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ERCIYES UNIVERSITY
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**THE WOMAN IMAGE IN THE ROMANCES OF
MEDIEVAL ENGLAND**

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**THE WOMAN IMAGE IN THE ROMANCES OF
MEDIEVAL ENGLAND**

(Yüksek Lisans Tezi)

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Furkan YILDIZ, Kayseri, 2024

ORTA AĐ İNGİLTERESİ'NDEKİ EDEBİ METİNLERDE KADIN İMGESİ

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, 13. yüzyılda Anglo-Norman dilinde kaleme alınan Gui de Warewic ve 15. yüzyıl İngilizce olarak kaleme alınan Guy of Warwick eserlerindeki kadın imgesi kadın karakterlerin anlatı üzerinde düşünüldüğünden daha etkili olmaları açısından analiz edilecektir. Orta çağ romans geleneğinde kadınların daha az değerli ve daha az saygı duyulan figürler olarak tasvir edilmesi oldukça yaygındır ve özellikle 13. ve 15. yüzyıllarda, kadınlar genellikle dar toplumsal cinsiyet normları çerçevesinde ikincil bir rolde, güçsüz varlıklar olarak tasvir edilme eğilimindedir. Sosyal, ekonomik ve dini faktörlerin yanı sıra ataerkil toplum yapısının da bu tasvirlerin ardındaki belirleyici etken olduğu varsayılabilir. Genellikle ataerkil toplum yapısından etkilenen yazarlar, kadın karakterleri pasif ve itaatkâr olarak resmetme eğilimindedir. Ancak bu algıların yanıltıcı olabileceği ve kadın karakterlerin gerçek etkisinin daha derinlemesine analiz edilmesi gerektiği unutulmamalıdır. Orta çağ romans geleneğinde kadın figürlerin konumu toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri bağlamında incelenirken, yazarların eserlerindeki kadın karakterleri nasıl şekillendirdikleri de irdelenecektir. Bu çalışma, kadın karakterlerin anlatı üzerinde yaygın olarak düşünüldüğünden daha büyük bir etkiye sahip olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Ayrıca kadın karakterlerin aslında düşünüldüğünden daha etkili olduğu savını desteklemek amacıyla eserler arasında derinlemesine bir karşılaştırma yapılacaktır ve metinler arası analiz yöntemi kullanılarak gerçekleştirilecek olan bu araştırma karşılaştırmalı bir çalışma olacaktır. Başka bir deyişle, ataerkil toplum yapısının ve teolojik yaptırımların bir yansıması olarak bastırılan ve değersizleştirilen kadın figürünün aksine, Anglo-Norman dilinde kaleme alınan Gui de Warewic ve İngilizce Guy of Warwick adlı Orta çağ romanslarında genel kabul gören algının dışında başka bir kadın imgesinin var olduğu incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Orta Çağ, İngiltere, *Gui de Warewic*, *Guy of Warwick*, Kadın

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ABSTRACT

This study probes the image of women in the 13th-century Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* and the 15th-century English *Guy of Warwick*, arguing that female characters are more influential in the narrative than previously thought. The portrayal of women as less valuable and less respected figures is quite common in the medieval romance tradition, and, especially in the 13th and 15th centuries, women are tended to be portrayed as powerless beings, often in a subordinate role within narrow gender norms. In addition to social, economic, and religious factors, the patriarchal social structure can be seen as a determining factor in these representations. In general, authors influenced by the patriarchal social structure tend to portray female characters as passive and submissive. However, it should be borne in mind that these perceptions can be misleading and that the real impact of female characters needs to be analysed in more depth. While analysing the position of female characters in the medieval romance tradition in the context of gender roles, this thesis also examines how authors shaped the female characters in their works. This study theorises that female characters exert a greater influence on the narrative than is commonly assumed, and the theory that women are deliberately sidelined in historical contexts by patriarchal writers will be analysed. In addition, in order to support the argument that female characters are in fact more influential than assumed, an in-depth comparison between the works will be carried out using intertextual analysis. In other words, in contrast to the suppressed and devalued female figure as a reflection of the patriarchal social structure and theological sanctions, the medieval romances of the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* and the English *Guy of Warwick* will be examined to see if there is a different image of women than the commonly accepted one.

Keywords: Medieval, England, *Gui de Warewic*, *Guy of Warwick*, Woman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE WOMAN IMAGE IN THE ROMANCES OF MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

CONFORMITY TO THE SCIENTIFIC ETHICS	i
ORIGINALITY PAGE	ii
SUITABILITY FOR GUIDE	iii
ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL PAGE	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
ÖZET	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
INTRODUCTION	1

CHAPTER ONE

GENDER IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

1.1. Gender Perspectives in Medieval English Literature	10
1.2. Faith, Literature, and Patriarchy: Exploring Gender Norms in Medieval Texts	13

CHAPTER TWO

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF WOMAN AS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION IN GUI DE WAREWIC

2.1. Medieval Romances and Female Representation: Challenging Stereotypes.....	24
2.2. Examining the Intellectual and Emotional Influence of Women in Romances	32
2.2. Women's Influence: Shaping Hero's Identity and Destiny	40

CHAPTER THREE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN AS INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES IN GUY OF WARWICK

3.1. Beyond Passivity: Women's Power and Influence in Medieval Romances	50
3.2. Heroic Inspiration: Women's Role in Shaping Destiny	68
CONCLUSION	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

INTRODUCTION

The purpose in this study is to focus on the representation of female characters in medieval romance genre through the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* and fifteenth-century English *Guy of Warwick*. This thesis asserts that the portrayal of female characters in medieval romance is tended to be influenced and shaped by various social factors such as cultural themes, religious beliefs, political issues, and historical events. The assumption is that they have accepted the terms of the patriarchal structure, and they are portrayed as such in literary texts. The idea of recognising the existence and value of women, and perceiving them as they are, is thought not to be explored to the extent it deserves in most literary works. In the medieval period, it is possible to encounter works that provide a better observation of social relations between men and women, which can remain outside the social norms and portray gender roles as they are. This study aims to reveal how and why a one-sided perception should not exist in England in the 13th and 15th centuries, where there are also strong women, contrary to the stereotypical other or inferior woman that is believed in romances.

As can be observed from the social structure of the period and examples of the medieval literature, there are clear distinctions in the relationships between men and women, and these distinctions generally support the idea of women's social inferiority.¹ Contrary to the phenomenon of marginalised women reflected in literature by the patriarchal society and theological sanctions in medieval England, the depictions of female characters in *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* romances seem much more complex.

¹ Eileen Edna Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. Michael Moyssey Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 3; Judith Weiss, "The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance," in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carol Meale (Cambridge England: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 150.

Gui de Warewic, which is composed in Anglo-Norman in the thirteenth century, represents a vital example of the development of the medieval romance genre, which emerges in the twelfth century and quickly becomes widespread throughout Europe.² The romance reflects the cultural and political context of Anglo-Norman period of England.³ The narrative also features a strong emphasis on chivalry and the ideals of knightly conduct, as well as the importance of religious piety and devotion.⁴ *Gui de Warewic* is considered an appropriate source for this study because it reflects the socio-cultural effects of the period to which it belongs. The romance also has the traces of the perspectives of medieval society, attitudes of medieval writings to the representation of women, and the literary conceptions of the romance genre.

On the other hand, fifteenth-century English *Guy of Warwick* represents a development in the genre of medieval romance literature.⁵ It reflects the changing political, social, and religious landscape of England during the fifteenth century.⁶ Besides, *Guy of Warwick* features a more fully developed female character who plays a more active role in the narrative. The romance allows the reader to analyse the representation of gender roles and relationships in medieval literature and explore how these representations reflect broader social and cultural attitudes towards women. The *Gui* and *Guy* romances are considered to be appropriate sources for this study, which seeks to answer the question of the actual place of women in the romance genre by critiquing the perception that women are deliberately portrayed as less worthy in the romance narratives.

This study's concept and objective are also focused on the social contexts and surroundings of the audience of these writings. To what extent have strong, autonomous female characters within medieval romance literature been recognised by audiences,

² Judith Weiss, "Insular Beginnings: Anglo-Norman Romance," in *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 27.

³ Marianne Ailes, "Gui de Warewic in Its Manuscript Context," in *Guy of Warwick Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 23.

⁴ Anthony Stockwell Garfield Edwards, "Speculum Guy de Warwick and Lydgate's *Guy of Warwick*," in *Guy of Warwick Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 89.

⁵ For the quotations to be stated in this study, the edition based on the manuscript "Cambridge University MS, Ff 2. 38" will be used.

⁶ Alison Wiggins, "The Manuscripts and Texts of the Middle English *Guy of Warwick*," in *Guy of Warwick Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 76.

amidst prevailing gender norms and societal structures of the time? What might a study of these individuals reveal about the literary and audience tendencies of the medieval era? One of the major concerns of this study is to indicate to the medieval audience that, apart from stereotypically illustrating female characters as inferior and destitute to their male counterparts, it is possible to observe that women in romances are not as miserable as they are demonstrated. In order to address these issues and provide answers to the questions above, the methodology that have been widely used in this study is intertextual reading analysis.

While sustaining this study, intertextual reading methodology is considered to be congruent. The very first step of this study is to be able to prepare or represent the background information of the period. In order to investigate gender roles and attitudes towards women in society, it is necessary to approach society from a general perspective and study the social, cultural, and religious environment. As Lehman and Greensfeld argue, literary texts cannot be considered in isolation from the social and cultural environment and previous works since the cultural, social, ideological, and political contexts in which the narratives are created and heard or read reflect those contexts.⁷ Both romances are going to be analysed intertextually in order to determine the changes in socio-cultural differences between thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Considering *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* in terms of the place and role of female character as a determining and guiding figure brings out the complexity in these texts, as well as the uncertainty and potential power of female characters. Examining the existence of these influential female characters, particularly the ways they perform active and crucial roles, frequently both conform to and disrupt gender standards. This examination demonstrates their capacity and dominance in the Middle English romance genre, in which characters' identities are mainly established by their actions. Analysing Middle English romances intertextually uncovers unresolved parts, narrative gaps, and implicit connections to other works. Because of their shortness and directness, Middle English

⁷ Ilana Elkad-Lehman and Hava Greensfeld, "Intertextuality as an Interpretative Method in Qualitative Research," *Narrative Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (2011): 264, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.21.2.05elk>.

romances include many of these gaps, with certain portions detailed so sparingly that they could be more comprehensible to modern audiences.

Intertextuality, at the same time, is a crucial concept in literary studies as an intricate network that links texts across time and location. It includes the interaction of echoes, allusions, and connections across many literary works, resulting in a complex tapestry of related meanings. Intertextuality has its roots in early literary traditions when poets and writers conversed with one another and built on one another's notions and narratives. It is now a crucial tool for authors, readers, and researchers alike, providing fresh perspectives on interpretation and comprehension. By examining the intertextual connections inside and between texts, readers may uncover hidden levels of meaning, identify literary influences, and observe how ideas have continuously changed through time. Intertextuality acts as a bridge in a time when literature is no longer limited to printed books, promoting connections and deepening understanding of the intricate and interwoven nature of human expression.

The portrayal of gender roles in *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* can be examined through the utilisation of an intertextual analysis. The investigation of gender relations in medieval romance highlights the complicated interaction between tradition and innovation in literary representations and sheds light on the medieval mindset. Sebeok mentions that as the creation of works of art, especially literature, is a reaction to earlier works of art as well as the rules and other norms that govern them rather than to social reality.⁸ In order to make more precise and more solid comparisons and examinations, this study aims to investigate the general condition of women in the medieval period. Social, historical, or religious attitudes towards women in general will also be examined in this study under the scope of intertextuality. In fact, intertextual reading has become an indispensable and necessary method in comparative studies, especially when examining and studying medieval narrations.

Through a critical examination of primary sources, secondary scholarship, and theoretical frameworks, this study confidently explores the intersections of gender, power, and

⁸ Thomas Albert Sebeok, "Enter Textuality: Echoes from the Extra-Terrestrial," *Poetics Today* 6, no. 4 (1985): 658, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1771959>.

narrative in medieval literature, with a specific focus on the complexities of female representation and agency during the age of chivalry and romance. Each of the studies on medieval and women's studies has various perspectives and assertions in terms of their research area. Düzgün and Girgin argue that the growth and spread of Christianity have had an impact on the status of women, particularly in Medieval Europe.⁹ The study also examines Christianity's contradictory views on women, concentrating on the divergent representations of Eve as a seductress and the Virgin Mary as a figure of chastity by exploring the shifting depiction of women, their changing function within the setting of Christianity, and the effect of religious ideas on gender relations through *Gui de Warewic* and *Boeve de Haumtone*.

Öztürk's study examines how Saracen-Christian relationships are portrayed in Anglo-Norman romances, with an emphasis on *Boeve de Haumtone*, *Gui de Warewic*, and *Romance de Horn*.¹⁰ The text focuses on both the favourable and unfavourable portrayals of Christians and Saracens in these historical accounts to show the complexity of these interactions drawing attention on Edward Said's idea of Orientalism. In her research, Rooney aims to comprehend the difficulties and conflicts of ardent love in medieval literature, as well as the interactions between love, marriage, infidelity, and guilt through reading of *Guy of Warwick*'s text as well as allusions to other religious and medieval works.¹¹ The study also explores the difficulties of courtly love, particularly for literate aristocrats who absorb passionate love stories yet are restricted by societal marriage duties. *Guy of Warwick*'s Middle English romance is discussed by Rouse, who also examines the romance's role in medieval literature and society.¹² He lists his exploits, which include gaining noble titles, fighting off Saracen attacks, participating in a Crusade, and finally returning to England as a recluse and a hero after the invasion. Rouse's

⁹ Hülya Taflı Düzgün and Melis Kutlu Girgin, "Female Healers in the Medieval Anglo-Norman Romances," *Ortaçağ Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (2023): 41, <https://doi.org/10.48120/oad.1196435>.

¹⁰ Sümeyye Öztürk, "A Fuzzy Reading Of Saracen-Christian Interaction In Boeve De Haumtone, Gui De Warewic And Roman De Horn," *Cogito - Multidisciplinary Research Journal* XII, no. 4 (December 2020): 201.

¹¹ Matthew Rooney, "Of Guy, of His Felice, and of His Guilt Problematic Love in the Auchinleck Guy of Warwick," *Verso: An Undergraduate Journal of Literary Criticism* Verso 2019 (May 5, 2019): 123.

¹² Robert Allen Rouse, "An Exemplary Life: Guy of Warwick as Medieval Culture-Hero," in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 94.

research shows how *Guy of Warwick* represents the many aspects of identity and bravery in medieval literature and functions as a diverse cultural figure.

Djordjević's study examines the specific aspect of Manuscript A, namely the inclusion of a seventy-line list of the hero *Gui de Warewic's* accomplishments at the end of the text.¹³ The study explores the genesis, manifestation, and purpose of this uncommon romantic supplement. She carefully examines manuscript A and presented synopsis, contrasting it with other known renditions of the *Gui de Warewic*. Besides, Djordjević investigates how *Guy of Warwick's* conceptions of national identity in medieval England are influenced by the Auchinleck text.¹⁴ She investigates how language, translations, and the interplay of several vernaculars affect the nationalism of the narrative. Djordjević employs a comparative method to examine several Middle English and Anglo-Norman French translations of *Guy of Warwick* in order to assess the level and kind of nationalism present in the narrative itself.

Gos examines *Gui de Warewic* and its multiple iterations, a medieval romance by using a comparative method to examine several manuscripts of the *Gui de Warewic* narrative, including the Middle English and Anglo-Norman variants.¹⁵ Gos' study utilises textual analysis to compare individual sections and features to find parallels, contrasts, and potential relations between these texts. In another study, Gos analyses romance literature written in the Anglo-Norman period, Middle English, and Medieval Irish using a feminist poststructuralist and comparative methodology by covering lots of romances in her study, such as *Roman de Horn*, *Guy of Warwick*, *The Adventures of Art*, and *Mongán's Love for Dubh Lacha*.¹⁶ She contends that as stories are updated and recast for new audiences, ideological stress points must be renegotiated by paying great attention to linguistic development, she asserts that female characters move from being symbols to being subjects in their own right.

¹³ Ivana Djordjević, "'Les Pruesses Gui': Summarizing 'Gui de Warewic' in London, College of Arms, Ms Arundel 27," *Medium Ævum* 84, no. 2 (2015): 279, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26396536>.

¹⁴ Ivana Djordjević, "Nation and Translation: Guy of Warwick between Languages," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 57 (2013): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.nms.1.103668>.

¹⁵ Giselle Gos, "New Perspectives on the Reception and Revision of *Guy of Warwick* in the Fifteenth Century," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 113, no. 2 (2014): 156, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jenglgermphil.113.2.0156>.

¹⁶ Giselle Gos, "Constructing the Female Subject in Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Medieval Irish Romance" (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012), 1, <https://hdl.handle.net/1807/65473>.

With an emphasis on the romance of *Guy of Warwick*, Eckert explores the use of numerology in medieval romantic fiction.¹⁷ He contends that religious and moral themes were communicated in these works via the symbolic use of numerals like three, seven, and fifteen. He uses *Guy of Warwick* as the main example in his study to show how numerology was used as a literary element in medieval romances by demonstrating that numbers in these works served as more than just literary devices; they also have deeper religious and moral connotations that enrich the plot and shape the characters. Percy gives a thorough examination of how the author of *Gui de Warewic* alters and includes a particular episode from the source material, with a primary focus on that episode.¹⁸ He provides insights into the literary devices and influences in *Gui de Warewic* and makes the case that, when considering the author's creative decisions and narrative approaches, a more sympathetic assessment of the work as a whole may be justified.

Gordon's approach involves a careful comparison of the Anglo-Norman source text *Gui de Warewic* and the Middle English translation *Guy of Warwick*, with a particular focus on the Caius College MS 107 copy of *Guy of Warwick*, to examine how chivalric romance heroes change when translated into different cultural contexts.¹⁹ Her research considers the linguistic, political and religious elements that influenced the text's transformation, particularly in terms of nationalism, religion and style. Driver examines Felice, the spouse of the mythical hero Guy of Warwick, in the context of her portrayal in medieval romance literature, drawing attention to the fact that Felice is often conventionally characterised as a beautiful, quiet, virtuous and pious woman, but early versions of the narrative place more emphasis on Guy's brave actions and battles.²⁰ Driver goes into further detail about Felice's personality, including her attractiveness, passivity, virtues and religious piety, challenging readers to consider the discrepancy between historical representations of women and their actual realities.

¹⁷ Ken Eckert, "Numerological and Structural Symbolism in the Auchinleck Stanzaic *Guy of Warwick*," *English Studies* 95, no. 8 (2014): 849, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838x.2014.946793>.

¹⁸ Roy Percy, "An Episode in *Gui de Warewic* and *Fierabras*," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1979): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03648664.1979.9926332>.

¹⁹ Sarah Gordon, "Translation and Cultural Transformation of a Hero: The Anglo-Norman and Middle English Romances of Guy of Warwick," *The Medieval Translator. Traduire Au Moyen Age*, 2007, 319, <https://doi.org/10.1484/m.tmt-eb.3.2258>.

²⁰ Martha Driver, "'In Her Owne Persone Semly and Bewteus': Representing Women in Stories of Guy of Warwick," in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 133.

Mills' study analyses the different themes that *Guy of Warwick* encompasses, such as courtly love, chivalry, courage, religious devotion, and the quest for redemption.²¹ It also draws attention to the narrative structure's intricacy. In order to highlight the variations in structural patterns, it contrasts *Guy of Warwick* with other romances like *Horn* and *Beves of Hamtoun*, Mills investigates how Felice moves the romance along by having an impact on Guy's deeds.

While the romances of *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* have been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, a notable gap persists in the comprehensive examination of strong and influential female characters within these narratives. The socio-cultural contexts of the medieval period shaped complex representations of gender, often reflecting and reinforcing prevailing patriarchal norms. However, glimpses of female strength, cunning, and autonomy emerge from the margins of these narratives, hinting at untold tales waiting to be unearthed and celebrated. The insufficiency of studies on this subject has become the main factor in the emergence of this study.

The first chapter analyses the socio-cultural and/or religious reasons for the misogynistic attitudes towards female characters in the medieval romance genre by examining the reasons for the deliberate portrayal of women as passive, ineffective, and less valuable characters in medieval romance literature. The aim is to point out literary justifications for misogyny in literary texts produced in societies shaped by socio-cultural, economic, or theological factors. These societies exhibit strong influences on attitudes and behaviour towards individuals. Possible reasons for the tendency to portray female characters as weak and dominated in the medieval romance genre will therefore be explored in the third chapter.

The second chapter discusses the deliberate marginalisation of women in medieval romance writing, especially in the thirteenth century *Gui de Warewic*. The argument is made that women should be recognised as central elements that shape the narrative and guide the male protagonist through *Gui de Warewic*. Contrary to the oppressed and passive profile of women in the romance, it will be argued that women are independent

²¹ Maldwyn Mills, "Structure and Meaning in Guy of Warwick," in *From Medieval to Medievalism*, ed. John Simons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 54.

individuals who play a much more active role in the narrative than they are given credit for. The phenomenon of how the tradition of writing romances, which is shaped by the patriarchal social structure, portrays the female characters in the narrative in the light of social norms will be studied.

The third chapter will examine the changes in the social roles of women in the fifteenth-century romance tradition through the example of *Guy of Warwick*. It will discuss the approaches to women between the thirteenth century Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* and the fifteenth-century English *Guy or Warwick* and analyse the manner in which the socio-cultural values of the society find a place in the romance genre. In contrast to the traditionally oppressed and passive portrayal of women in the romance genre, this analysis will argue that women are in fact independent individuals who play a far more active role in the narrative than they are traditionally acknowledged. It will be proposed that women should be recognised as one of the central elements that shape the narrative and guide the male protagonist through *Gui* and *Guy* romances.

The concept of the integrity of the romance of female characters and their impact on the narrative is not adequately addressed, despite the existence of studies on medieval romance, women in romance, and the role of women in society. While studies of *Gui* and *Guy* romances have addressed certain subjects, they have not sufficiently addressed the influence of female characters on the romance hero. This study aims to contribute to the field of medieval literary studies by examining the influence and contribution of female characters to the romance hero and narrative in medieval romance literature. Despite the perception of female characters as passive and ineffective, this study will demonstrate their significant role in shaping the narrative. By centring the experiences of strong and influential female characters, the understanding of medieval literature can be enriched, and the enduring legacy of women in history can be deepened.

CHAPTER ONE

GENDER IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

1.1. Gender Perspectives in Medieval English Literature

When analysing and interpreting medieval romances, it is crucial to consider the socio-cultural, economic, and political context of their time. These factors heavily influence literary works, and it is essential to acknowledge their impact on the place and role of female characters on the narrative. The complexity of social hierarchies, gender relations, religious convictions, and moral norms pervasive in the British environment can be understood by looking through the prism of these romances. Krueger points out that the content and structure of medieval romances are significantly influenced by the sociocultural environment.²² The romances capture the social and political reality of medieval civilisation as well as the ideals and beliefs of the time. Lehman and Greensfeld state that thanks to the fact that every storyteller, whether intentionally or unintentionally, arranges the information within the confines of an established tradition of structure and style, employing the tale patterns they have heard.²³ These literary works serve as priceless archives of historical and cultural information, illuminating the desires, fears, and aspirations of the readers and scribes who created them.

The phenomenon of social and individual judgement and exclusion, to which women are subjected in many social and cultural spheres, has an important place in literary works as well as in social relations. Studies and writings on the place and impact of women in society often seek to challenge traditional gender norms and advocate for greater gender

²² Roberta Krueger, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

²³ Lehman and Greensfeld, "Intertextuality," 264.

equality in society. Larrington asserts that the gender disparities experienced by female characters in literature stem from entrenched patriarchal structures and societal norms, which have been influenced by centuries of male hegemony and the perpetuation of beliefs regarding female inferiority.²⁴ These attitudes contribute to a culture that perpetuates gender inequality and limits women's autonomy and agency, and according to Power, these ideas derive from religious dogma, patriarchal teachings and aristocratic systems that have been ingrained in societies for generations.²⁵ This situation perpetuates a cycle in which women are seen as subordinate and their voices are silenced, hindering progress towards gender equality. Women are disproportionately affected by poverty and lack of decision-making power, further perpetuating the cycle of gender inequality.

The social difficulties and discrimination resulting from this gender discrimination against women can be seen in medieval romances as well as in other literary works. McDowall argues that the portrayal of women in the Middle Ages as both sacred, as the Virgin Mary, and unreliable, as Eve, leads men to either worship or denigrate women, ultimately forcing women to acknowledge male domination.²⁶ The Middle Ages' binary image of women upholds social norms and expectations that restrict women's agency and autonomy.

The narrator's, reader's, and audience's social and ideological affiliations significantly shape the narrative, while cultural background reading helps understand how a text or artwork reflects and challenges the norms of its time.²⁷ Reading these stories helps people connect with the past and understand how they have influenced literature and society over time.²⁸ A comprehensive understanding of the intricate interactions between literature, society, and faith is gained through the merger of socio-cultural and theological inquiry, highlighting the ongoing human search for meaning, love, and transcendence.

²⁴ Carolyn Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 194.

²⁵ Eileen Edna Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. Michael Moyssey Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 1.

²⁶ David McDowall, *An Illustrated History of Britain* (Harlow: Longman, 2019), 62.

²⁷ Lehman and Greensfeld, "Intertextuality", 264.

²⁸ Urpo Kovala, "Cultural Studies and Cultural Text Analysis," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2002): 3, <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1169>.

In England in the Medieval Period, the general profile of women in the characterisation, compared to men, is tended to be suppressed, and they cannot receive the honour they deserved.²⁹ Reflecting the patriarchal social structure that is still prevalent in the Middle Ages, the romance genre is tended to portray women as less valuable than men. The emergence of a new intellectual sexism in the early twelfth century affects how women are portrayed in the writings since the men who compose them are closely associated with the elite clergy and the cathedral school.³⁰ The reason why women are portrayed in literary texts with a view parallel to society's perception can be attributed to the authors who create this portrayal. Women accept certain expectations of marriage, children, and obedience in an effort to appease the patriarchal society.³¹ In the context of male-female or female-social relations, the role and function of women in literary texts tend to be portrayed as ineffective, passive, or weak. This parallogism is the starting point of this study, which aims to provide a different perspective on social relations that are biased against women.

During the thirteenth century and afterwards, women's roles and status have been influenced by numerous factors, including their social class, marital status, and religious affiliations. The socio-cultural and theological context of the Middle Ages has an impact on the romances of the period. Medieval romances frequently cover topics like love, gallantry, and polite behaviour.³² Within this rich tapestry of societal norms, religious beliefs, and cultural practices, medieval romances emerged as a reflection of the values and aspirations of the time. The way that men and women are portrayed in medieval romances reflects the expectations and traditions around gender at the period. Men are shown as heroic knights who exemplify the virtues of bravery, strength, and honour. However, women in medieval romances are frequently represented as objects of

²⁹ Murat Serdar and Murat Hanar, "Orta Çağ Avrupası'nda Kadın Algısı," *Cappadocia Journal of History and Social Sciences* 17, no. 17 (October 2021): 171, <https://doi.org/10.29228/cahij.53944>.

³⁰ Kimberly Klimek, "Forgetting the Weakness of Her Sex and a Woman's Softness': Historians of the Anglo-Norman World and Their Female Subject'" (PhD Thesis., University of New Mexico, 2009), 107, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/hist_etds/40.

³¹ Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopaedia* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 181.

³² Corinne Saunders, *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 2.

desire and adoration, whose virtue and beauty act as a source of inspiration and a reward for the knights' bravery.

Women from aristocratic families play crucial roles in the intricate framework of medieval society. They have great influence over the management of estates, the running of households, and the planning of courtly activities. Women from noble families often play important roles in managing estates, overseeing household affairs, and engaging in courtly activities. They are expected to embody the virtues of chastity, piety, and obedience while also actively participating in the social and political lives of their households.³³ For women in lower social classes, their roles often revolve around domestic and agricultural work, with limited opportunities for education or public involvement.³⁴ Religious women, such as nuns, held a distinct position in society, with their lives devoted to prayer, contemplation, and service. It is significant to note that historical records predominantly reflect the experiences and perspectives of privileged women, leaving gaps in our understanding of the lives and viewpoints of women from marginalised backgrounds.

Exploring primary sources, such as legal documents, literary works, and religious texts, alongside secondary scholarship allows us to piece together a more nuanced understanding of women's experiences and contributions in thirteenth-century medieval England. The dynamic relationship between text and context underlines the importance of considering different perspectives when interpreting literature, as literary texts cannot be expected to be independent of the conditions of their time and environment. It is of great importance to consider the social, cultural, religious, and economic conditions of the period while examining the mediaeval romances, which constitute the main points of this study.

1.2. Faith, Literature, and Patriarchy: Exploring Gender Norms in Medieval Texts

Literary works that have great significance in social or individual interactions have also been shaped by the interactions of individuals in the environment in which they live or have largely covered these interactions. They cannot be expected to exist independently

³³ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University, 1986), 45.

³⁴ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 75.

of their time or environment. In producing literary texts, which cannot be considered independent of their social context, it is possible to encounter patriarchal approaches to women in works produced under the influence of male-dominated societies. When analysing the value and position of women in society, it is also necessary to consider socio-cultural, economic, religious, or political reasons. As in many literary studies, there are stereotypical classifications of the position and value of women in medieval literary works and romances. It might be asserted that romances are also strongly influenced by the patriarchal structure and ideas about the perception of women or the position and role of women during the Middle Ages.

In order to have a better idea of the place and neglected position of women in medieval works, it is necessary to consider the conditions of the period and the socio-cultural interactions. In this way, the cause and source of the perception of deliberate devaluation of female characters in romances can be revealed. Before drawing conclusions, the reader should consider the sociological situation of the Middle Ages, which was generally characterised by patriarchal thinking. The situation in which women are seen as inferior or considered less valuable than men in every sense in the social sense is generally called patriarchy. Patriarchy, as Lerner defines, generally means increasing male dominance over women in society and institutionalising and displaying male dominance over children and women in the family.³⁵ This indicates that men hold power in crucial institutions of society and that women's right to access such power is thwarted.³⁶ Since patriarchy is not a manufactured pattern, finding a place to start is quite challenging. This is due to the fact that patriarchy permeates cultures for many years and changes and adapts to many cultural circumstances. Its origins may be seen in prehistoric societies when male supremacy is entrenched via social, political, and economic structures.

The rise of patriarchy occurs in various chronological situations and at different rates throughout history, influencing the social structure of each civilisation in a unique way. Lerner states that the patriarchy's formation period, which spans from 3100 to 600 B.C., is marked not by a single event but rather by a process, and it arises in several diverse

³⁵ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 3-4.

³⁶ Saadet Altay, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis," *E-Şarkiyat İlmî Araştırmaları Dergisi/Journal of Oriental Scientific Research (JOSR)*, April 30, 2019, 418, <https://doi.org/10.26791/sarkiat.541704>.

civilisations at various paces and periods.³⁷ It is difficult to identify a single origin for patriarchy because of its ties to other oppressive systems like racism and classism. This complicates the issue even further. In actuality, the idea of patriarchy evolves in cultures over time and permeates cultural life.

The idea that patriarchal structures are historical artefacts reflect a sincerely held social conviction about the inherent virtues and endurance of these structures. Patriarchal systems are viewed as historical, everlasting, and are approved by God because they are and have always been the way life is.³⁸ It is important to understand that, as Lerner mentions, patriarchal systems are social constructs that have persisted over time rather than being inherent or naturally occurring.³⁹ In this sense it is considered that women are naturally inferior, because it is believed that it always is in this way. According to Mikołajczak and Pietrzak, there is a close connection between patriarchy and religion in terms of constructing societies by God.⁴⁰ In other words, the Christian tradition contains close relations to patriarchy since the Lord, King, and Father are the most common masculine pronouns used to describe God in the Bible and in liturgical prayer. The presumptive maleness of God and Jesus is utilised to legitimise women's subjugation in the religious context, which exacerbates the oppression of women by patriarchal societal systems.⁴¹ It might be stated that the source of the problems in male-female relations and the position of women in society are the ideas that are suitable for misinterpretation in Christianity of Medieval Europe or religion in general.

In order to identify the root of societal patriarchy, which is a wide phrase, it is important to look at societies from different perspectives. Within this broad framework, the religious component plays a crucial part in uniting communities, enabling them to live in harmony and order, and playing a crucial role in establishing cultural, moral, and social rules. When talking about the position, duties, and responsibilities of women in society, it is hard to disregard a source as significant as religion. Rakoczy suggests that religions worldwide,

³⁷ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 6.

³⁸ Susan Rakoczy, "Religion and Violence: The Suffering of Women," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, Religion & Spirituality*, no. 61 (2004), 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2004.9676037>.

³⁹ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 3.

⁴⁰ Małgorzata Mikołajczak and Janina Pietrzak, "Ambivalent Sexism and Religion: Connected through Values," *Sex Roles* 70, no. 9–10 (May 28, 2014): 388, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0379-3>.

⁴¹ Rakoczy, "Religion and Violence," 31.

such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, advocate for peace, yet their followers often exhibit aggression and warlike behaviour, both in conflicts and in domestic settings.⁴² Even though there might be a number of explanations for the discrepancy between followers' actions and the teachings of peace, including historical conflicts, political motives, and incorrect interpretations of religious texts, religion plays a significant role in the establishment of patriarchal societies.

By examining different religions, one can uncover common themes, customs, and beliefs unique to women. This comparative approach offers insights into how various religious traditions shape and affect women's cultural experiences. Considering that Anglo-Norman and Middle English literary texts, and Medieval Europe in general, are the main focus of this study, it becomes possible to reduce this analysis to Christianity. Examples based on Christianity would be a better choice to show religious reflections in Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances as Christianity is the preeminent religion at the time and has a significant impact on society's cultural and literary features. Readers can better comprehend the religious themes and symbolism found in these romances by applying examples from Christianity, which will improve the grasp and enjoyment of the writings as a whole. The examples given will be from the Bible - English Standard Version (ESV) while examining the impact of religion on social structure. Understanding the religious themes and symbolism in medieval romances requires knowledge of the Bible, particularly the English Standard Version (ESV). It might be considered as a good way to examine the impact of Christianity on society and literature due to its extensive usage and familiarity among the Christian populace of the period. Considering these writings through the ESV's perspective enables a more thorough examination of how Christianity influenced this period's literary and cultural developments.

According to Christian belief - or as it is said in the Bible - the role of women in the community must always be one step behind men. Tuten interprets this issue that God creates Eve (woman) after creating Adam (man) in Genesis chapter two since Adam requires Eve as God believes that he should not be by himself and that he needs a helper

⁴² Rakoczy, "Religion and Violence," 29.

or companion.⁴³ It can be argued that the reason why woman (Eve) is created second is that she is not given an significant role as man (Adam), and that she is actually assigned the role of a helper or assistant for Adam rather than an individual. It is mentioned in the *New Testament* that God forbids a woman from instructing or ruling over a man; instead, she is to be silent because Eve arrives after Adam is created, and Adam is not tricked, it is the woman who is tricked and turns into a transgressor.⁴⁴ The imbalances between men and women are encountered in many scenes of history and the primary source of women's efforts to find a place for themselves in patriarchal societies date back to the creation story. Therefore, by looking at the verses in the Bible about creation, it would not be wrong to interpret that the source of the imbalance or inequality between men and women have religious reasons.

It is possible to find various examples in the *New Testament* showing the relationship between the creation of woman and the roles of men and women. The following words appear in Corinthians (English Standard Version), stating that since he is the representation of God and his glory, a man should not hide his head; yet a woman is the glory of man since man is not made for woman; rather, she is, and man does not originate from woman; rather, woman does.⁴⁵ It would not be wrong to deduce from these words that women are created for men and that the reason for their existence is to support men, glorify them and serve for them.⁴⁶ It can be said that this is one of the reasons why women have to be under the protection and supervision of men all the time in the patriarchal order, which is also frequently seen in medieval societies, and that women cannot be an individual.

As the source of the subject about women is sought, it becomes apparent that the origins of this subject are firmly rooted in the narratives of the Bible, where the portrayal and perception of women serve as foundational elements influencing subsequent cultural, religious, and societal discourses. Religious works and religious subjects are examined in terms of forming a basis for the study. Having such kind of examples in the sourcebook

⁴³ Belle Tuten, *Daily Life of Women in Medieval Europe* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2022), 2.

⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 2:12-14 (English Standard Version)

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:8-10 (English Standard Version)

⁴⁶ Kathleen Quirk, "Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy, 1050–1150," in *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past, 700-1300*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 54.

and encountering such examples from religious sources makes it possible to say that religion, violence, and patriarchy are all intertwined.⁴⁷ The most important and fundamental reason why religion and patriarchy are intertwined and constantly mentioned together is that the basis of patriarchy has close connection to religious structures. In essence, the connection between cultural values, social rules, and religious influences is evident, particularly in religions like Christianity, where male-based formations prevail. This correlation is widely accepted as a natural outcome of the religious underpinnings that shape societal norms and order. For example, all prophets are men, suggesting a belief that men lead/rule societies.

The emergence of patriarchy is inevitable in societies that are overly preoccupied with religion and religious values and that shape their living conditions according to religious teachings. Reflections of this situation can be seen mainly in the Middle Ages. Women's roles undergo significant restrictions from the fourth century onwards, coinciding with the formal recognition of the Church by the Roman Empire and the establishment of the Church's patriarchy, mirroring patterns seen in other faiths.⁴⁸ A woman's primary responsibility is to bear children, especially sons, who would carry on her husband's family line. She is also expected to remain pure and in the home.⁴⁹ In light of these considerations, it is possible to say that religion has a significant impact on gender inequality and the devaluation of women. This is because it is difficult for women to find a place for themselves in religion, and there are differences how religion approaches men and women.

In addition to male dominance in the emergence of religion, its teachings and its approach to people, religious activities are also male dominated. There is not a majority of women actively involved in religion since entering a convent is often required to participate in active religious life because women are not permitted to serve as priests or administer the sacraments.⁵⁰ Although men and women are equally responsible for religious duties and beliefs, the approaches of the churches or Christianity to women, in general, is not

⁴⁷ Rakoczy, "Religion and Violence," 30.

⁴⁸ Robert Scott Ellwood and Barbara McGraw, eds., *Many Peoples, Many Faiths: Women and Men in the World Religions* (New York: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2023), 492.

⁴⁹ Ellwood and McGraw, *Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, 492.

⁵⁰ Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 116.

considered equal. Women are mostly excluded, exposed to inequality by religious regulations. They are not allowed to become priests, and so, they have to enter monasteries to be religiously significant or to devote themselves to religion and cut off their outer world, social life and family/friend relations completely.⁵¹ As Larrington states, it is difficult to become a nun since convents want admission fees that may rival the value of a dowry without providing the woman's family with the opportunity to form an alliance with another household.⁵² Entrance to the monastery and devotion to religion also have a price. Women who isolate themselves from life must continue their lives on the path of church and religion. They are obliged to isolate themselves from social activities such as marriage and family life in order to take part in religious communities.

Whether in religious establishment or not, the church has a significant influence on social life, especially on women. In many periods throughout history, religious organisations interfere with people's lives, daily activities, and even their private lives.⁵³ These interventions, which can extend to private life and marriage life, show how determinant the religious structure is on shaping societies. Marriage holds considerable sway over the perceptions of sexuality, religion, and childrearing in the Middle Ages, given that the majority of women enter into matrimony at least once, often multiple times.⁵⁴ The study of women's family dynamics and marital experiences provides a direct route to understanding their place within medieval Christianity and the wider implications of religious influence on women. Because in addition to the supposed fact that women belong to men and live under male domination, there is the supervision and control of the church even in male-female relations and marriage.

The church even intervenes in people's private lives in order to create more religious societies. In fact, some argue that sexual intercourse, even within marriage, is deemed sinful due to the emphasis placed on preserving virginity. Tuten mentions that according to this perspective, if intercourse occurs, it should be approached with religious reverence,

⁵¹ Quirk, "Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy," 60.

⁵² Larrington, *Women and Writing*, 116.

⁵³ Barbara Hargrove, Jean Miller Schmidt, and Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Religion and the Changing Role of Women," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 480, no. 1 (1985): 119, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716285480001010>.

⁵⁴ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 1.

specifically to fulfil the divine mandate of procreating Christian offspring.⁵⁵ The fact that the church can interfere in people's private lives in this way shows how easily societies can be shaped by the church and religious values. It is assumed that religion and patriarchy are intertwined structures.

It is the main duty of the church to keep societies away from sin as much as possible and to lead them to the right path. While fulfilling these duties, it can be clearly observed how the church can easily guide and shape societies. Even in some sources, sexual desire is seen as a product of Original Sin and therefore, individuals who want to be wholly obedient to God should refrain from intercourse.⁵⁶ This can be accepted as the reason why religion claims so much over people's private lives. The church, which should equally give religious teachings to society, might be treating women more oppressively and distantly.

In terms of gender inequality, it can be observed that women are subjected to injustice in certain situations and events, whether they are responsible or not. Women are historically unfairly blamed and held responsible for a range of societal problems.⁵⁷ Their growth is hindered, and negative prejudices are reinforced by this institutional censorship. Since it is accepted that the woman is the main culprit, even though both parties are punished as a result of original sin, the punishment of the woman is more severe than that of the man.⁵⁸ The idea that women are inherently imperfect or immoral is reinforced by the disparity in punishment. It is crucial to understand the historical context in which these views first appear and to actively seek to destroy these unjust notions of women's worth and potential. As a religious reflection of why woman is a sinner and a scapegoat, it is stated in Genesis that as a punishment for disobeying God and breaking his prohibitions, God increases her (Eve's) pain in childbirth, causing her to give birth to children in agony. Her husband will be the object of her desire, and he (Adam) will be in charge.⁵⁹ It allows the reader to interpret this religious narrative in Genesis as an approach to explain the power relationships and social roles between men and women. This approach draws attention to

⁵⁵ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 7.

⁵⁶ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 2.

⁵⁷ Hargrove, Schmidt, and Davaney, "Religion and the Changing Role of Women," 120.

⁵⁸ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 2.

⁵⁹ Genesis 3:16 (English Standard Version)

the notion that, in some religious contexts, women suffer the weight of sin and are inferior to males, which shapes conventional gender standards.

The focus of the study is not to examine the position of women only in religious values or in religion in general. It is seen that people are greatly influenced by religious teachings as a major reason of gender inequality in society and the patriarchal social structure that develops accordingly. It is essential and crucial to look at religious sources and examples when examining why women are considered inferior in the Medieval Period while analysing society and its foundations. After all these religious examples, men in the Middle Ages naturally see themselves as superior to women. Tuten notes that women in the Middle Ages are taught that their husbands are in charge of their daily worries and activities and that they should always obey.⁶⁰ This state of being superior enlarges the gap between the parties in male-female relations, and men have the idea that they have all kinds of rights over their wives or any woman in the society.

It is possible to encounter cases of domestic violence because of this superior vision that men possess or have acquired over time. Tuten argues that there are occasionally apparent incidents of marital violence in court documents from late mediaeval Europe, when the record keeping is more vital than in earlier centuries.⁶¹ The historical background of domestic violence is clarified by Tuten's theory, which suggests that because males are thought to have superior vision throughout late medieval Europe, there may be more instances of domestic violence. This demonstrates the probable link between marital violence during that period and cultural perceptions of gender roles.

As a reflection of patriarchy, social rules and laws are also based on male dominance due to the fact that men consider themselves superior. Gender inequalities in justice and law represent a critical aspect of social order, highlighting significant disparities that warrant close examination and remedial action. There are differences between men and women in the punishments given for offences committed and application of these punishments.⁶²

⁶⁰ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 23

⁶¹ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 22

⁶² JaneMaree Maher, Jude McCulloch, and Gail Mason, "Punishing Gendered Violence as Hate Crime: Aggravated Sentences as a Means of Recognising Hate as Motivation for Violent Crimes against Women," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 41, no. 1 (2015): 180, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13200968.2015.1040148>.

Medieval courts are severe toward women who injured their husbands. An English treason statute from 1352 describes a woman killing her husband as a kind of treason, much like a subject trying to kill a monarch or an enslaved person their master.⁶³ The severe treatment of women at the period is a reflection of the strongly patriarchal culture in which husbands are viewed as having the final say and any action against them is seen as a threat to the social order. These restrictions are designed to keep women under control and to uphold their inferior status in marriage. Because of the severe penalties imposed for these transgressions, it is clear that medieval courts go to great lengths to uphold male authority and the social hierarchy. Consequently, women are subjected to discrimination and injustice in numerous aspects of their society, and are usually regarded as the oppressed group, which leads this study to examine the situations where women are more valued and considered more important.

As a result of all this devaluation of women or second-class treatment of women against men, they are not able to gain much space in romances. The role of women in romances is portrayed as having minimal importance, quite similar to gender roles in society.⁶⁴ Quirk argues that despite women's deep attachment to the family, their duties are severely constrained.⁶⁵ Reflecting the patriarchal framework of medieval society, these narratives tend to relegate women to subordinate positions, emphasising their subservience and limited autonomy. The limitations imposed on women's roles in romance and society highlight the pervasive influence of patriarchal ideals, which feed the cycle of marginalisation and inadequate representation of women in both everyday life and medieval romance.

Men are often depicted through the lens of their warrior-like, heroic, or leadership qualities, emphasizing their physical prowess or notable achievements, while aspects of their family life or emotional dimensions receive comparatively less attention. In depictions of women, emotional attributes and roles as mothers or wives are frequently emphasised, with other characteristics or scenarios receiving less prominence.⁶⁶ One of the biggest reasons for this is stereotyped gender roles. Women are depicted in ways that

⁶³ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 22

⁶⁴ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 20.

⁶⁵ Quirk, "Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy," 60.

⁶⁶ Quirk, "Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy," 59.

are consistent with this paradigm, and it appears that no one fits it more than mothers, who are often seen as the epitome of what a woman should be.⁶⁷ This idealisation of motherhood as the ultimate expression of womanhood not only confines women to a narrow set of roles but also overlooks the diversity and complexity of women's experiences and identities.

Despite the fact that women take an active part in more fields than is believed, they cannot find a place for themselves in romance. Female characters are shown only as mothers, wives, or daughters in many romances, and it is very difficult to come across female figures other than these. In other words, a mother needs a son, a wife needs a husband, and daughter needs a father to exist.⁶⁸ One of the biggest reasons for this is the view that women cannot exist independently as one of the consequences of patriarchy. It is not common to encounter autonomous, strong, or independent women figures in medieval romances.

Consequently, autonomous, strong, or independent female characters are rare in these narratives, reflecting a broader societal view that women cannot thrive independently within a patriarchal framework. In contrast to these prevailing norms, romances such as *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* offer a unique perspective on the depiction of women. In these romances, women are portrayed as stronger and more influential characters, challenging the traditional gender roles prevalent in medieval romance. They offer a more nuanced and progressive representation of female agency and autonomy, highlighting the potential for women to exert significant influence within the context of the narrative. This departure from conventional gender dynamics underscores the narrative's distinctive approach to the representation of women, showing a wider range of roles and abilities beyond the confines of patriarchal expectations.

⁶⁷ Quirk, "Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy," 60.

⁶⁸ Quirk, "Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy," 60.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF WOMAN AS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION IN *GUI DE WAREWIC*

2.1. Medieval Romances and Female Representation: Challenging Stereotypes

Women have limited opportunities for social, political, and economic independence and are frequently restricted to conventional gender roles in medieval romance writings. As in other literary works, male-female relationships in medieval romance tend to be one-sided, and female characters are seen as less valuable or less effective than men.⁶⁹ These stereotypes perpetuate societal expectations and reinforce traditional notions of femininity. While explaining the relationship of the romance genre with social norms, Krueger says that even in its earliest forms, romance has been an idealising genre that is yet intricately linked to societal realities that are patriarchal and feudal.⁷⁰ These narratives tend to emphasise the dominance of male characters and the subservience of female characters, reflecting the social norms of the time by romanticising wealth and social status and reinforcing the hierarchical structure of feudal societies.

Regarding gender roles and the social position of women in medieval romances, Krause states that gender roles are commonly perceived as conventional, unchanging, and readily classified. In this view, a brave knight saves a princess, who is most likely trapped in a tower, and female protagonists are seen as lovely objects of desire that active masculine subjects have chivalrously gained.⁷¹ It should not be neglected that not all medieval

⁶⁹ Roberta Krueger, *The New Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 7.

⁷⁰ Krueger, *The New Cambridge Companion*, 4.

⁷¹ Kathy Krause, "The Construction and Interrogation of Gender in Old French Romance," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 135.

romances adhere strictly to these stereotypes. It is possible to find literary texts, and romances, challenging these stereotypes by presenting female characters as strong, independent, and capable of making their own choices only if the perspective and attitude towards female characters are changed. These portrayals offer a more nuanced understanding of women's social position in medieval society and challenge the notion that they are solely passive objects of desire. *Gui de Warewic*, written in Anglo-Norman in the 13th-century offers reader an opportunity to recognise the significant role and influence of female characters on the narrative from a different perspective.

The portrayal of women in *Gui de Warewic* reflects the broader social and cultural shifts occurring during the medieval period, especially in the thirteenth century. It is an example of how medieval literature can be used as a window into the social and cultural history of the period. It would not be wrong to state that *Gui de Warewic*'s representation of women in medieval romances is a testament to the diversity of female representation in literature. Considering the objectification and societal inferiority often imposed on women, it may be deemed acceptable for the medieval romance genre to consider them according to their physical appearance rather than their unique qualities. In the general perception of women's beauty, their pale skin colour, fascinating eyes, and unique body lines come to the fore.⁷² Female characters tend to be emphasised for their appearance and physical beauty since the medieval romance tradition does not emphasise individual characteristics or qualities. When Felice is introduced, it can be observed that she reflects the ideal of female beauty in the romance genre, with her outstanding appearance and beauty:

*Her face was pink and white, long and shapely and pleasing; she had a lovely mouth and a becoming nose, sparkling eyes and blonde hair; time would seem to stand still to anyone contemplating her. Her body was well-made, of a good height, and her glance was gentle.*⁷³

Felice stands out with her unique physical appearance and delicacy, and her extraordinary beauty with fair skin and striking facial features are the first elements that attract attention when she is mentioned at the beginning of the romance.⁷⁴ Her body is perfectly built, and

⁷² William Todd, ed., *Guy of Warwick*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 4.

⁷³ For the thirteenth century *Gui de Warewic*, the source used for this version is as follows: Judith Elisabeth Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic: Two Anglo-Norman Romances* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 97.

⁷⁴ Todd, *Guy of Warwick*, 7.

she has reached a respectable height, and she has a gentle look in her eyes. Speaking of Felice's beauty, Phillips mentions that her pale skin, beautifully shaped mouth and nose, and smooth facial features are the qualities considered preferable for women's appearance in medieval romance tradition.⁷⁵ The physical beauty of Felice reflects the expectations of medieval society and the romance genre for women in society. Since women's roles in social relations are typically limited to that of a wife figure, it is considered normal for female characters to be depicted with perceptions and stereotypes of physical beauty. Women are often objectified or portrayed as subordinate characters in society. They are not typically expected to possess qualities that would bring them to the forefront, and as a result, their physical appearance is often the primary focus of attention.

Felice's character defies the stereotypical female character profile often found in the romance genre. The general perception of ideal beauty for female characters in romances is often assumed to be shaped by the influence of male-dominated romance writers. However, it is important to note that her character is not defined solely by her appearance or physical beauty. *Gui de Warewic* becomes noteworthy for its portraying female characters as more than mere objects of beauty. Felice, in particular, is an exceptional character due to her personal growth and level of education, which challenges the perception that female characters are only present for aesthetic purposes:

*She was courteous and learned, instructed in all the arts: her tutors, all hoary and white-haired, had come from Toledo and taught her astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry. She had a very proud heart. Because she was so wise, she was sought by dukes and counts for came from many lands for her sake. But she would love none of them because she was so noble.*⁷⁶

Felice challenges stereotypical norms not only in appearance but also in cognition. As Power points out, a woman's status is often determined by her sex rather than her personality, which can lead to her being unfairly considered inferior to a man.⁷⁷ It is essential to recognise Felice's exceptional character and the valuable contributions she makes, regardless of gender. She, therefore, is described as an intelligent, well-spoken,

⁷⁵ Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 45.

⁷⁶ Judith Elisabeth Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic: Two Anglo-Norman Romances* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 97.

⁷⁷ Power, *Medieval Women*, 2.

and well-educated woman. Phillips asserts that the ultimate goal of medieval English maidens' education, which is remarkably different from that of contemporary education, is to form women who are useful as secondary sexes.⁷⁸ Felice's education, however, is solely for personal development, rather than to gain the favour or approval of any male counterpart. This exceptional position is a testament to her confidence and independence.

On the other hand, as a requirement of the chivalric tradition in medieval romance, it is common for male characters to be portrayed in a strong, warlike, or superior position.⁷⁹ This portrayal often includes attributes such as bravery, honour, and skill in combat. Additionally, these male characters are typically depicted as protectors of the weak and defenders of justice, embodying the ideals of knighthood. Leyser notes that men are often thought of as knights, merchants, or crusaders, while women in the Middle Ages are categorised according to their marital status: they are virgins, wives or widows.⁸⁰ Gui is therefore expected to be portrayed as a strong and respected character in a male-dominated society.⁸¹ Contrary to this stereotyped expectation, Gui appears at the beginning of the romance as the son of the seneschal and a servant, rather than a strong or respected character:

*"My lord," he said, "I will most readily do your command."... He knelt before Felice and gave her father's greetings; how he had been sent to her that they to serve her according to her wishes... "I am son of Sequart, the seneschal, whom your father loves and considers trustworthy; he was brought me up in his court and I thank him for the great kindness he has shown me."*⁸²

Gui is in the presence of Count Rault and is told by the count to go to his daughter's room to greet and serve his daughter Felice. Accepting the order, Gui goes straight to the girl's room and introduces himself to her, telling her that he is the son of Sequart, the seneschal

⁷⁸ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 61.

⁷⁹ Ronald Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, eds., *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 5.

⁸⁰ Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2013), 93.

⁸¹ Justyna Kielkiewicz, "Beyond the Convention? Representation of Female Characters in Middle English Romances," *New Horizons in English Studies* 2 (2017): 47, <https://doi.org/10.17951/nh.2017.2.39>.

⁸² Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 99.

whom her father respects so much. Gui also expresses his gratitude to the count for bringing him up and making him available to the court.

As can be understood from these words, Gui is just the son of an ordinary seneschal and is a simple character. The only duty given to him at the beginning of the romance is to fulfil the wishes of the Earl's daughter and serve as her servant.⁸³ This description is very significant in order to learn more about Gui's life and his background before he becomes *Gui de Warewic*, or to better understand how Felice changes his life. In fact, it would not be a mistake to state that Gui would have been sustaining his life as a servant unless he had never met Felice.

As an example of the medieval romance genre, *Gui de Warewic* is expected to portray its main character as mentally and physically strong and resilient, as is customary in the romance. It can be considered normal that Gui does not have these qualities, as his character development is not yet complete. The fact that he considers himself as a pitiful and pathetic person suggests that he has no superiority as a male character, or that he cannot find the power that he has in Felice's eyes. He is unable to cope with these intense emotions and needs courage to express his thoughts to Felice:

*He often called himself unfortunate. "What shall I do, alas, wretch that I am? Alas the day I ever saw bright-faced Felice! I daren't show her the pain I feel because of her, both night and day, nor will I ever show her – I won't dare do it."*⁸⁴

Gui is deeply in love with Felice, and he cannot stop thinking about her love. He frequently considers himself unlucky and desperate. He questions what he should do and then he feels miserable and unfortunate. He regrets the day he first encountered the beautiful Felice. Despite the intense emotional pain that he experiences because of Felice, he is hesitant to reveal his feelings to her, and he suffers both during the day and at night. Gui believes that he will never find the courage to express his emotions to her.

Gui is struggling because of his feelings and thoughts to Felice, which makes him think how desperate and unfortunate person she is to be in love with.⁸⁵ The reader might notice

⁸³ Todd, *Guy of Warwick*, 6.

⁸⁴ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 100.

⁸⁵ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in Guy of Warwick*, 61.

the inner turmoil of the character, who is deeply troubled by his feelings for Felice. His frequent self-deprecating thoughts and his description of himself as unfortunate suggest that he is going through a challenging and emotional period. Gui's agony arises from his inability to openly express his love for her. In medieval romances, unrequited love is a common theme, adding complexity to the characters and their relationships strengthens the impact of the evolution of Gui.

By closely examining the interactions between Gui and Felice, the nuances and complexities of their relationship can be uncovered. Through careful analysis of the text, it is discerned that Felice's role is located as a catalyst for Gui's character development. *Gui de Warewic* presents the reader with the opportunity to examine the pivotal role of female characters in the narrative of the romance and to understand how Felice shapes Gui's actions and motivations. By delving into the details of the passage, one can appreciate the agency and influence that Felice holds as she stands out as a determinant factor in their relationship. The presentation of a perspective that differs from the patriarchal one allows the audience to identify the underlying power dynamics and the manner in which influential women exercise their authority within the narrative.

One of the fundamental characteristics of the romance genre can be seen in Gui's internal conflict between his love for Felice and his fear of rejection. As Wiggins argues that Felice is a representation of both the righteousness or goal that Gui seeks to achieve in his exile-return journeys, as well as the threat or force of cruelty that drives Gui into exile.⁸⁶ The threat option is less effective than being the mobiliser because she changes Gui's life for the better. Gui's character is made more nuanced and complex by this internal conflict, which highlights the underlying struggle between pursuing his goals and giving in to the fear of inner weakness. It also keeps the reader engaged in Gui's search for self-knowledge and heightens the conflict in the narrative. His reluctance to reveal his feelings to Felice represents the courtly love concept of medieval romance tradition. According to this custom, as Larrington explains, a knight is often prevented by chivalric norms and social conventions from marrying a girl he sees from afar.⁸⁷ Krause mentions

⁸⁶ Alison Wiggins, *Guy of Warwick: Study and Transcription* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2000), 19.

⁸⁷ Larrington, *Women and Writing*, 42.

that in romance, masculine heroes confront not only formidable challenges but also they inherent conflicts of chivalric masculinity, such as balancing affection with knightly combat, navigating the homosocial aspects of chivalry, and meeting the expectations of the women who admire them and serve as the epitome of chivalric excellence.⁸⁸ Even if it is too early to talk about Gui as a knight, his words give the reader a preview that he might also strive for self-realisation.

In *Gui de Warewic*, Gui confidently gains courage and decisively speaks to Felice even though he does not consider himself a worthy companion or partner for her. He is aware of the consequences of this confession or his dedication and prepares himself for the possible consequences. In terms of the significance of Felice in Gui's life, Phillips suggests that even though males in all spheres of society benefit most from the male-dominated socialisation; however, to be effective for this socialisation, women must participate, comply, and support men.⁸⁹ Gui therefore still recognises Felice's superiority and expects her to reciprocate his courage. It might be said that Gui expects pity from Felice, contrary to the stereotypical male-dominated thought structure of the patriarchal romance tradition:

*Noble Felice, I beg you for God's sake to take pity on me, wretched creature that I am, so that I don't find you so cruel to me that you don't hear my prayer. From now on, I can no longer conceal – it is a love that makes me speak – the great pain and misery which I suffer both night and day for you...*⁹⁰

Gui states that he implores her, for the love of God, to have compassion on him since he considers himself a wretched soul. He asks her not to be so unkind as to ignore his plea. He also mentions that he cannot hide the intense pain and suffering he endures because of his love for her. It's this love that compels him to speak, and it torments him day and night.

After some time of struggling and suffering agony because of his deep and excessively devoted love, Gui finally finds the motivation and courage to express his love and face his fate. He declares that he cannot think of anything because of her as he is expressing

⁸⁸ Krause, "The Construction and Interrogation," 144.

⁸⁹ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 13.

⁹⁰ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 100.

his sickly devoted love. His statements expose that even without doing anything to him on purpose or having any individual influence on his life, Felice has a great impact on Gui and his character development. His revelation demonstrates the intensity of his emotional relationship with Felice. It implies that just having her in his life has the impact to determine who he is. This highlights the significant power she subconsciously has over him and the transformational nature of the connection they have by highlighting the theme of courtly love prevalent in medieval romances.

In contrast to the usual strong and central male characters, Gui represents a controversial idea of a romance hero. Apart from the class difference between him and Felice, she is more complete in terms of character development than Gui. He sees Felice as someone challenging to reach because he is aware of these differences between himself and Felice. This unattainability puts Gui into a phase of physical deprivation and causes him physical and mental helplessness:

*Love made him fall to the ground; love made him suddenly shudder; love made him remove his clothes. He kept calling himself miserable and weak. " What should I do, and what can I do? I certainly don't want to live! Most of all, I want to die, for what would please me. Oh death, what keeps you? I'm so defeated by love! Why don't you come and take me? I've quite gone out of my mind..."*⁹¹

It is his love that causes him to collapse, makes him tremble uncontrollably, and compels him to disrobe.⁹² He continually berates himself as wretched and feeble. Gui considers himself miserable, questions his existence, and expresses a great desire to die. The thing he wants most is death, and he thinks that this death will be satisfied to a great extent. Gui begs for death to come and rescue him as soon as possible because he thinks that this desperate love is consuming him.

Gui's statements suggest that he completely captures all the consuming and overwhelming intensity of his feelings. Gui is said to be both physically and emotionally affected by love. It is this love of Felice that makes him tremble, fall and act irrationally. Gui defines love as an overwhelming emotion that consumes his entire being, leaving no room for reason or control. He uses strong verbs like fall and tremble to emphasise the

⁹¹ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 101.

⁹² Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 67.

intensity of his feelings and the tremendous effect of love on him. This description might be considered as a perfect example of the pervading power of courtly love.⁹³ Because it goes beyond basic feelings and becomes the motivation, inspiration and reason for his decisions and actions. This embodies the idea of exhausting and passionate love that characterises medieval literature.

The portrayal of emotional pain in chivalric literature serves to humanise knightly figures and emphasises knights' inner conflicts. Gui's personal struggles might be considered as a demonstration of the virtues of chivalry by showing his weakness and frailty in the face of love, proving that true strength comes from facing one's emotions.⁹⁴ This portrayal gives his character more nuance and makes it easier for the reader to identify with him personally, which adds to the appeal of his journey. Gui's expression of vulnerability shows that he is committed to whatever he faces, even if he is not yet considered a knight. It would not be wrong to conclude from these words that Gui does not reject or cannot ignore the significance and impact of Felice's character, and he expresses that he is vulnerable and open to any kind of difficulty that he might face in order to be a worthy spouse for Felice.

2.2. Examining the Intellectual and Emotional Influence of Women in Romances

Gui de Warewic would be convenient examples to demonstrate the idea that women should be considered as worthy and influential as men in medieval romances. Through the representation of Felice's impact on Gui, the romance opens up an opportunity to mention that there are stronger women who have a significant influence on narration, contrary to general belief.⁹⁵ Considering Felice as an efficient character makes it possible for reader to realise the fact that it is women who create the hero since it is not expected to see such an example in medieval romance. Phillips mentions that the idea that women are inferior to males and should be treated as such is a basic aspect of medieval perspectives about women.⁹⁶ *Gui de Warewic*, however, departs from the conventional

⁹³ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 96.

⁹⁴ Marcia Smith Marzec, "What Makes a Man? Troilus, Hector, and the Masculinities of Courtly Love," in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 58.

⁹⁵ Barbara Ann Hanawalt, "The Female Felon in Fourteenth-Century England," in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 132-133.

⁹⁶ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 11.

portrayal of women as passive or secondary figures by presenting them as strong and independent characters who make a substantial contribution to the hero's quest. The romances challenge the general perceptions by conveying a clear point that female emancipation is necessary for the overall success and influence of any heroic action, as well as for individual development.

In *Gui de Warewic*, Felice's active and determinant role is consistently evident throughout the text. Gui finds himself in a great love that he feels is impossible for him and for which he suffers physically and emotionally. This state of helplessness suggests that male characters are not as strong as they are thought to be, that they are physically and emotionally deprived, and that they need women to feel sorry for them. As in the case of Felice, as Herlihy points out, female characters are more active and play a more effective role in the narrative than one might think.⁹⁷ As the decisive role in the relationship, Felice cannot understand Gui's courage to fall in love with her, but she still wants to give Gui a chance. Felice makes her role in the narrative clear by stating that she will reciprocate his love when she is convinced that he is worthy of it:

*"Gui," she said, "now listen to me! I've changed my mind. Don't think it insulting if I tell you what I think. I don't want to love any young man unless he's a knight – handsome, courteous and renowned, brave and bold, prized for his feats of arms. When I have seen you receive weapons, I will grant you my love if you become as I have asked you."*⁹⁸

Felice decides to express herself more clearly and asks him to pay attention to what she says. She states that her feelings have changed, and she hopes he would not take offense when she shares her thoughts. She says that she has decided not to love anyone unless he is a knight. She also mentions that a suitable spouse for her should be handsome, courteous, and renowned to be a right person for her. She looks for a brave and bold knight who is famous for his achievements in battle. If she witnesses Gui's being knighted and displaying these qualities, she will grant him her love.

With these words, Felice emphasises that she does not have a completely negative attitude towards Gui. She clears her thoughts and determines some criteria to make a decision

⁹⁷ David Herlihy, "Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200," in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 15.

⁹⁸ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 104.

about him. Felice's open expression of her wishes and expectations of the person she will marry shows the reader that, as a woman, she takes an active role in the narrative. Felice is a strong character who can take control of her life rather than being a passive or ineffective one. In addition, the way she expresses her demands shows that she is a harmonious character who can control her feelings and thoughts and change or develop them as necessary.

Felice's requirements underline the social structure of the period and the importance of people's social position. Her desire for a companion who exemplifies the qualities of a true knight might be considered as the overall perception of relationships in the Middle Ages, especially in the thirteenth century. In fact, her expectations and demands overlap with the traditional virtues generally associated with medieval romances. Felice's statements suggest that her love for Gui also depends on whether or not he can fulfil these qualities. She often emphasises the idea that knights must prove their worth to their lovers through heroic deeds. Felice's criteria imply that Gui must prove his love through his courage and chivalrous virtues, showing that love is a phenomenon that must be earned through heroic deeds.⁹⁹ It would not be wrong to argue that women actually have more say in everyday or social situations than is commonly believed.

Through Felice's demands in *Gui de Warewic*, Herlihy states that she underlines the fact that women are more autonomous and have more significant roles in social relations than is generally assumed by the male-centred tradition of medieval romance writings.¹⁰⁰ The fact that she clearly states some of the qualities she is looking for in her potential husband, and sets conditions for Gui in this regard, underlines the fact that women have the potential to control their own destiny. Felice challenges patriarchal and traditional norms that see women as oppressed and silenced figures in society by insisting on having a say in her relationship and expressing her wishes.¹⁰¹ Krause asserts that women also exert their influence on the narrative, setting the terms and choosing their suitors according to their own personal standards, while knights like Gui often seek to prove themselves and

⁹⁹ Kielkiewicz, "Beyond the Convention," 42.

¹⁰⁰ Herlihy, "Land, Family, and Women," 20.

¹⁰¹ Laura Ashe, "'For Love and For Lovers': The Origins of Romance," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 26.

their skills by embarking on adventures to win the favour of their lovers.¹⁰² The tradition of medieval romance writing, which is shaped by patriarchal medieval writers and readers, is challenged by the controversial depiction of female agency in *Gui de Warewic*.

The reader's ability to break out of the male-centred perspective of romance writing gives women, through Felice, the ability to actively control their own choices.¹⁰³ Felice's expectations and wishes for her partner emphasise the value of consent and mutual respect in relationships by promoting a more harmonious and satisfying marriage between couples. Tuten mentions that Medieval women are not as repressed and silent as commonly believed or portrayed, despite the fact that formal laws and severe social conventions limited their options.¹⁰⁴ That is why *Gui de Warewic*, and particularly Felice, are significant examples of how women are actually more important and influential individuals in social relations than they are assumed.

Gui acts according to Felice's instructions even though he is the main character of the romance - the hero for whom the romance is composed. Gui, who rises to the rank of chivalry as through his love and devotion to Felice, is willing to do anything to be worthy of Felice, and Gui's willingness and passion indicate that Felice is in the position to be the major character of the romance who directs the narrative. Gui, who progresses according to her wishes, waits for Felice to give him new responsibilities in order to improve his position or achieve new successes:

*"My fair love, you know very well what a hard life I have had because of you and how my body has been afflicted. But now you've greatly comforted me. Because of you I've received weapons, and now I've come to you to hear your wishes. You are what I most desire."*¹⁰⁵

Gui turns to Felice and tells her that she is well aware of the hardships he has endured because of his love for her. He mentions the physical suffering he endures. He also mentions that now she gives him great comfort. Thanks to her, Gui is dubbed knight and seeks to discover her desires. Gui even admits that Felice is his most cherished wish.

¹⁰² Krause, "The Construction and Interrogation", 136.

¹⁰³ Wendy Wood and Alice Hendrickson Eagly, "A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Behavior of Women and Men: Implications for the Origins of Sex Differences.," *Psychological Bulletin* 128, no. 5 (2002): 712, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.128.5.699>.

¹⁰⁴ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 174.

¹⁰⁵ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 104.

Due to Felice's wishes, Gui undergoes a considerable change and starts to become a different character. Therefore, he wants Felice to be aware of this change. Gui's alteration is so significant for him that he desires Felice to see new aspects of his character. The development he has experienced might be considered as evidence of his dedication to their relationship, and he hopes she will see it. He starts his words by acknowledging the difficulties and sacrifices he has endured due to his love for Felice. He wants Felice to realise that his passion for her is the motivation for the progress Gui is making. He emphasises that he expects Felice to understand the significant impact she has on his personal development and the extent of his devotion to her when he shares his transformation. Gui is determined to fulfil Felice's wishes because he loves her so much and wants to learn what she wants since she plays a significant role in Gui's life, providing the condition for him to become a knight. This reflects the idea that women in medieval romances could have considerable influence over the lives and fates of their admirers, often by setting conditions or bestowing rewards.

Gui's declaration of love for Felice and his willingness to do anything for her shows his respect for Felice and his acceptance of her superiority. Women have as much say in the narrative as men and play crucial roles in their relationships with men. Challenging the patriarchal male-dominated mindset of medieval romances, Felice presents the idea of women having a say in the narrative by shaping Gui into the character she wants him to be.¹⁰⁶ The first condition Felice offers Gui to prove that he is a worthy partner. She wants him to prove himself as a knight by taking part in tournaments and showing that he is a respectable and brave warrior:

*'You are worth no more than you were the other day, except for being dubbed and called knight. When you have been in battles, and are renowned for tourneying, and have captured knights and attacked towers and castles, and when your fame and report of your great valour runs throughout the land and the country, then you should ask me for love.'*¹⁰⁷

When Gui mentions that now he has become a knight for the sake of her love and he wishes Felice to notice his development, Felice replies that he has not gained any additional worth beyond who he is the other day, except for being dubbed a knight. To

¹⁰⁶ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 104.

win her love, he must engage in battles, earn renown in tournaments, capture knights, siege towers and castles, and establish a reputation for his extraordinary valour throughout the land and the country. After accomplishing her request, he then might seek her affection.

To be considered as a potential spouse by Felice, Gui must prove himself as a worthy and chivalrous knight, in accordance with the tradition of medieval courtly love. Felice acknowledges her influence on Gui and values the power and abilities of her character rather than conforming to traditional gender roles. Gui's actions are motivated by Felice's control and influence. He confidently declares that he will fulfil every request made by Felice, acknowledging Felice's authority and autonomy over him.

The relationship between Gui and Felice reveals a complex picture of gender roles and connections to authority in the context of courtly love and chivalric wishes. Felice establishes an exceptionally high standard for a potential union, highlighting the value of heroism and defiance in mediaeval culture. Her acknowledgment of her influence on Gui speaks to her awareness of her agency and autonomy, challenging conventional gender norms. Gui's unwavering commitment to fulfilling Felice's requests serves to illustrate his recognition of her authority, thereby departing from traditional notions of male dominance. Through their interactions, the narrative illuminates the complexities of medieval relationships, where power and influence are not solely determined by gender but by individual character and agency. In essence, the narrative of *Gui de Warewic* invites the reader to reconsider the traditional roles assigned to men and women in medieval romance. It does so by highlighting the potential for mutual respect and partnership to transcend societal expectations.

Reading romances with a societal and theological perspective prompts the reader to delve into the socio-cultural implications of religious and socio-cultural aspects in medieval Europe, exploring how religious beliefs and social norms influenced notions of honour, virtue, and gender roles in the society. The fact that Gui participates in tournaments organised across Europe to prove himself is an important example of how the romance bears traces of the period in which it was written. These tournaments serve as showcases of chivalry, martial skills, and social prestige, reflecting the values and ideals of medieval society. Kernodle mentions that they also provide opportunities for knights to display

their horsemanship, bravery, and prowess in front of an audience.¹⁰⁸ Tournaments and knightly deeds are accepted as a prerequisite to earn the love of a lady. Felice's requests could be seen as emphasising the importance of chivalry, such as fighting and bravery, in making Gui a worthy lover for her. Felice highlights her influence on Gui as she begins to shape and improve his character according to her requirements of a suitable partner.

The fact that the female character of *Gui de Warewic*, Felice, suggests that she has the capacity to test his devotion and that her demands are important. As a result of their active participation in influencing the narrative and the knights' fate, Tuten argues that women possess the authority to place restrictions on love and evaluate the virtues of their potential partners.¹⁰⁹ *Gui de Warewic* serves as a crucial example of how ladies in medieval romances have a more impact on the narrative. The idea emerges that women are more valuable, influential, and active than the profile presented to the reader by patriarchal medieval romance writers. Women play a more active role in the narration that they can set standards and criteria for the men they want in their lives, although this phenomenon is generally ignored in the patriarchal tradition of medieval writings.

As can be seen from Felice's requests and Gui's efforts to make Felice accept him, the role of the female character in *Gui de Warewic* is relatively active, and she is at the centre of the narration. Instead of falling in love with a man who falls in love with her, she asks him to improve himself and become a worthy partner. Felice's role as a determinant character in the romance challenges the patriarchal tradition of medieval romance writing, which portrays women as passive and ineffective characters.¹¹⁰ Her agency and strength serve as a powerful critique of the limited roles assigned to women in medieval society, ultimately reshaping the narrative landscape of romance literature. Manion mentions that she directs Gui by expressing her conditions and expectations and encourages him to take part in a long and challenging development journey.¹¹¹ In line with Felice's demands, Gui

¹⁰⁸ George Kernodle and Portia Kernodle, "Dramatic Aspects of the Medieval Tournament," *Speech Monographs* 9, no. 1 (1942): 165, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637754209390069>.

¹⁰⁹ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 94.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 12-13.

¹¹¹ Lee Manion, "The Crusading Romance in Britain," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 104.

begins a journey of development and change, travelling to European cities and taking part in tournaments:

From now on, Gui went tourneying to advance his reputation. In Germany and in Lombardy, in France and in Normandy, there was no tournament or battle where Gui did not win all the distinction. He stayed for more than a year and was famous throughout these countries. He won praise and glory and made many good friends in these regions.¹¹²

After Felice's demands, to accomplish her requests, Gui begins a journey of tournaments to build his reputation. He travels to Germany, Lombardy, France, and Normandy and competes in tournaments and battles. In every competition, Gui achieves great fame and success. His journey extends for over a year, and he becomes famous in these lands. Thanks to his success and fame, he has the chance to make important companionships and connections with the great names of the countries he has travelled through.

Gui's actions reflect a common theme in medieval romances, where knights go on journeys seeking adventures to gain fame and honour. Ashe explains that the hero goes through extreme psychological pain for his love in order to show off his exquisite emotion and ability for selfless devotion.¹¹³ In the case of *Gui de Warewic*, however, the competitions, tournaments or challenges serve a distinguishing purpose on Gui's character development. His one and only desire is to prove himself to the woman he loves and to be worthy of her love.

The fact that Gui wants to prove his love for Felice and improve himself in order to become a worthy spouse for Felice sufficiently demonstrates the importance of Felice in Gui's life. Suppose the reader is able to step outside the perspective of the male-dominated medieval romance tradition. In that case, the example of Gui's changing and developing for Felice allows the reader to infer that women have a say in the narrative and the protagonists. An example of the model of a strong and active woman presented by Felice for inference is when Gui returns to Felice after the tournaments he has participated in. Gui tells her what he has done and asks her to decide whether he is worthy of her love:

¹¹² Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 108.

¹¹³ Ashe, "For Love and For Lovers," 20.

*My fair love, I have come; I certainly owe my life to you. Were it not for you, I would be dead and destroyed, my body in a wretched plight. You made me take up arms and then told me what you wished: since I have taken up arms and cross the sea and, far off in a foreign land, become quite famous for using them, I should be given your love for which I have been so eager.*¹¹⁴

After being dubbed a knight and fighting in tournaments, Gui returns to Warewic and tells Felice that he owes her his life. He would have perished, and his body would have suffered dramatically without her. It is Felice who encourages Gui to take up arms and reveals her wishes to him. Now that he has embarked on this journey, crossed the sea, and gained fame in foreign lands through his martial prowess, he hopes to earn her love, which he longs for.

Gui's ambition to be able to gain the love and approval of Felice questions gender roles of medieval romance genre by showing the influence of women, especially noblewomen, on the male characters and the narrative in general. The devotion of Gui to Felice and the duties she imposes on him highlight the central role of women in courtly love, influencing the behaviour, goals, and aspirations of knights, and actively shaping their thoughts.¹¹⁵ Her role in his existence not only makes him more determined, but also serves as a constant reminder of the value of tenacity and commitment in achieving his goals. Gui is prepared to deal with any difficulties that may arise with Felice's helping motivation.

2.2. Women's Influence: Shaping Hero's Identity and Destiny

In contrast to Gui's excitement and sense of devotion in this process of change and development, Felice does not let him go that much. Questioning the idea that women are easily obtainable gifts, Felice tells Gui that he has more to perform to prove himself and show his worth. Felice is an independent and self-respecting character, contrary to the mindset of the medieval patriarchal tradition of romance writing. She tells Gui that he should not be in a hurry that he has more to do to be worthy of her love:

Felice at once replied: " Not so fast, sir Gui! You are not yet so famous that there's no one as good in the kingdom. You are very brave and valiant, bold and courageous in battle. If I were to love

¹¹⁴ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 108.

¹¹⁵ Kielkiewicz, "Beyond the Convention," 46.

*you above else and give you my love, you would become so infatuated that it would make you quite lazy; you would no longer want to bear arms or enhance your reputation.*¹¹⁶

After Gui tells her that he takes up arms for her, and that he enters and wins all the tournaments for her sake, and that he asks Felice to accept that he is worthy enough of her love, Felice promptly replies that he does not achieve a level of fame where there is no one better in the kingdom. She is aware that Gui performs himself as undoubtedly brave, valiant, and bold in battles. However, Felice thinks he might become so infatuated that he would become complacent if she favoured him above all others and offered him her love. She knows that if she bestows her love to Gui, he might no longer wish to bear arms or seek further renown.

Felice responds to Gui's advances with a measured and cautious approach. She acknowledges Gui's bravery and valour in battle, indicating that she respects his qualities as a knight, but also acknowledges that she needs some time to understand and evaluate her own feelings fully. Felice stresses the value of establishing a firm foundation of friendship and trust before thinking about being romantically involved. Felice knows that if she gives Gui what he wants, she will interrupt his development progress and he will not be able to reach the high rank she wants him to reach, and he will lose the chance to become a glorious knight. She wants Gui to complete his development in this journey he has started, and she offers him new conditions to fulfil in order to be worthy of her love.

Felice makes her central role in this development clear by expressing her reservations about reciprocating Gui's feelings for her. She expresses concern about the possible repercussions of Gui's infatuation, suggesting that her opinion and judgement will be crucial in this courtly interaction. In terms of the impact and role of women in medieval romance, Felice has the power to shape the actions and motivations of the protagonist of the romance. Felice's hesitancy regarding Gui's level of fame and her concerns about the impact of her love reflects her role in guiding Gui's quest for chivalric honour.¹¹⁷ His purposes are inspired and motivated by his desire for both love and honour. Felice's response highlights the interplay between these two motivations and the complex dynamics between knights and their beloveds in medieval romance tradition. Tuten notes

¹¹⁶ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 108.

¹¹⁷ Rouse, "An Exemplary Life," 99.

that women can inspire knights to perform heroic deeds, and women's opinions and choices about love and bravery are crucial to the plot.¹¹⁸ Felice's response in these words demonstrates her influence over Gui's motivations and the central role of women in shaping the narrative.

Gui's character development is gradually completed with Felice's contributions. Gui is on the verge of winning Felice's love as he makes visible progress towards becoming a respected and recognised knight. She expects Gui to be precisely the profile she wants because Felice is not an ordinary woman, nor is she the passive, ineffectual woman that medieval romance writers tended to portray in the eyes of the reader. She does not expect Gui to be a good option, but to be the best. Krause mentions that a noble woman does not want to be with an ordinary man, nor does she want to be with a man who is only good; she demands that the person in her life be the best.¹¹⁹ Felice, therefore, makes her expectations and requirements to Gui clearly:

*I won't conceal my thoughts from you but want to make them quite clear: you will not have my love unless you're so good that no one is your equal in any land or as famous for bearing arms, or until you are the flower of chivalry and quite the best in the world. When you are like that in every way, when there is no one better than you under heaven, I will give you my love, to do with it as you please. No one but you will have my love, as long as I live.*¹²⁰

Felice mentions that she will not hide her thoughts from Gui that she wants to be very clear. Gui will not receive her love unless he is unmatched in any land, renowned for his martial skills, and the epitome of chivalry, the best in the world. Once he attains an exceptional level where there is no one superior to him, she will then bestow upon him her love to wield as he sees fit. She promises that as long as she lives, her love will be his alone.

In order to observe Felice's influence on Gui and her role as his guide, it is necessary to look at how Gui responds to the offers and options presented to him. Gui becomes increasingly famous and well-known and makes great strides in his journey to prove his love for Felice and that he is a worthy spouse for that love. Gui has no material benefit or

¹¹⁸ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 89.

¹¹⁹ Krause, "The Construction and Interrogation", 138.

¹²⁰ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 108.

expectation from this journey and ignores the respect and admiration for him and has only Felice in his mind and goal.¹²¹ This is an indication of Gui's sense of loyalty and suggests that this loyalty and devotion to Felice has the most significant impact on his journey:

*...Queens and ladies of the kingdom now greatly desired Gui, but he would not love any of them; he had given his love to Felice. Whether for gifts, whether for generosity, whether for goodness, whether for prowess, no knight as far as Antioch was so famous.*¹²²

This part mentions that even though queens and noble ladies throughout the kingdom express a great desire for Gui, he remains faithful to Felice. They offer him gifts, generosity, kindness, and their valour but Gui does not accept any of them. It is also mentioned that even as far as Antioch, no knight has ever achieved such renown as Gui, and he has a good development in this journey.

Beside these generous offerings, Gui's fame and talents become so well-known and widely admired that the Counts suggest that Gui become their protege. Gui repeatedly refuses the riches and opportunities that are offered to him. Felice's influence on the narrative continues to affect Gui, even when she is not present in the scene. No reward or gift offered to him on this journey, which he embarks on to prove his devotion to Felice and that he is a worthy spouse to her can divert him from his path:

*My lord," he said, " if you please, I don't deserve that yet. Stay with me! This very day I will give you half my castles and my cities, and half the fief of Louvain." But Gui took his leave and departed, and the duke wept for sorrow.*¹²³

When Gui asks the Duke for permission to leave the castle and continue his journey, the Duke says that he does not want Gui's leave and mentions that if it pleases Gui, he does not believe he deserves Gui's departure. Duke wishes Gui to stay with him and offers to give Gui half of his castles, his cities, and half of the fief of Louvain in return for his stay. However, Gui bids farewell and leaves, causing the duke to weep in sorrow.

The thirteenth-century *Gui de Warewic* also reveals traces of chivalry and devotion. Gui is loyal to Felice under any circumstances and declares that he will not abandon her for

¹²¹ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 64.

¹²² Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 114.

¹²³ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 128.

any political gain or return because loyalty and fidelity are as important as honour and fame in medieval romances. Gui's evaluation of the options available to him also show that there is an internal conflict in his character. On the one hand, there is his loyalty to Felice; on the other hand, there is the chance to make important strategic connections and become a powerful and respected lord. Gui intends to decide to do what he thinks is right and, and he gets angry at Heralt for suggesting him to give up Felice. His response to his friend's advice makes it clear that he will not be swayed by offers by declaring that even if he needs to risk his life, he will not listen to his advice:

Be quiet!" said Gui, "don't talk like that! Now, Heralt, I know you don't love me when you advise me to leave my beloved. Were I to lose my life, I would not do it."¹²⁴

Gui's response underlines his stable devotion to Felice. He will not consider leaving her, regardless of the potential risks or challenges he might face. Through his advice, Heralt wishes Gui to save himself and have an untroubled life with the rewards and titles offered to him. Gui implicitly declares that he will never consider of forgetting his feelings towards Felice. This rejection shows Gui has irreversible feelings and faith in his beloved Felice. He makes it clear that he does not consider any wealth in his life without his union with Felice since he faces all the struggles and challenges for the sake of her approbation. Power mentions that men cannot sustain their lives without women's contribution.¹²⁵ This statement indicates Felice's impact on Gui as he has been considering the reward of being a worthy lover for Felice throughout his journey. While this passage does not explicitly mention Felice, it demonstrates the idea that women often play significant role in the decisions and motivations of knights.

Towards the end of the romance, Gui completes his journey, travelling to different cities, conquering castles, and towns, and winning great battles. These achievements bring him great prestige and recognition. When he returns to Warewic, he is congratulated by the people who are aware of his achievements. Gui, on the other hand, has only one person on his mind: Felice. He goes straight to Felice and tells her everything that has happened

¹²⁴ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 143.

¹²⁵ Power, *Medieval Women*, 26.

to him as soon as he returns to his hometown, which is not considered unusual since he has already made this journey for her:

...Then Gui went to talk to his beloved and told her all that had happed: how mighty kings and emperors had offered him very great honours, and how he was beloved by maidens, by daughters of princes who were very beautiful, but he had not wanted to love anyone except her, nor would he ever do so.¹²⁶

After his long and challenging journey, Gui goes to Felice and shares all the stories he has experienced. He tells her about the prestigious titles which have been offered to him by powerful kings and emperors. He also tells Felice that although he has been admired by beautiful princesses and ladies, he has no desire to love anyone but her and will never do so.

When Gui talks about experiences that he has had during the journey, he mentions the gifts, offers and opportunities he has been given. It shows that Felice is a significant and irrevocable factor in his life. He states that any difficulties or struggles he goes through are for Felice. His main source of inspiration and motivation is not fame, glory, or titles, but his only intention and desire is to be worthy of Felice. It is also clear from these statements that Felice has a significant influence on Gui's progress of being a famous knight. He completes this journey with the desire to be worthy of the woman he loved, rather than to protect his homeland, seek revenge, or prove his chivalry to the king like other knights.¹²⁷ Felice can be considered as the main reason and indicator that shapes Gui's life and saves him from living as the son of Sequart. It is Felice and her influence that create this famous, glorious, dignified, and powerful hero.

Gui now becomes a respected, self-developed and famous knight with the guidance and requirements of Felice.¹²⁸ This change and development has earned him the respect of the people around him and Gui achieves his goal and marries Felice. Gui, having achieved his goal of being worthy of Felice, realises when he does a self-evaluation that he has done all these changes and all the experiments he has gone through for Felice. His

¹²⁶ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 178.

¹²⁷ Johns, *Noblewomen*, 30.

¹²⁸ Nicolaescu, "Guy of Warwick," 103.

realisation that he has done everything for Felice in this journey he has set out for her, but nothing for God in the process, shows the reader how important Felice is in Gui's life:

*...And he thought of how he was a man of influence, and renowned in foreign lands, and how he had killed so many men, captured towers and cities by force, and had exerted himself far off in strange realms, for the sake of a woman whom he loved so much and for whom he had borne so much suffering – but never for his Creator who had done him such great honour, nor had he bothered to serve Him...*¹²⁹

Gui contemplates his own influence and fame in distant lands, pondering the many battles he's fought and victories he's achieved. He recalls how he's endured significant hardship and exerted great effort for the love of a woman, a love that's meant so much to him. Yet, in contrast, he's never exerted himself in service to his Creator, who has honoured him greatly.

A comparison of literary texts, as Bazerman argues, reveals common themes and structure since texts are produced from the sea of prior texts that surround us and the sea of languages that we are immersed in.¹³⁰ *Gui de Warewic* embodies reflections of their historical period, intricately weaving elements of the socio-cultural milieu, economic conditions, and political dynamics characteristic of the era into their narrative tapestry. The characters in these writings become more ambiguous, with potentially subversive force, if they are read with the presumption of acquaintance with them and awareness of their conclusions. Readers may better understand how authors include other characters in their stories and how these characters place themselves inside these multi-textual worlds by learning to evaluate intertextuality.¹³¹ These linkages shed light on the relationships between medieval works of literature and the persistence of idealised heroic archetypes.

Stating the importance of knightly quests, Ashe mentions that the hero is declared victorious and awarded money, social standing, a marriage that brings together both, and an excellent reputation after putting his skills and bravery to the test in several types of

¹²⁹ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 180.

¹³⁰ Charles Bazerman, "Intertextuality: How Texts Rely on Other Texts," in *What Writing Does and How It Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices*, ed. Paul Prior and Charles Bazerman, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 83.

¹³¹ Bazerman, "Intertextuality," 84.

chivalric challenges.¹³² Gui's reflections underscore the idea that knights are often driven by their love for women to embark on heroic journeys. It is crucial to leave the patriarchal point of view to reach the fact that women are also very important and effective characters to understand the social role and position of women in the medieval romance tradition.

Felice's influence on Gui as the heroine of the romance is evident in her contribution to his development and in making him a glorious knight. The presence of Gui, however, makes it unnecessary to observe Felice as a strong and autonomous individual. Felice, who is a self-developed, competent woman before Gui enters her life, continues to display similar characteristics after Gui leaves. The role of a determined and effective female character is not something she gains from Gui. Even when Gui leaves for the path of God and goes into exile, Felice sustains being an independent character who stands on her own two feet, fulfils her own desires without needing anyone else, and goes on with her life:

*After her husband went into exile, she truly never stopped feeding the poor, furnishing churches and restoring poor abbeys, making roads and repairing bridges; she often gave clothes to prisoners. No matter what amusement was made for her, no one ever saw her laugh.*¹³³

Even after Gui's exile, Felice continues to engage in acts of charity, providing for the poor, supporting churches, restoring impoverished abbeys, constructing roads, and repairing bridges. There is no one in the world who can match her in goodness, nor is anyone more deserving of praise. She also frequently offers clothing to prisoners.

When Gui realises that all the battles and adventures he has fought and won are for Felice and not for God, he decides to dedicate himself to God, leaving his past behind and embarking on an irreversible journey to do good. His realisation is already an indicator that he has improved himself for the woman he loves, and it also indicates the impact of Felice in his life. Kielkiewicz argues that despite the fact that the gender roles associated with the patriarchal form of society are often depicted as set and unchanging, the complicated function of women demonstrates that the medieval conceptions of the feminine are periodically questioned in the romances.¹³⁴ If female characters may be viewed from outside a patriarchal perspective, it clearly shows that for readers and writers

¹³² Ashe, "For Love and For Lovers," 20.

¹³³ Weiss, *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic*, 196.

¹³⁴ Kielkiewicz, *Beyond the Convention*, 47.

of medieval romances, women had much more influence on the narrative than one might think.

Gui de Warewic stands out in medieval literature due to its exceptional content, which includes a diverse array of heroic adventures, detailed character growth, and nuanced exploration of themes. Wiggins mentions that Gui grows up at home free from the traumas that other romance heroes endure, and his departures from Warewic can only be seen as a form of intentional exile: in each of the initial moves, he desires to become equally worthy as Felice in order to win her love, and in the second, he seeks spiritual perfection and repentance for an entire life of behaviours driven by devotion to Felice.¹³⁵ Felice, the main incentive and motivator in Gui's development, is more present in the narrative than one might think and plays a determinant role in the romance narrative. It is the woman who makes the hero, and it is the woman who transforms Gui from an ordinary man at the beginning of the romance into the hero of the romance. Acknowledging that women play a pivotal role in creating heroes is not erroneous. This recognition can only be achieved when readers depart from the patriarchal lens often inherent in the tradition of romance writing.

¹³⁵ Wiggins, "Guy of Warwick," 17.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN AS INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES IN *GUY OF WARWICK*

3.1. Beyond Passivity: Women's Power and Influence in Medieval Romances

Most literary works, whether written or oral, are closely related to social changes, developments, or problems that affect society and people in general. It is, therefore, inconceivable that relations between men and women, which are the building blocks of society, should remain outside this literary reflection, since gender roles, like any other subject, have found a wide place in literature. However, when it comes to these gender roles and individual interactions between men and women, the theme and scope tend to be one-sided, in favour of male supremacy.

In the literature of medieval studies, the romances of *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* stand as enduring monuments to chivalric romance and heroic valour. These narratives, steeped in the rich tapestry of medieval culture and tradition, offer a glimpse into the lives of knights, damsels, and the intricate webs of honour and duty that bound them.¹³⁶ Yet, woven within the fabric of these narratives lies a deeper exploration of the social dynamics of the time, including the complex roles and representations of women in medieval society. Against the backdrop of patriarchal norms and feudal hierarchies, women navigated a landscape fraught with constraints and expectations, yet their presence and agency within these narratives often defy simple categorization.¹³⁷ The complicated dynamics involving gender roles, power structures, and the experiences of

¹³⁶ Rouse, "An Exemplary Life," 98.

¹³⁷ Schaus, *Women and Gender*, 145; 181; 292.

women in medieval society may be better comprehended by examining how female characters are portrayed, what they do, and how they interact with one another.

When studying the Guy romances, it is crucial for medieval audience to consider how these romances relate to each other and to other works from the same period. These narratives provide significant insights into how society perceives and expects women to behave, as well as how they are represented. As Dueñas points out, this approach enables the examination of interconnectedness both within a single text and across multiple texts.¹³⁸ *Guy* romances stand out among these timeless narratives as examples of chivalric bravery and courtly love. By examining the relationships between *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* and other literary works, as well as their historical and cultural contexts, additional levels of relevance and meaning within the narrative can be relatively understood.

The conventional portrayal of women as passive and powerless is challenged by the representation of female characters in these romances, offering a nuanced and complex representation of women that reflects the changing attitudes towards gender and women's roles in medieval society. The physical description of Felice in the fifteenth-century English *Guy of Warwick* is, for example, almost identical to that of the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* since the perception of female beauty, as stereotyped in the medieval romance tradition, does not undergo much change:

Longe, small and well farynge;

Feyre mowthe and nose syttyng,

Feyre forhede and feyre here. (57-59)¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Pilar Mur Dueñas, "Intra- and Intertextuality in Literary Translation: The Case of a Non-Contemporary Piece of Work," *Across Languages and Cultures* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2005): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1556/acr.6.2005.1.4>.

¹³⁹ For the fifteenth-century *Guy of Warwick*, the manuscript "Cambridge University MS, Ff 2.38" will be used as the source. The source used for this version is as follows: Julius Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick: The Second or 15th-Century Version* (London: Published for the Early English Text Society, by N. Trübner, 1875), 2.

The social perception of women and the portrayal of female characters in the romance genre remain the same when comparing *Gui de Warewic* from the thirteenth century and *Guy of Warwick* from the fifteenth century. Felice has an appearance that is expected and accepted by society. This mesmerising and exceptional external beauty, which makes her stand out, creates a preliminary impression of the importance of her presence in the romance.

In the tradition of the medieval romance genre, there are stereotypical perceptions of beauty for female characters. Since women are not seen in important roles in romance narratives and are not considered as part of the society or narrative, their physical beauty is usually the most prominent feature. One of the most prevalent deficiencies of the romance genre is the tendency to portray women as characters who are constrained by the social roles and expectations that are typically attributed to them. These roles and expectations often shape the characters' actions and behaviours, leading to a narrow representation of women's experiences. Klimek argues that women become only spouses, lovers, sisters, and mothers, even if the texts would be incomplete without the strong women who occupy the narrative.¹⁴⁰ As an example of the romance genre from the fifteenth century, *Guy of Warwick* contains social reflections, and therefore Felice, with her appearance and physical characteristics, has the characteristics of a medieval female character. However, the distinctive attributes that set her apart are not her physical attributes, but rather her education and her capacity to make autonomous decisions on significant matters.

In *Guy of Warwick*, Felice is portrayed as an effective and autonomous individual, in contrast to the image of a passive woman who is emphasised only for her beauty in the romance narrative. Private tutors from different parts of England come to educate her, teaching her arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy, and grammar. This highlights her intelligence and education rather than glorifying her physical appearance: “And taght hur astronomye, / Arsmetryck and gemetrye (67-68).”¹⁴¹ The fact that Felice has these qualities reinforces the idea that women of this period can be well-educated and knowledgeable in any field, challenging conventional gender roles. Krueger questions the

¹⁴⁰ Klimek, *Forgetting the Weakness of Her Sex*, 108.

¹⁴¹ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 3.

portrayal of female characters in literary writing stating that if it that women are less valuable and unimportant or is it that they represent an extreme risk to the existing quo that favours men.¹⁴² The reader gets the impression that Felice is an exceptional character from the beginning of the romances showing that women are not the oppressed, downtrodden, or inferior figures in society that they are thought to be.¹⁴³ Phillips explains that women are trained to accept subservience while fulfilling significant duties in the family, the theological community in their early years, rather than being trained to be totally passive or domineering.¹⁴⁴ *Guy of Warwick* is therefore a good example of how the perception of female characters have been shaped through years and how women can be strong and prominent figures in society, despite the fact that gender roles are defined by patriarchal medieval writers and readers.

The depiction of Felice as being successful in astronomy, geometry, or other fields shows that she is a substantial and autonomous person. The author's use of glittering language points out her inner brilliance and attractiveness in addition to her outward beauty. Speaking of the impact of male authors on the romance narrative, Larrington declares that male writers and lawmakers of the Middle Ages have a tendency to portray female sexuality as obedient and inactive.¹⁴⁵ She is not passive and controllable like the generalised female character, but she is ambitious and open to development. Felice is portrayed as a well-educated and courteous character, which is unusual for medieval women.¹⁴⁶ This portrayal of Felice both emphasises her intelligence and common sense and it asserts that it is these qualities that make her different from general women's perception of the period. This situation brings to the forefront the fact that women stand out not only with their appearance, but also their cognitive capacities and the fact that they are individuals who contribute to society.¹⁴⁷ Such descriptions and qualities enable the reader to have an idea about the changing social values and the fact that women are also effective and significant characters in the medieval romance culture. Women, who

¹⁴² Sheila Fisher, "Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 150.

¹⁴³ Wood and Eagly, "A Cross-Cultural Analysis," 705.

¹⁴⁴ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ Larrington, *Women and Writing*, 51.

¹⁴⁶ Power, *Medieval Women*, 74-75.

¹⁴⁷ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 180-181.

are already admired for their appearance and physical beauty, are actually an indication that intelligent and educated female characters perceive more active roles in many areas of society than they are thought to.

It is possible to infer from the very beginning of the romances that Felice is a physically and cognitively extraordinary character. In fact, as Stuard mentions, noble women like Felice, who is depicted as educated and cultured, are considered more influential than male characters in medieval romance.¹⁴⁸ It would not be surprising for the reader to encounter that Felice, in her context, would often be portrayed as virtuous and knowledgeable as she is an exceptional and autonomous character. Phillips mentions that female characters, like Felice, in medieval romances have often been the object of love, passion, and ambition for knights and lords, and they stand as a goal to be achieved by these knights.¹⁴⁹ Rather than objectifying women solely through their appearance and physical beauty, Felice offers a different perspective on female characters in the tradition of medieval romance.

Guy romances are more exceptional than similar examples from the period to which they belong, and it is necessary to consider the socio-cultural reflections of the period while addressing the portrayal of female characters in the romances and their effect on the narrative. According to Field, Guy's friends are devoted, he never fights with his neighbours, his king, or the land where he was born, and neither his homeland nor his beloved spouse are ever in danger.¹⁵⁰ *Guy of Warwick* is distinguished not only by the exceptional role and influence of Felice, but also by the fact that the character of Guy is not the standard and expected character of the other romances. The character definition he exhibits before becoming the hero of the romances makes him more distinctive than the others. In the fifteenth-century version of *Guy*, he has no qualifications other than being the son of a seneschal, and he offers his services to Felice:

'Madame,' he seyde, 'god the see.

¹⁴⁸ Susan Mosher Stuard, *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Brenda Bolton et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 9.

¹⁴⁹ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 117.

¹⁵⁰ Rosalind Field, "From Gui to Guy: The Fashioning of a Popular Romance," in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 46.

Thy lorde the gretyth well be me

And comawndyd, y schulde, par ma faye,

Before the serue thys same daye.' (163-166)¹⁵¹

As a usual character, son of seneschal, Guy shows obedience and respect by readily agreeing to fulfil the Earl's command. His willingness to serve Felice may indicate his interior chivalric qualities and readiness to carry out acts of service for the lady.¹⁵² In the ideal of chivalry, as Power mentions, The woman is adored, the centre of romance and the object of admiration, often able to command obedience and inspire acts of valour..¹⁵³ Elements of chivalry, courtly love, and interpersonal relationships commonly found in medieval romances are being reflected through Guy's words, making *Guy of Warwick* notable examples of the romance genre.

Guy declares his love for Felice despite his status as the seneschal's son and his awareness of his mediocrity. However, he does not receive the response he desires, which is contrary to the expectations of the romance genre. Felice is not an ordinary lady waiting to be saved by a man and her education and self-determination enable her to evaluate and even reject the offers presented to her. This presents the reader with the idea that women are not obedient characters as previously thought. Guy's dutiful offering of himself to Felice and his submission to her suggests to the reader that he is not as superior as one might think. The fact that he falls in love with the woman he is supposed to serve may also imply that Guy is not a mentally strong character, and this makes Felice a relatively more efficient character. Guy's falling in love with Felice does not mean that Felice will reciprocate his feelings with a similar submission, as she is an autonomous character with her own thoughts and preferences:

'Art thou not Seqwardes sone Gye?

Who made the so folehardye

For to assaye me of loue?

¹⁵¹ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 5.

¹⁵² Todd, *Guy of Warwick*, 23.

¹⁵³ Power, *Medieval Women*, 27.

Be Iesu, that syttyth aboue,
And y pys my fadur telle vnto,
For pys worde he wyll the sloo,
*Soone that pou schalt be drawe, (221-227)*¹⁵⁴

Felice's response indicates that women of this time are not passive or submissive characters, and they have the agency to think, evaluate, and reject the wishes of men.¹⁵⁵ She knows who Guy is and that he is not a suitable spouse for her. According to Chojnacki, the fact that the noble ladies wish to associate with equally worthy and respectable individuals informs the reader that a woman is not a chosen product but an active and independent individual.¹⁵⁶ Unlike the patriarchal romance tradition, which perceives women as a prize and harbours the idea that they do not have the ability to choose, Felice questions Guy's thoughts. Her response shows that women are not ineffective or insignificant and they have the power to stand on their own feet.

Felice is a strong and independent character who is aware of her own value, expectations, and capabilities. Her awareness makes her far from the stereotypical submissive and passive female character often found in the romance genre. This is one of the reasons why Felice does not see Guy as a suitable husband. She finds the idea of being with someone of lower social status unacceptable. Guy must improve himself and be a suitable spouse who can meet the expectations in order to close this class gap and be seen as a worthy spouse for Felice. Tuten argues that the general perception of women in the Middle Ages is negative: they are said to have been lewd, to have loved to talk, and to have sought beautiful jewellery, expensive clothes, and money.¹⁵⁷ It is important to recognise that these perceptions are often influenced by patriarchal ideologies and biased historical accounts. Tuten also states that while these stereotypes are often used in a light-hearted way to make fun of women, men or marriage, they also serve to reinforce and propagate unfavourable perceptions of women and spouses.¹⁵⁸ Even in this hierarchical and male-

¹⁵⁴ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Kielkiewicz, *Beyond the Convention*, 47.

¹⁵⁶ Stanley Chojnacki, "Dowries and Kinsmen in Early Renaissance Venice," in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 186.

¹⁵⁷ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 17.

dominated social structure, Felice has the power and influence to evaluate or designate her partner's position because noble and educated women have a voice in society.¹⁵⁹ In order to notice this power and impact, and the active role that Felice plays, it is necessary to step outside the patriarchal perspective of medieval romance writings. Women are more important and active characters than they are thought or portrayed to be, as can be seen in the character of Felice in *Guy of Warwick* illustrates.

Felice intends to warn Guy of the serious consequences that could befall him, as social rules and norms are seriously enforced in these times. It shows that if someone is thought to be disrespectful or aggressive towards someone, the consequences can be more severe than expected. Instead of punishing or threatening him, Felice's attitude towards Guy is not entirely negative because she intends to be with someone who is worthy, socially equivalent and she would like to consider someone a spouse who deserves her. In terms of romantic relationships and the concept of courtly love, Larrington discourses that noble men are expected to court women and find suitable spouses for themselves, and the more noble a lady is, the more respectable the male suitor is expected to be.¹⁶⁰ Felice's response implies that she expects respect from those around her and she is not willing to settle for less in terms of social relations. Her demands and expectations imply that women are not easy to get or inferior characters in society and they should be treated with respect and dignity.

Male characters in the fifteenth-century romance tradition are tended to be portrayed as superior, perpetuating gender role stereotypes and presenting them as heroic figures. Male dominance or the perception and expectation that men should always be strong and robust is criticised in *Guy of Warwick* in a way that criticises social norms. Guy sees himself as pathetic and needy in the face of Felice, which challenges the typical male stereotype. After enduring much suffering, he finally finds the courage to express his feelings towards Felice, despite the potential consequences of his actions:

And seyde: 'Felyce, haue merce on me.

I am to blame now wyth skylle:

¹⁵⁹ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 81.

¹⁶⁰ Larrington, *Women and Writing*, 44.

I am come hedur agenste þy wylle.

I may not slepe nyght nor day:

So thy loue byndyth me aye.

On nyghtys, when odur men slepe,

*Thou makyst me full sore to wepe. (302-308)*¹⁶¹

It might be inferred from Guy's words that he is aware that their relationship is not of a kind that can be accepted by the society. Because of social norms, as DeAragon implies, it is not considered ordinary or prevalent for a lower-class man to marry a noblewoman or vice versa.¹⁶² The possibility of Guy being punished is quite high since this affair could be considered as an insult. Guy comes to Felice with the awareness of all these facts and possibilities. Felice is the one who plays a decisive and active role in this relationship. Guy will either be punished or rewarded depending on the decision that Felice will make after this courageous confession. This makes her an active and effective key factor rather than an easily accessible or passive character.

Guy's devotion to his love for Felice is also an example of the theme of courtly love in medieval romances. Guy's expression shows that he considers it as an honour to die for such a beautiful woman - Felice. The themes of noble and honourable love are not unusual for the medieval romance tradition, and they serve as examples of devotion, selflessness, and the pursuit of an authentic and sincere bond between two people.¹⁶³ What distinguishes *Guy of Warwick* from other romances is that Felice is not the sort of character in a romance that can be fallen in love with and be reached. If she were, Guy would not have made any effort for his love and would have easily obtain what he wanted. Instead of being seen as a prize or an option for Guy, she becomes the main element in his life, because Felice is an autonomous, self-confident, and judgmental woman.

In contrast to the tradition of medieval romance writing, which tends to portray women as less influential or passive characters, Felice challenges the expected stereotypes.

¹⁶¹ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 10.

¹⁶² RaGena Cheri DeAragon, "In Pursuit of Aristocratic Women: A Key to Success in Norman England," *Albion* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 258, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4048516>.

¹⁶³ Kielkiewicz, "Beyond the Convention," 40.

Felice, who is aware of her position as a strong woman, claims that she is never a gift or a prize or someone who can be easily obtained. To illustrate her position, she mentions her previous suitors and emphasises to Guy that she is not easy to get hold of and is more independent than he thinks:

'Gye,' sche seyde, 'be nowe styлле.

Here me, yf hyt be yowre wyлле.

Knyghtys and erlys y haue forsake,

That wolde me to wyfe take.

And y loued now a yong knaue,

How schulde y my worschyp save?

When þou art dubbed a knyght

And proued well in euery fyght,

Then, for sothe, hyght y the,

That þou schalt haue þe loue of me.' (355-364)¹⁶⁴

Felice gives Guy the message that she is not an easy person by mentioning the lords and knights who sued her and her rejection of them. She is not a simple character whom one can easily get. Felice is looking for to be with someone who is respected in society, who has developed himself and is known by everyone.¹⁶⁵ Felice believes that someone like Guy is a disgrace to her reputation. Rigby argues that in medieval societies, hierarchical structure and social status in matters such as property are quite prevalent and normal.¹⁶⁶ What is not common is for women to have an idea about their own future and to make choices about their relationships.

¹⁶⁴ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 11.

¹⁶⁵ Ivana Djordjević, "Guy of Warwick," *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, 2017, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118396957.wbemlb194>.

¹⁶⁶ Stephan Henry Rigby, "Introduction: Social Structure and Economic Change in Late Medieval England," *A Social History of England, 1200–1500*, 2006, 2-3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139167154.002>.

Felice is an important and exceptional example in terms of considering the actual role of women in medieval romances without a patriarchal perspective. For example, Felice's request for Guy to become a knight and her statement that she will consider this offer later demonstrate the significance of the medieval ideal of chivalry, highlighting Felice's crucial role in Guy's character. Felice plays an active role in determining her potential relationships, charting her own destiny, and influencing the people around her. Since this is not common in the patriarchal medieval romance tradition, *Guy of Warwick*, and especially Felice, play an important role in terms of considering the place and position of female characters in medieval romance genre consistently. She has the authority to set conditions for a potential relationship, which aligns with the neglecting values of women in the Middle Ages as women are increasingly recognised for their ability to make choices about their own futures.¹⁶⁷ She is a significant indicator that women have much more potential and impact on medieval romance and male characters in narration. In the narration of *Guy of Warwick*, she plays a crucial role as she shapes the characteristics of Guy and turns him into a romance hero.

As can be seen in the example of Felice, women are not passive, silent, dominated characters, but according to Krause, they can make their own way when necessary and take a more active role in the narrative.¹⁶⁸ *Guy of Warwick*, through the character of Felice, challenges social norms and, in particular, the fifteenth-century romance tradition's way of depicting women as silent and inefficient characters and stand as significant examples for the social role of women.¹⁶⁹ As Power argues, the aristocracy and the Church, which are closely connected with medieval writing, work together to develop the theory of women's subjugation, which is frequently associated with the idea that women are fundamentally inferior.¹⁷⁰ In addition to giving Felice the autonomy she deserves in her bilateral relationships, this portrayal of Felice as an independent person who can make her own choices in decisions about herself is seen as an important example of the importance of women's roles in social relationships and the importance of living their own preferences.

¹⁶⁷ Tuten, *Daily Life of Women*, 20.

¹⁶⁸ Krause, "The Construction and Interrogation", 140-141.

¹⁶⁹ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 77.

¹⁷⁰ Power, *Medieval Women*, 11.

Across these works, women hold significant roles, exercising influence over the protagonists' actions and experiences. In *Guy of Warwick*, Felice holds agency in defining the terms of love and inspiring Guy's transformation. She explains the qualities she looks for in a potential husband who might be worthy of her. The qualities that a knight should possess, according to Felice's requirements, are good looks, kindness, courage, bravery, and boldness, as well as success in battles and fights; in short, they are the ideals of chivalry.

The examination of both romances is deemed essential as it enables an analysis of *Guy of Warwick* in terms of demonstrating the actual role and impact of female characters in the narrative of the medieval romance genre. There are some minor differences between *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* in terms of the attitudes of Gui/Guy towards Felice. His intention and purpose are still to get the love of Felice.¹⁷¹ Gui states that he gets weapons, becomes a knight, and is ready to hear Felice's additional wishes which indicates that he is completely devoted himself to Felice. However, in *Guy of Warwick*, Guy admits to taking up arms and becoming a knight for Felice's sake and demands something in return for what he has done for her. Through Guy romances, therefore, this study aims to deepen the understanding of the diverse portrayals and complexities of women's roles in medieval romances, shedding light on the social, cultural, and literary contexts in which these narratives are created.

Guy becomes a knight, which is a significant achievement in that era, symbolising honour, valour, and the fulfilment of a societal ideal.¹⁷² Guy's reason for becoming a knight and transforming himself into a medieval hero is quite different. Satisfying Felice's demands is a priority for Guy:

He seyde: 'lemman, for thy sake

Knyghtys ordur haue y take:

For þe y am dubbyd knight (431-433).¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 64.

¹⁷² Krause, "The Construction and Interrogation," 140.

¹⁷³ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 13.

The main reason for this title is not Guy's pursuit of glory, fame, or heroism, but his desire to be a worthy spouse for Felice. Guy does what Felice wants and speaks. He gets the knighthood for her, and now expects something in return for his feelings: "Do nowe, as þou me hyght (434)."¹⁷⁴ The fact that he takes crucial steps in his life and improves himself in this way just to fulfil Felice's wishes and demands suggests Felice's influence on Guy and the influence of women on the narrative.¹⁷⁵ It is easy to get an idea of the changing relationships and gender roles between men and women in the Middle Ages through Guy's assertion.

In the medieval romance tradition, male characters become knights in order to impress lords, kings or other men, to prove themselves to them, or to help maintain the practice of Christianity. Guy is not concerned with any of these reasons. As the son of a seneschal, he is not concerned with proving himself or fulfilling the religious duties expected of him. Guy has only one concern, and that is Felice. In order to earn Felice's love, Guy begins to experience changes that he would not normally even think about.¹⁷⁶ The fact that this change is for Felice is even more apparent when he asks her to do what she promised. Felice, as the main factor in Guy's character change and development, challenges the stereotypical medieval patriarchal romance writing tradition of portraying women as passive and weak characters.

Even though Guy considers himself important and asserts that he is worthy of Felice's love, since she places a high value on worthiness, Felice states that he has nothing but a title. She expects Guy to prove his bravery and chivalry through significant deeds in order to be considered a suitable spouse. Being dubbed as a knight is not sufficient for Felice and therefore Guy should show some valour in order to get the approval of Felice.¹⁷⁷ She believes that it is only through these heroic deeds that Guy can prove his worth as a partner:

'Gye,' sche seyde, 'what wylt þou done?

Ȝyt haste þou not wonnen þy schone.

¹⁷⁴ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 13.

¹⁷⁵ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 63.

¹⁷⁶ Rouse, "An Exemplary Life," 98.

¹⁷⁷ Djordjević, *Guy of Warwick*, 1.

Before she can fully consider Guy as a possible suitor, she needs to see concrete proof of his bravery, as she passionately believes that actions speak louder than words: “Goo and do thy cheualrye / And þen þou schalt lye me bye (441-442).”¹⁷⁹ Taking a decisive role on the new path of Guy, Felice declares that love cannot be imposed or promised, and she must ultimately observe Guy’s dedication to his love in deciding whether or not to respond Guy’s adoration.¹⁸⁰ This reflects the theme of women playing an active role in choosing their romantic partners in *Guy of Warwick*.

Felice mentions that Guy has not yet won any glory and that the first thing a knight should do is to joust or fight with other warriors. This reflects the chivalric ideals of the time, where a knight’s honour and worth are measured by their deeds on the battlefield. She sets clear conditions for her love. Rooney argues that being dubbed as a knight is not enough for Guy to be approved by Felice and this dissatisfaction does not show Felice as greedy or insatiable.¹⁸¹ Felice states that Guy should prove himself through chivalrous acts before she will consider being with him by emphasising that love and affection are not freely given, but earned through actions and achievements, reinforcing the chivalric concept of earning a lady’s favour through achieving some successes to show that he is worthy of her feelings.

Medieval readers are familiar with encountering battles and tournaments in romances as these challenges allow knights to present their chivalry. Barker explains that knights have the opportunity to display their strength, courage, skill, and prowess through these tournaments.¹⁸² The aim of the knights who participate in these activities is to gain fame and alliances with respectable people. These events attract large crowds as well, including noblewomen, who come to see the knights’ courage and adroitness.¹⁸³ But Guy does not

¹⁷⁸ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 13.

¹⁷⁹ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 13.

¹⁸⁰ Rouse, “An Exemplary Life,” 103.

¹⁸¹ Matthew Rooney, “Of Guy, of His Felice, and of His Guilt Problematic Love in the Auchinleck Guy of Warwick,” *Verso: An Undergraduate Journal of Literary Criticism* Verso 2019 (May 5, 2019): 132.

¹⁸² Juliet Barker, *The Tournament in England 1100-1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 99.

¹⁸³ Barker, *The Tournament in England*, 102-103.

have any interest of proving himself to any lord, king, or knight. His only intention is to earn Felice's affection and prove himself a worthy spouse.

In Guy's journey from town to town, attending tournaments, there is no direct connection with the female character or a direct relationship with the role of women in society. The main issue for the reader to consider is the fact that Guy's sense of duty and responsibility is based on his devotion to Felice. Guy's journey is highlighted by his dedication and resilience as he overcomes a variety of difficulties and obstacles. Guy, travelling under Felice's guidance, manages to gain a great reputation in the surrounding cities:

Nowe wendyth Gye to justynge

For to wynne hym preysynge.

In Almayn and in Lumbardye,

Yn Frawnce and in Normandye—

Ther was no justyng in þat londe,

But Gye had the bettur honed. (743-748)¹⁸⁴

It can be argued that Felice is Guy's inspiration and motivation as Guy used to be a simple, ordinary person before meeting Felice.¹⁸⁵ The role and contribution of Felice into the narrative is the fact that if Guy had not met Felice, he would have continued to live as the same simple Guy who has no intention or ambition to prove or improve himself through these tournaments.¹⁸⁶ His desire to meet the demands or gain the approval of the woman whom he loves demonstrates his unwavering devotion and emphasises the significant influence women have on his behaviour and decisions.

Throughout the romance, Felice serves as an important motivating force for Guy. She asks him to take up arms, become a knight, and win glory and honour. Because of his love for Felice and his sense of desperation towards his feelings, Guy approves of facing any challenge and difficulty he may encounter on this journey. Nicolaescu asserts that his

¹⁸⁴ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 22.

¹⁸⁵ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 54.

¹⁸⁶ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 54.

intention and motivation is not the desire of glory and fame but the desire to be a suitable partner for Felice.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, her role in shaping the Guy's destiny is more crucial than any other factor. He would never have had the courage to begin his journey towards recognition and respect if it had not been for Felice's undying faith in him and her constant encouragement.

Love, loyalty, and chivalry are timeless elements that weave together in the rich aspects of medieval romance to create the basis for a number of engrossing narratives. In these narratives, the heroes frequently set off on adventures and take part in challenging actions, but their acts are constantly driven by their everlasting love for their beloved. Guy's heroic actions during competitions serve as a monument to his passionate devotion for Felice rather than just being performed for personal glory. Guy's commitment to his love becomes a moving reminder of the immense significance that love bears among the hardships of medieval existence through his deeds and genuine remarks. The fact that Guy goes straight to Felice after participating and gaining fame in tournaments reminds the reader that he is loyal to his love and the purpose of these struggles is for Felice. Guy expresses his deep appreciation to his beloved for being the source of his motivation and the reason for his actions:

And seyde: 'god loke þe, my lemman dere.

I haue for the turned my redde

Yf þou were not, y were but dedde. (780-782)¹⁸⁸

Guy feels that his achievements and personal development are directly linked to her constant love and support. He cherishes every moment they spend together because it strengthens his determination to succeed in every aspect of his existence. Guy's devotion to Felice and his feeling of desperate love for her could be seen as a high point in the influence and inspiration of women over knights in medieval romance.

Women are frequently represented in medieval romances as the inspiration and source of a knight's heroic deeds. Krueger asserts that knights have their journey whether to prove

¹⁸⁷ Nicolaescu, "Guy of Warwick," 103.

¹⁸⁸ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 23.

their glory and chivalry to the king and earn fame or to find their woman and marry her.¹⁸⁹ However, Guy's only intention is to be able to become an appropriate partner for Felice: "Ordyr of knyght þou dud me take, / And passyd the see for thy sake (783-784)."¹⁹⁰ Women might be considered as integral parts of the knight's journey towards chivalry and dignity. Guy's devotion and dependence on Felice clearly presents the fact that women play a more influential and central role, going beyond the clichés of the medieval writing tradition.

The central theme of Guy's devotion to his love is also evident in the fifteenth-century *Guy of Warwick*. Everything Guy does, and everything he will ever do is definitely for the sake of gaining Felice's love and being a worthy lover for her.¹⁹¹ He completes the challenges that Felice gives to him and wonders if he is worthy of her or not: "Now am y come to wytt thy wylle, / What þou wylt seye lowde or style' (791-792)."¹⁹² His actions, including taking up arms, seeking fame, and embarking on adventures, are undertaken with the aim of winning the love of his beloved. This reminds the reader that the female character, Felice, has an irrecusable impact on the narration as she is the main reason and motivation for Guy to achieve all his fame and glory.

Guy's dedication to Felice and the source of his ambitions preserves itself in *Guy of Warwick*. The fact that Guy returns to Felice after the tournaments to tell her what he has been through and then expects her to accept his love as they had agreed shows that Guy is acting according to Felice's instructions. These qualities, however, are not enough for Felice, although Guy proves to be talented, strong, and brave in the tournaments: "Ȝyt art þou not of soche poste, / But ther be bettur in thys contre (795-796)."¹⁹³ Guy is not yet as good as or better than other knights.¹⁹⁴ Felice warns Guy that if she gives Guy what he wants and gives him temporary satisfaction, he will stop improving himself and in time he will look at other knights and feel jealous and resentful:

¹⁸⁹ Roberta Krueger, "Questions of Gender in Old French Courtly Romance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146.

¹⁹⁰ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 23.

¹⁹¹ Rouse, "An Exemplary Lie," 98.

¹⁹² Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 23.

¹⁹³ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 23.

¹⁹⁴ Djordjević, *Guy of Warwick*, 1.

Yf y the graunt ouyr all thyng

My loue and to be thy derlyng,

*Thou woldest be so yelowse (799-801)*¹⁹⁵

Felice, as indicated at the outset, rejects the advances of lords and knights, expressing her desire to be with the best suitor, rather than accepting just anyone. Rooney mentions that Felice is determined to find a suitable and socially worthy partner and she does not consider being in love with someone lower than her status.¹⁹⁶ She states that he is not yet the best and if she grants her love and accepts him as a spouse, Guy will give up on this journey and discontinue his development: “That were a grete schame for the / To lose þy pryce for þe loue of me (805-806).”¹⁹⁷ Felice's only request is that Guy should become a hero and that he should be the best in order to earn her love. Her reluctance to grant her love to Guy is motivated by her concern that he would become consumed by amorous desire and jealousy, potentially neglecting his knightly duties. Felice, in this conversation, takes an active role in shaping the course of her relationship with Guy. This highlights the notion that courtly love is considered as significant aspects of a knight's life, but it should not overshadow their commitments to honour and duty.

Felice asserts her agency by establishing specific conditions under which she would consider offering her love, demonstrating her influential role in shaping her romantic choices. While her criteria are demanding, her ability to set them indicates that, as Johns mentions, women could exert control and make decisions about their relationships during this period.¹⁹⁸ She is the central influential figure in *Guy of Warwick*, and in order to present her actual position in social relations, the reader should be able to look through the narrative from a non-patriarchal perspective. Felice clearly states her expectations, demonstrating her desire for an equal and respectable partner in the fifteenth-century *Guy of Warwick* as well. She expresses her expectations and does not entertain the idea of being with just anyone. Felice makes it clear that she has incredibly high standards for the man she would consider as a suitable mate and requires Guy to excel in all aspects of

¹⁹⁵ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 23.

¹⁹⁶ Rooney, “Of Guy, of His Felice, and of His Guilt,” 130.

¹⁹⁷ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 23.

¹⁹⁸ Susan Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.

chivalry and knighthood. She pledges Guy to give her love if he becomes the most suitable spouse to her, as she wants him to be the best, the strongest and the most confident: “My love y wyll not the hyght, / Or thou be the boldyst knight (809-810).”¹⁹⁹ Her determination puts Felice at the top of any comparison, which in fact brings up the idea that women are higher than they are thought to be, and that they always have the right to make important decisions in their own lives.²⁰⁰ Felice asserts her agency in determining the conditions under which she will grant her love. She emphasises that Guy is required to be the best in the world. She indicates her position as the one who bestows favour and affection on the hero of the romance.

Guy's pursuit of love is intertwined with his desire to win Felice's love and the pursuit of chivalric perfection. It would therefore be no mistake to state that the pursuit of love and honour are closely linked in medieval romances as knights perform heroic deeds and feats to earn the love and favour of their beloved.²⁰¹ In general, women set the conditions and expectations that drive the knight to strive for excellence in chivalry and bravery. Her words highlight the central role of women in the knight's quest for love and honour. It also underlines women's agency and influence on the narrative.

3.2. Heroic Inspiration: Women's Role in Shaping Destiny

Felice's dissatisfaction with Guy's development is not due to her aversion to Guy, but to her concern that Guy will interrupt his development and give up because he will not find the same motivation later. In fact, as Nicolaescu notes, the primary motivation and force that keeps Guy going on his journey and keeps him away from giving up is his love for Felice.²⁰² Achieving his only goal will cause a loss of motivation for Guy and will cause him to interrupt his development. The fact that Felice offers conditions in this way and does not give her approval without fully fulfilling her expectations reminds the reader of the fact that she is the major influential factor in the narrative and in making Guy a hero:

And, when pou haste borne þe so euyn,

¹⁹⁹ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 23.

²⁰⁰ Kielkiewicz, *Beyond the Convention*, 43.

²⁰¹ Sarah Kay, “Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81.

²⁰² Nicolaescu, “Guy of Warwick,” 103.

That þer ys no bettur vndur hevyn,

*All my loue thou schalt haue. (815-17)*²⁰³

The words of Felice imply ice is evi that women could exert control and make decisions about their relationships during this period. The passage also exemplifies the idealised concept of courtly love, as Fisher states, where knights would undertake heroic quests and accomplishments to win the love and favour of noblewomen.²⁰⁴ Felice's requirement for Guy to become the finest knight in the world represents the elevated and often unattainable nature of courtly love during this era.

Guy's love and loyalty to Felice are evident in the fact that he turns to her at every opportunity during this challenging journey of development and tells her what he has done for her. Signs of Felice's influence and significance in Guy's life extend beyond these examples. He emphasises that Felice is his main source of inspiration, rejecting the material gains or rewards offered to him on this journey to win battles, capture castles and conquer cities. The fact that he keeps her in mind and in his sight, even in scenes where Felice is not present, shows how women are important and indispensable in relations.²⁰⁵ No matter how great or valuable the rewards offered to Guy, it is not the material gains that he seeks, but his desire to be worthy of Felice:

'Syr,' he seyde, 'at thys tyde

For nothyng wyll y here abyde.

*God yow 3ylde, haue gode day.' (851-863)*²⁰⁶

Guy's decision to leave his homeland and fulfil Felice's wishes demonstrates his loyalty to her and her influence over him, despite being offered wealth and important positions to stay in Warwick and serve the Earl. This underscores the importance of motivations and inspirations of knights' quests in medieval narratives. Besides his desire to journey,

²⁰³ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 24.

²⁰⁴ Fisher, "Women and Men," 150-152.

²⁰⁵ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power*, 197.

²⁰⁶ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 25.

he has other and more important plans than becoming rich and prestigious in those lands. Guy's main reason for embarking on this journey is not to become rich, famous or to win the favour of other knights, kings, or lords. His only aim is to prove himself to Felice and show her that he is worthy of her love. Guy's only ambition is to declare himself a powerful and respected man, as Felice wants. He considers each option to mean gaining Felice's love and approval.

Guy's dedication to embarking on this journey and participating in tournaments for Felice, regardless of the challenges, offers a broader view of the cultural values and social position of female characters in medieval romance. Despite the speech lacking a direct connection to the evolving social values of women, it underscores their significance within the narrative. This conversation between Guy and Earl illustrates the importance of the role of women and gender roles and shows how influential women are in medieval romances by challenging traditional gender roles. Krueger mentions that successful and enterprising men such as Guy are often portrayed as embarking on adventures, making their own way, making their own choices, and living freely.²⁰⁷ Felice's influence on Guy is better understood by the fact that he dedicates himself for the sake of the woman he loves, and thinks only of her during his journey for Felice. She is not just a partner to him, or the woman he loves, but a role model to whom he dedicates his life and to whom he will do anything in his desire to meet her wishes.

Guy, and knights like him, are expected to display certain virtues such as strength, triumph, and bravery if they are to be accepted by society, as these were very important and valued in medieval chivalric culture. Guy's chivalric virtues such as generosity and valour earned him not only recognition but also royal honour:

Thorow hys strenkyth þere he wanne

Grete looueyng of many a man.

He was large of spendynge:

They honowred hym, as a kynge. (915-918)²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Krueger, "Questions of Gender," 132.

²⁰⁸ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 26.

For a correct understanding and interpretation of the narrative, it is crucial for the reader to bear in mind Guy's primary motivation and ambition in attaining this position. Guy would not have made such progress or received such praise without encountering Felice, without falling in love with her, and without accepting the conditions she set and embarking on this journey. Given Felice's influence on the narrative in almost every part of the romance, it might be argued that Felice's presence is felt throughout Guy's development, even though there is no direct mention of women or gender roles.

The patriarchal tradition of medieval romance writing, which could be seen as a major reason why women are less frequently mentioned in romances, tends to portray women in mostly passive roles, overshadowed by the men.²⁰⁹ It should not be overlooked, however, that it is the character of Felice, who remains in the background, that shapes Guy, who plays an active role in his experience of these developments, and, above all, it is Felice who makes him a medieval hero. Guy would have remained as Sequart's son and would not have become *Guy of Warwick* without Felice. Weiss argues that the woman who is supporting and controlling the man is stronger and more competent than he is.²¹⁰ It becomes clear that women are more influential, important, and powerful characters than one might think from the point of view of the medieval patriarchal tradition of romance writing, with the influence of Felice, who changes, shapes and recreates Guy's life to such an extent.

Guy, who does not allow any distraction from Felice in this journey, also considers Felice as to be a source of inspiration and motivation by keeping her at the centre of this journey and development process in the fifteenth-century *Guy of Warwick*. He cannot think of any other reward than earning Felice's love, and he does not pay any attention on other queens and ladies. Mills argues that his love for Felice is so powerful that he does not consider any potential partner for himself even if the ladies and queens are ready to devote themselves to Guy.²¹¹ The queens and ladies of the kingdom show interest in forming romantic ties with this famous and brave knight: "So well he had there hym spedde, / That

²⁰⁹ Stuard, *Women in Medieval Society*, 3.

²¹⁰ Judith Weiss, "The Power and the Weakness of Women in Anglo-Norman Romance," *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*, 1993, 7–23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511582073.003>, 15.

²¹¹ Mills, *Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick'*, 62.

ladyes wolde be to hym wedde (1305-1306).”²¹² Guy’s only purpose is to prove himself to his beloved, Felice, as a worthy knight. As a result of this commitment and sense of dedication he shows no interest in ladies or queens. Guy becomes more famous for his exceptional qualities, including his bravery, qualities, and fame as a knight.

His reputation extends as far as Antioch, underlining his exceptional status and achievements. As a great collimating figure in Guy’s life, Felice’s influence and role in this journey is revealed once again: “Ȝyt louyd he Felyce moste of all (1310).”²¹³ In fact, women often play a central role as objects of courtly love in medieval romance, so Guy’s devotion to Felice could be seen as the ideal of a knight’s firm commitment to his beloved, even when he has other potential suitors. Dillard asserts that the way of portraying as the subjects of courtly love raises the social position of female characters by emphasising their control on knights and their role in influencing the narratives of these romances.²¹⁴ In *Guy of Warwick*, women are often at the centre of knights’ quests and affections, challenging the social norms and general acceptance towards the role and position of women.

The pursuit of love is a driving force in the knights’ actions and journeys, and women’s roles are integral in shaping the narrative and motivating the characters to achieve chivalric renown and honour. After earning fame and glory through his success and valour Guy has become a prominent figure across many lands and he is offered considerable wealth and castles by the Lords to stay with them and not leave the city. This offer showcases the role of wealth and property as symbols of power and influence in medieval romances. The offers to Guy are very generous and acceptable to almost everyone:

But ye schall dwelle here wyth me:

Of my castels and my cyte

Of my goodeys the more dele

²¹² Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 38.

²¹³ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 38.

²¹⁴ Heath Dillard, “Women in Reconquest Castile: The Fueros of Sepulveda and Cuenca,” in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 88-89.

*Y schall the geue, so haue y hele. (2695-98)*²¹⁵

Despite the generous offer, Guy's decision to leave suggests that he has a higher quest or mission that supersedes material wealth. This reflects the chivalric ideals of knights prioritizing honour, valour, and noble pursuits over personal gain. There might be one reason why all this property is unattractive to Guy: Felice, the woman he loves and devotes his life to.

Guy's willingness to help Duke Segwin reflects the values of loyalty and chivalry held in high esteem during the Middle Ages. A knight's willingness to protect and assist his lord is at the heart of chivalric virtues and principles. Duke Segwin's offers of castles, lands, cities and wealth to persuade Guy to stay with him is another example of how possessions and material wealth were another sign of respectability in these societies. Nobles often used such offers to retain the loyalty of their vassals and knights.

Guy does not intend to stay with him for the rest of his life even if the relationship between Guy and Duke Segwin is substantially good. The impact of Felice may be observed through Guy's decision even though the passage focuses on the interactions between male characters. Guy's leaving without accepting any of these offers reveals that he does not intend to be rich or famous for his own sake: "He toke hys leue and went hys way: / The dewke wepte, y dare well say (2699-2700)."²¹⁶ If Guy's aim had been to become rich, powerful, or well-known, he would have accepted these offers without thinking. He is offered well enough to sustain rest of his life comfortably. The only reward he has in mind is to be worthy of Felice's love since Guy does not seek wealth, power, or fame.

It becomes apparent that Felice plays a more important and effective role in Guy's life than property, wealth, fame, glory or being a famous knight. The fact that Guy does not prefer any material income to Felice suggests that women are more important and play a more effective role in the narrative than they are given credit for. The reader should bear in mind that this importance and role of women can be seen from a perspective other than patriarchal medieval writing.

²¹⁵ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 77.

²¹⁶ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 77.

Guy's experience and development process is also known and respected by his friends. There is a marked difference and improvement between Guy before the journey and Guy at this point. Mills mentions that there is a great inspiration and motivation in Guy's mind which is the woman he is in love with and to whom he has dedicated his development.²¹⁷ When Guy, who is not interested in the offers and rewards he is offered, wonders what other people think of this attitude, and when people around him suggest that he should choose material gains, he declares that he will not deviate from his goal and that he will continue this journey for Felice:

'Syr,' seyde Harrowde, 'y schall þe say

The beste cowncell, þat y maye.

The emperowrs doghtur, loke, þou take

(A ryche man sche may þe make)

Aftur hym to be emperowre.

God haþ geuyn yow grete honowre:

In all þys worlde schall none bee

Of yowre ryches and yowre poste.

Soche twenty schulde be at þy hande

Of ryche erledams wyth wode and lande,

Than ys erle Roholde the gode.

He, þat forsakyth worschyp, ys wode.'

'Let be, Harrawde: þou louyst me noght,

When þou me soche cowncell broght.

When þou me seyst forsake þat maye

²¹⁷ Mills, Structure and Meaning in 'Guy of Warwick', 54.

I schall be dedde that ylke day.' (4011-4026)²¹⁸

Hereward's advice to Guy reflects the political nature of marriages during the medieval period. Marriages are often arranged for political and economic reasons, and noble marriages could consolidate power and wealth. Hereward emphasises the potential for Guy to become emperor through this union. This dialogue between Guy and Hereward focuses more on political and strategic issues. Even if there is no direct connection with the values of women or attitudes towards them, Guy's statement that he will complete this challenging journey for Felice suggests that Felice has an inalienable place and importance for Guy.

As the source of inspiration and motivation, Felice's presence and her significance in the Guy's life play a crucial role in shaping the narrative and guiding the character's actions. Johns mentions that knights are frequently shown as being inspired and strengthened by their lover, which motivates them to perform heroic deeds and accomplish significant achievements.²¹⁹ They discover purpose and tenacity via their admiration for the beloved, which eventually helps them define their identity and leave a lasting legacy in the world of chivalry. The fifteenth-century *Guy of Warwick* continues to reflect the ideals of chivalry and the ethics of knights. Guy states that he has the opportunity to marry the daughters of kings and lords and that these marriages would bring him great glory, honour and power. His statements reflect the idealised medieval concept of courtly love:

And, how he was bedyn ryche wife,

Kyngys doghtur and emperowre

And wyth hur moche honowre" (6992-6994).²²⁰

Guy chooses not to take advantage of these marriage proposals or opportunities since his love and expectation is always for Felice. Because Felice plays a central role in Guy's life and directly influences the decisions he makes or will make. His preference for Felice is

²¹⁸ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 115.

²¹⁹ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power*, 14.

²²⁰ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 200.

due to his sense of loyalty to the woman he sees as his ideal, and to Felice's guiding influence on Guy: "Of them all wolde y noght, / For on yow was all my thocht (6995-6996)."²²¹ Guy cannot be expected to make a decision with any strategic or political interest that would undermine or hinder his commitment to Felice. This situation underlines the fact that women, who are portrayed as the object of the knight's love and chivalric pursuit, are in fact in a much more central and influential position.

Guy's devotion and dependence on a noblewoman might be considered as a common recurring motive in medieval romance, and it emphasises the knight's commitment to a single, idealised love. These words of Guy reflect the traditional values of courtly love, while also highlighting the changing value of women in the social life. Stuard mentions that women can have a significant influence on their community and have significant informal freedoms, even in situations that severely restrict their activities.²²² Far from being a passive object of love in Guy's life, Felice plays the role of an active character at the centre of his actions and goals. Although *Guy of Warwick* is concerned with Guy's cognitive and physical development, it is Felice's presence that is at the centre of his development.

After arriving at his homeland, Guy realises the impact of Felice and her main role in his life as a source of motivation and director. As the reader can see from this confessional speech of Guy, his knighthood, all the tournaments he takes part in, this journey he makes, the successes he achieves on this journey, the material/spiritual gains he makes, are all for Felice. She becomes the most important element and the most vital source of motivation in Guy's life and plays a major role in his journey and development. The role of women as influencers of knights' quests and actions is evident in Guy's awareness of the change and development he has undergone. He is now admired, respected, and recognised by all. He realises how his achievements in tournaments and battles bring him recognition and honour in many countries:

And how he had many slane

And castels and towres many tane

²²¹ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 200.

²²² Stuard, *Women in Medieval Society*, 9.

*And how in many londys longe. (7135-7137)*²²³

Guy also realises that all these achievements and the success, glory, and fame he has achieved are for and thanks to Felice, the woman he loves and to whom he dedicates his life: “He had bene in parell stronge / And all for þe loue of þat maye (7138-7139).”²²⁴ Throughout his journey, motivated by his great love for her, Guy has thought of nothing but Felice and everything he has done has been to fulfil her expectations.²²⁵ Guy's self-awareness offers the reader a chance to realise that by moving away from the patriarchal, stereotypical tradition of medieval romance writing, the reader is given the idea that female characters in romance are in fact just as respectable, active and important as male characters.

These words highlight Guy's considerable achievements and sacrifices, which are driven by his love for a woman, Felice. This theme underscores the role of women as sources of inspiration and motivation for knights to perform extraordinary deeds and pursue chivalric quests as well as her influence on the main character, hero of the romance. Felice's reflection on his influence and renown in foreign lands reinforces the idea that knights often seek honour and prestige to win the favour of their beloved women. The difference of *Guy of Warwick* from other fifteenth-century romances is that Guy's only ambition and purpose is to be a worthy lover for Felice. He is not concerned about any other gift or reward through his journey.

Guy is aware of his achievements, including the battles he has won and the titles he has acquired. He is also aware that these successes are the woman he is in love with and who is at the centre of his life and the source of motivation. As a result of this realisation, he lacks the expectation to fight for Christianity, one of the concepts of the romance genre. He embarks on a long pilgrimage to serve God for the rest of his life, which has been shaped and given importance thanks to Felice. He decides never to return, but this lack has no effect on the strong character of Felice, who does not need Guy for her influence on the narrative. She continues her life where she left off.

²²³ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 204.

²²⁴ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 204.

²²⁵ Djordjević, *Guy of Warwick*, 3.

In the fifteenth-century *Guy of Warwick*, Felice's ongoing charitable activities reflect her commitment to benevolent action as well. She supports the poor and helps churches and abbeys. This emphasises her virtue and shows how important generosity and charity are in the medieval world: "Abbeyse, churchys sche dud make / At that tyme for Gyes sake (8404)."²²⁶ The mention that no one has ever seen her laugh despite any amusement suggests a degree of stoicism. It's possible that her stoic demeanour is related to her husband's exile, further emphasizing her loyalty and resilience in the face of adversity.²²⁷ This mental strength of hers and her devotion to the man she loves can be considered as an indication of how strong Felice is, how she can overcome every difficulty and how loyal she is:

Mony, sythe þat Gye fro þe londe yede.

Neuyr for game, that was done,

Loghe sche, sythe þat Gye was gone" (8406-8408).²²⁸

While this part of the romance does not explicitly describe Felice as Guy's source of motivation or quest, it underscores the significance of women's roles in supporting their husbands and the broader community. Her unwavering commitment to charitable deeds and her stoicism are qualities that influence her surroundings.

Upon examination of the narrative, it becomes evident that Felice's strength and influence extend far beyond her relationship with Guy. While this part of the romance does not explicitly describe Felice as Guy's source of motivation or quest, it underscores the significance of women's roles in supporting their husbands and the broader community. Her unwavering commitment to charitable deeds and her stoicism are qualities that influence her surroundings profoundly. Despite the absence of men in certain passages, Felice remains a central and formidable figure, demonstrating that her agency and impact are not contingent upon male presence. Her acts show how strong and resilient women might be in medieval society, showing how they could control their own fate and have a lasting impact on the world. Felice is an accurate representation of the resilience and

²²⁶ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 241.

²²⁷ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power*, 198.

²²⁸ Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 241.

determination. of women, demonstrating that their influence endures and their contributions are essential even in the absence of males.

Guy of Warwick challenges the stereotypical perception of the powerless and passive female figure, which is common in medieval romance literature, by presenting Felice as an influential character in the narrative. Instead of seeing female characters as essential elements of the narrative, medieval literature often tends to marginalise and objectify women.²²⁹ *Guy* romances, on the other hand, present a more nuanced and complex view of gender roles by placing the female character in a relatively influential and autonomous role, providing a congruent example of women's agency and influence in shaping the narrative.²³⁰ The fact that Felice is the source of Guy's motivation for the actions that shape his life provides a distinctive example of male-female relationships and the place of women in the medieval romance genre.

²²⁹ Jennifer Fellows, "Mothers in Middle English Romance," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol Fellows Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43.

²³⁰ Matthew Rooney, "Of Guy, of His Felice, and of His Guilt Problematic Love in the Auchinleck *Guy of Warwick*," *Verso: An Undergraduate Journal of Literary Criticism* Verso 2019 (May 5, 2019): 129.

CONCLUSION

Literary works that have great significance in social or individual interactions have also been shaped by the interactions of individuals in the environment in which they live or have largely covered these interactions. They cannot be expected to exist independently of their time or environment. In producing literary texts, which cannot be considered independent of their social context, it is possible to encounter patriarchal approaches to women in works produced under the influence of male-dominated societies. When analysing the role and position of women in society, it is also necessary to consider socio-cultural, economic, religious, or political reasons. As in many literary studies, there are stereotypical classifications of the position and value of women in medieval literary works and romances. It might be asserted that romances are also strongly influenced by the patriarchal structure and ideas about the perception of women or the position and role of women during the Middle Ages.

Female characters in medieval romance are portrayed as objects of love, acquired through the courageous efforts of chivalrous heroes.²³¹ Female characters tend to be portrayed as needy and dependent on the help of another person (usually a man). In addition to some examples that create a misogynistic perception by giving the impression that women are of less value, we can also find examples that show that medieval women are able to hold positions of power, such as queens and nobles, and those women have the ability to influence male characters through their intelligence and wit.²³² Owing to the misconceptions attributed to women by patriarchal societies, medieval romance writers tend to portray female characters as weak, silent and passive. The idea that female characters in the medieval romance genre are weak and unimportant is the result of a misogynistic perspective. Among various romances, to provide a good example of the

²³¹ Krause, "The Construction and Interrogation," 135.

²³² Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power*, 1-2.

importance and influence of female characters in the narrative through the active role of the character, this study examines the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* and its Middle English adaptation *Guy of Warwick* because they can be seen as appropriate for arguing the idea that women are more active and influential in the narrative than is commonly perceived.

Despite the deliberate portrayal of female characters as oppressed and powerless in medieval romance, there is no sufficient research to support the claim that women in romance are actually to be considered independent and authoritative. Studies on the role and position of women in social relations fail to focus on the ignored or deliberately devalued personality of female characters in the medieval romance genre. This thesis has demonstrated that female characters exert a significant influence on the hero's character development and on the romance narrative. This is in contrast to the prevailing portrayal of female figures in medieval romance as silenced, devalued or ignored.

Contrary to common classifications of women as supernumerary characters in medieval romances, *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* allow reader to consider the idea that women are worthy and significant characters as much as their male counterparts. In these literary texts, women are portrayed as complex characters with their agency and influence over the narration, challenging traditional gender roles and expectations of society. Stating the role and position of women in Middle Ages, Power argues that the various expressions of women's status in the Middle Ages interact with each other, but they do not always correspond exactly; the actual status of women is a synthesis of theory of legal status and everyday life.²³³ Despite the tendency in medieval romance to portray women as less valuable and socially passive compared to their male counterparts, the importance attached to the female character in *Gui/Guy* romances suggests that the contribution of women to the narrative can be better understood when the influence of patriarchal romance writing is removed. By analysing the complex representations of women in *Gui/Guy* romances, medieval audiences can better comprehend the complexities surrounding gender dynamics in the Middle Ages. These narratives challenge established

²³³ Power, *Medieval Women*, 1.

notions of women's roles, and they demonstrate the significant impact that women have on medieval literature.

In medieval romance, the portrayal of female characters is often characterised by a perception of suppression, silence, and ineffectiveness. Such representations are common perceptions shaped by the stereotypical writing tradition that can be found in many literary works and the main reason for the formation of this perception is that the tradition of writing medieval texts was shaped by a male-dominated mentality. Contrary to the stereotypical male-dominated writing tradition, this study aims to highlight that female characters are much more active and effective, and they have more influence on the narrative than they are perceived to be. Although the medieval romance genre is often perceived as deliberately devaluing women, portraying them as passive and less valuable due to the male-dominated tradition of romance writing, these romances actually provide valuable examples of the role of women in romances and their influence as demonstrated through the character of Felice. As it can be understood from these examples, contrary to the stereotypical image of passive and weak women, female characters in medieval romances are strong, active, and have a directing influence on the narrative.

From a general point of view, the romances *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* focus on the theme of the main character, Gui/Guy, who begins his life as the son of an ordinary seneschal and develops into a strong, brave, and fearless knight whom everyone knows, loves, and respects. Gui/Guy, who begins his life as a simple and ordinary man, first acquires the title of knight, then participates in tournaments in different countries and proves himself, then sets out on a long journey and finishes his journey through difficult enemies and dangerous battles as the best and bravest warrior in the world. In keeping with medieval romance culture, Gui/Guy's experiences and travels provide valuable examples of medieval traditions such as the virtues of chivalry, the importance and dignity of titles, and courtly love. Although the Gui/Guy romances provide valuable historical and cultural examples, the main focus of this study is not on Gui/Guy's journey of development and change, but on the female character, Felice, and her indispensable importance and influence on the narrative.

The most significant distinguishing features of Gui/Guy romances from other works of the period are the manner in which female characters are presented within the narrative.

Despite their conventional heroic narrative structure, they deviate from this norm in their portrayal of women. Rather than merely serving as a backdrop to the male protagonist's journey, women in Gui/Guy romances occupy a central role in the narrative, influencing the hero's development and guiding the plot. In this respect, the Gui/Guy romances are unique within the tradition of medieval romance, in that the sole purpose of Gui/Guy's journey and the great change he undergoes is to prove to the woman he loves that he is a worthy husband. Felice, the woman who plays a vital role in Gui/Guy's development, stands out for the way she shapes and determines the narrative of the romance and Gui/Guy's physical development. Furthermore, Felice's influence challenges the perception that strong and influential women are deliberately and consciously portrayed as inferior by the patriarchal medieval writing tradition. This study aims to highlight the fact that in order to understand the real condition of women in medieval writings, the reader must be able to comprehend the deliberate misogyny and be able to read these writings without the influence of the patriarchal perspective of the medieval romantic tradition.

Through the romances *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick*, this thesis has attempted to address the fact that women have more influence on the narrative than one might think, mainly through the character of Felice. It would not be wrong to state that the stereotypically male-dominated tradition of romance writing has tried to suppress these effective and active roles of women who play a determinant role, are powerful and largely shape the narrative. In order to understand the actual impact and position of women, this study has emphasised the importance of taking the reader out of the patriarchal romance tradition and examining the texts from a different perspective. Only in this way can the reflection of the socio-cultural structure of the medieval period on literary products be observed.

In the medieval romance genre, female characters are widely recognised and presented to the reader as passive and suppressed under male domination. In contrast to this stereotype, female characters play an active role in the narrative. As can be understood from the examples of *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick*, female characters play an important role in shaping the narrative, contrary to the male-dominated perspective of the conventional romance culture. Although these active and influential roles are often

overlooked and, on occasion, even deliberately rejected by the patriarchal tradition of romance writing, it is possible to identify instances where women do in fact shape the narrative, as evidenced by the character of Felice.

The character of Gui/Guy, the son of an ordinary seneschal, undergoes a profound transformation and development at the outset of the romance. This physical and intellectual growth can be seen as an important indicator of the pivotal role played by the female character in the narrative of the romance. Gui/Guy embarks on a lengthy and challenging journey, driven by Felice's expectations. Thanks to the inspiration he receives from Felice, he ultimately emerges as a virtuous and respected warrior, known and admired by all. It is evident that the female character plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative arc of this adventure. Felice is the primary catalyst behind Gui/Guy's transformation into the central figure of the romance.

As evidenced by the examples of the Gui/Guy romances, female characters occupy a significantly more prominent and influential position in society and within the narrative of the romance than might be assumed. In contrast to the prevailing misconception that women are passive and entirely submissive, female characters are demonstrably more autonomous, independent, and free-willed. The active and influential role played by women in medieval romance writing is often overlooked, with the narrative shaped by the heroic stories of male characters. The portrayal of women as helpless and submissive individuals waiting to be rescued by the knight in their palaces, in contrast to the heroism and achievements of male characters, has become a common stereotype in the romance tradition. By challenging these preconceptions, the Guy romances and the character of Felice provide a compelling illustration of the extent to which female characters in the medieval romance genre are more influential and autonomous than previously assumed and have a greater impact on the narrative.

Medieval romance often reflects the socio-cultural, religious, or political characteristics of the period in which it is set, and misogyny is considered as one of the common themes in medieval romance. The tradition of male-dominated medieval romance writing can be seen in the formation of this misogyny and the perception that female characters are deliberately less valuable. Contrary to the commonly held belief that women in these narratives were passive and submissive, it is possible to encounter strong and active

female characters who play a guiding role in the narrative. It is important to acknowledge that the portrayal of female characters in medieval romances does not accurately reflect their actual role and position. It is crucial to recognise the diversity of female characters in these texts and avoid misperceptions of their character.

The examples of *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* demonstrate that women in medieval romances are active and autonomous individuals. By disregarding the patriarchal mindset that perpetuates the misconception that women are passive and oppressed in the narrative, it becomes evident that the contributions of female characters are not as limited as previously assumed. The fundamental premise of this study is that the depiction of female characters as subjugated and vulnerable individuals in romances does not align with the actual characteristics of women in the medieval social structure. The majority of the erroneous or biased accusations directed towards women are a consequence of social norms that have been shaped and influenced by the male-dominated tradition of medieval romance writing. In contrast to the aforementioned norms, female characters also assume a pivotal role in the narrative, influencing the male protagonist and shaping the direction of the story.

In order to comprehend the place and importance of female characters in medieval romance narratives, readers must be free from the influence of stereotypical perceptions projected on women. It is important to recognise that literary works, which can be considered as a reflection of society, can also be used as a means of controlling or shaping the masses. This has led to the formation of the perception of unqualified female characters, which reflects the difficulties faced by women in gender roles on the narrative. Nevertheless, it is important to note that female individuals, who represent the fundamental unit of society, are highly engaged in social roles and participate fully in shaping the course of events, just as male individuals do.

The representation of women in romance narratives, characterised by their perceived dominance, ineffectiveness, and weakness, does indeed reflect the patriarchal ideals of the period. However, a more nuanced examination reveals that these representations reflect not only societal expectations, but also complex narrative strategies employed by the authors. In the case of the Gui/Guy romances, which serve as the focus of this thesis, the analysis reveals a more nuanced portrayal of female characters than initially

perceived. Through close textual analysis, it becomes clear that women have a significant impact on the narrative trajectory and the development of the hero. Contrary to the passive roles often ascribed to them, female characters emerge as active agents who intricately guide and influence the hero's journey. Their agency goes beyond mere companionship or decoration; they actively participate in the construction of the hero's identity and the unfolding of the narrative.

This thesis has challenged conventional interpretations and encourages a reassessment of the genre by highlighting the curial roles played by female characters in medieval romance. This shift in perception not only enriches appreciation of medieval literature but also offers insights into the complex interplay between gender, narrative, and social dynamics in the medieval period. By presenting the actual position of female characters in the texts to the medieval reader, this thesis has argued that women play crucial roles in shaping the romance narrative and that it is female characters who create the hero in the romance. Through this perspective, the contributions of female characters emerge as fundamental catalysts in the development of romance narratives and reshape the understanding of the medieval literary tradition.

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