles. The imagination of the participants at Le Hem is filled with the stuff of romance. Participants take Arthurian romance as the inspiration for the best that men and women can do, in the belief that what is done in the imagination and in the heart is as important as what “really” happens. *Le roman du Hem* thus reveals broad dimensions of the performance of narrative in the Middle Ages; it points to ongoing performances in the imagination of a textual community of readers of romance which could, upon occasion, be manifested in the etiquette of courtly festivities, in Arthurian interludes, in the conduct of a tournament, and in the written chronicle of such an event. The knights and ladies perform in their own armor, their own white chemises, and in the familiar spaces of banquet hall and jousting field. Yet, because their exploits are performed as romance, these festivities glorify their every gesture—their beauty, prowess, courtesy, and generous courage.

²⁸ One real woman’s name is announced by Lady Courtesy, “la dame de Caius” (line 451), who is to accompany the Queen. She is probably Marguerite de Longueval, related to one of the tournament sponsors (Sarrasin lxxvii).

²⁹ “Que, pour le roïne honerer, / Amaint cascuns sans demourer, / Dame u pucele amaint o lui” (lines 383–5) [In order to honor the queen / let each bring without delay / a lady or a maiden with him]; see Juliet Vale 13. On women in real and romance tournaments from the twelfth and first part of the thirteenth centuries, see Baldwin 83–6. The importance of female attendance in the later thirteenth century and after is confirmed by archival records showing that wagonloads of maidens were transported to tournaments (Malcolm Vale, *The Princely Court: Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe, 1270–1380* [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001] 198–9).

³⁰ Regalado, “Picturing the Story of Chivalry.”

Appendix

Interlude 3: The Entry of the Knight of the Lion

2672	Ensi que la roïne estoit Es eskafaus et regardoit Les bon joustèours et les fors Si voit venir par de defors Quatre puceles d'un sanlant	2676	Lour palefroi furent amblant, Et sont si bien faites de taille Je ne quic mie que j'en faille Qu'ainc plus beles veïst nus hom.	2680	D'un sanlant et d'une façon Sont vestues au fuer d'esté; Blans cainses, bien menu ridé, Ont vestu, qui bien lour avienent.	2684	Devant le chevalier s'en vienent, Qui du castel les delivra Et toutes quatre lour livra Gros fremaus et grosses afiques.	2688	Arrestés est dehors les liches Li chevaliers qui les amaine Madamoïsele Sueffre-Paine A apielee et ele i vient,	2692	Et ot vestu, bien m'en souvient, Une cape; d'un couvrechief Gros ot envelopé son cief; Gaune ert et noire et de grant taille.	2696	Mesire une lettre li baille, Seelees d'un mirèour, Et dist: "Vous irés sans demour A la roïne, qui la haut	2700	Est assise en cel eskafaut; Bien la connisterés seur toutes Ains que soiiés outre les routes. Se mesire Kex vous perçoit,	2704	A la roïne trestout droit Vous merra pour vous escarnir; Mais de tant vous voel jou garnir Que ne respondés tant ne quant."	2708	Sueffre-Paine s'en part a tant Et vient a la roïne droit. Et mesire Kex orendroit Estoit venus au chevalier,	2712	C'on desarmoït sur son destrier, Si avoit il grant cop reçut. Cil qui premerains se perçut De Sueffre-Paine, ce fu Qués.	2716	Encontre li s'en est alés Et dist: "Bien veigniés vous, pucele. Or me dites, estes vous cele	While the Queen was in the grandstand and watching the good, strong jousters, she saw coming from outside four maidens all alike. Their palfreys were trotting and they were so shapely I dare say that no man ever saw prettier. They were all dressed identically in summer clothing. They wore white chemises, finely pleated which suited them well. They preceded the knight who delivered them from the castle, and he gave each of four great brooches and large clasps. The knight who brings them pauses outside the lists. He calls Miss Long-Suffering and she comes forward wearing (if I remember aright) a cape; her head was wrapped in a huge kerchief; She wore yellow and black and was very tall My Lord gives her a letter sealed with a mirror, saying: "You are to go without delay to the Queen, who is seated up there in the grandstand; You'll recognize her among her maidens As soon as you get through the crowd. If Sir Kay catches sight of you, he'll escort you to the queen in order to make fun of you; but I warn you not to answer him back." Long-Suffering sets off and comes straight to the Queen. And meanwhile, Sir Kay came up to the knight seated on his warhorse as he disarmed (for he had sustained great blows). Kay was the first to spot Long-Suffering. He went to meet her, saying: "Welcome, maiden. Now tell me, are you she
------	--	------	--	------	---	------	---	------	--	------	--	------	---	------	--	------	--	------	---	------	---	------	--	---

	Pour qui tant chevalier sont mort?	for whom so many knights have died?
2720	Par ceste teste que je port, Vous n'en rirés pas sans ami, Se vous volés entendre a mi. Que vos grans biauté me deçoit."	I swear that you'll not leave here without a lover, if you'll just listen to me, for your great beauty takes me by surprise."
2724	La damoisele s'aperçoit Que Kex le moke, si se taist. Pres de la roïne se traist, Si l'a hautement saluee.	The damsel sees that Kay is mocking her, and says nothing. She goes to the Queen and greets her courteously.
2728	Et la roïne s'est levee, Qui mout est bonne et honerable. "Dame, ves ci le bonne Orable ¹ Qui une lettre vous apporte.	The Queen arises, for she is good and full of honor. [Kay:] "Lady, here is the good Orable come to bring you a letter.
2732	Puis qu'ele entra dedens le porte, Le m'a on hapee trois fois Pour sa biauté." —"Taisiés vous cois Mesire Ques," dist la roïne,	Since she came to the gate, thrice someone has snatched her from me because of her beauty." —"Be quiet, Sir Kay," said the Queen,
2736	"Tant estes de male doctrine Que tous li mondes vous ressoingne. Mais il est drois qu'epine poingne Et que male langue parole.	"Everyone is concerned because you're so ill-mannered. But thorns must prick and sharp tongues speak.
2740	Il n'est nus qui ja mais vous tole Vostre usage, que si est vieus: De castiier cat qui est vieus Ne puet nus hom venir a chief."	No one can change your ways which are so long-standing. No one can teach an old dog new tricks."
2744	La damoisele de rechief Commence son message a dire, Et dist: "Roïne, faites lire Ceste lettre que je vous baille,	The damsel immediately begins to deliver her message, saying: "Queen, have this letter read out, which I bring,
2748	Que il convient que tost m'en aille." La roïne prent en sa main La lettre et huce un capelain, Qui li devise mot a mot	for I must leave soon." The Queen takes the letter in her hand and calls a chaplain, who reads out every word for her.
2752	Et lués que la roïne l'ot Que li Chevaliers au Lyon Li proie qu'en tout guerredon Le retiegne de sa maisnie,	And as soon as the Queen hears that the Knight of the Lion begs as his reward to join her court,
2756	S'en est la roïne si lie Qu'ele ne set que devenir. "Damoisele, faites venir Vostre seigneur, que Dix honnourt!"	the Queen is so happy she is beside herself. "Damsel, have your lord, whom God honors, come forward!"
2760	—"Dame, saus les drois de no court 'Est mesire a vous demourés." —"Damedix en soit aourés," Dist la roïne, "qu'il le gart!"	—"Lady, it is right that my lord remain in your court." —"God be praised," said the Queen, "and may He keep him."
2764	A tant la pucele s'en part, A son signeur vient, si li conte: "Sire, la sont et duc et conte, La u vous m'avés envoiie;	At this point, the maiden leaves, comes to her lord, and tells him all. "Sire, there are dukes and counts over there where you sent me;
2768	D'un chevalier fui convoiie Dusk'a madame la roïne Ne sai se ce fu par haïne,	I was escorted by a knight to my lady, the Queen; I don't know if he spoke out of hate,

1 Saracen name of Guibourc, wife of Guillaume d'Orange in the epic *La prise d'Orange*.

PERFORMING ROMANCE

	Mais il me requist de m'amour.	but he begged me for my love.
2772	La roïne, pour soie honnour, Se dreça lués qu'ele me vit. Quant ele ot entendu l'escrit, Sire, que je li aportai,	The Queen, in all honor, stood up as soon as she saw me. When she had heard the letter, Sire, which I brought to her,
2776	De la joie me confortai Qu'ele fist de vostre venue. Vous et vo gent est retenue, Se vous estiés quatre milliers.	I was gratified to see how she rejoiced over your arrival. You and your company are to join her court, even if you were four thousand strong.
2780	Joustes quatre de chevaliers, Mout feleesses et mout fort, Cevax et espaulés et mors I vi parmi ces rens jesir.	I saw knights in four jousts, fierce and mighty, horses, and broken shoulders, and gear lying about within the lists.
2784	La roïne n'a nul desir Si grant comme de vous vëoir." Son lyon commande a mouvoir Li chevaliers, et ses puceles	The Queen has no desire greater than to see you." The knight orders his lion to move forward, and his maidens.
2788	Deus et deus s'en vont, comme celes Qui plus bel cantent que seraine; Aprés le lyon qui les maine Viennent les puceles a court.	go two by two, singing more beautifully than sirens. After the lion, who leads them, the maidens come to the court.
2792	Tous li mondes encontre court, Il i a trompes et taburs; Es lices entrent parmi l'uis, Si ordené que riens n'i faut.	Everyone rushes forward to greet them; there are trumpets and tabors; They pass through the entry of the lists in such fine order that nothing is lacking.
2796	Les dames deseur l'escafait Voient le Vassal au Lion: El ne regardent se lui non Et son lyon et ses puceles;	The ladies in the grandstand see the Vassal with the Lion. They look only at him and at his lion and his maidens;
2800	Et de teles armes comme eles Fu li chevaliers adoubés. Devens les lices est entrés Prest de joster, ne li faut riens.	the knight was armed with armor like wings. He enters the lists ready to joust; he lacks nothing.
2804	"Par le chief Saint Jehan d'Amiens," Dist Fortrece, "cis est vassaus. Et si puisse jou estre saus, Je ne vi onques de mes iex	"By the head of Saint John of Amiens," says Fortrece, "what a warrior! And, God save me, I never saw with my own eyes
2808	Nul homme qui resanlast mix Monseigneur le conte d'Artois."	any man who looked more like my lord, the Count of Artois."



Le Morte d'Arthur (the Death of Arthur) is a French compilation by Sir Thomas Malory of traditional tales about the legendary King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and the Knights of the Round Table. Malory both interprets existing French and English stories about these figures and also adds original material. The Roman de la Rose is a medieval French poem styled as an allegorical dream vision. It is a notable instance of courtly literature. The work's stated purpose is to entertain and to teach others about the Art of Love. The story is constructed from a large number of elements found in other medieval romances. Modern scholarly opinion is critical of the poem for this reason, but readers should note that "borrowing" material during the Middle Ages was quite common and even expected.