

Romance and King Horn:

Originally, the term romance referred to the vernacular language of Rome; Romance languages descend from Rome. The term is used loosely in the Middle Ages (by the 14th century) to designate works that set ideals for knighthood and focus on knight's role as lover; fighting is often on behalf of lady. However, the term is not a generic label in the modern sense. The romance genre sets up ideals for knighthood, not only on the battlefield but especially in the court regarding the social etiquette of courtly love.

courtly love: a "modern" term invented by Gaston Paris in the 19th century that describes the rules for lovers codified by Capallanus in the 12th century. In the works of Chretien, these rules become part of the chivalric code for knighthood.

(Notes on "King Horn" are from my article "A Description of the Middle English Romance Based on King Horn" *Arthurian Interpretations* (11.2) 1991: 44-57.)

"King Horn" is extant in three Middle English manuscripts, all Southern dialect. The plot is shared with the French Romance of Horn by Maistre Thomas. Thomas refers to a "parchemin," or source, and alludes to the fact that his romance is part of a trilogy. The English version and the French version are similar, but there is no indication that one directly influenced the other. Rather, several variations of the story probably existed, and possibly the French and English writers were familiar with the same or similar versions.

Chevalier: horseman; chivalry= knightly code of honor;

Maurice Keen's definition of chivalry, from his text *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984): "prowess, franchise, loyalty, generosity, courtesy (behavior at court)"

Aspects of romance:

Introductions:

Most romances begin in one of the following conventional ways: with a dedication to patron/patroness; an introduction of the author; or a reference to source material. The plot itself often begins with an account of the hero's ancestry (sometimes an adventure of the hero's father), a court occasion in which the king refuses food until some event happens, a festival, or a history of the hero's childhood.

"King Horn" begins with a reference to "song," perhaps indicative of an oral tradition and indicating that the unknown author could be a minstrel. The action begins with an introduction of Horn's father and an account of Horn's youth.

Romance settings: remote rather than historical; even when specific locations are mentioned, one could not trace the hero's wanderings on a map. The author's purpose is to establish a setting that is distant, and in doing so, he may extend beyond his own sketchy knowledge of geography. Generally, a romance begins at a specific court from which knights wander in search of adventure. Obstacles pop up at random, and characters almost miraculously arrive at destinations. In "King Horn," wandering takes place initially at sea. In many other romances, the wandering is on horseback.

Characters: loosely drawn, stereotypical, always noble

Plot: The romance author does not intend to create a new work, but rather to shape familiar material artfully. This type of composition is known as invention. The plot is meandering, based on adventures; unified by knight proving himself or regaining status; little character development; the structure is divided according to the occurrence of the events, or according to various locales in which the events occur. With cyclic romances, the structure revolves around a hero or family of heroes.

Structure: King Horn is written in Alexandrine couplets, a standard romance form. The manuscript is divided into four main parts. If these divisions in the manuscript indicate the structure, then the structure revolves around Horn's attainment of honor by winning back his home and proving himself a worthy lover. Horn is carried from youth, in which he is helpless at the hands of pagans, to adulthood, in which he serves as a role model of chivalry.

Motifs: Recurring elements are common to the genre, and "King Horn" contains quite a few typical motifs, including descriptions of Horn, gift giving (Rymenhild's magic ring), fighting giants, etc. The exchanging of gloves is a common motif, as when King Thurston offers his glove to his son. Typically a gesture of significance to comitatus, here, the glove exchange becomes a jest: Horn is such an attractive hero that Berild needs the token to attract a wife.

Style: Style in the Middle Ages is an adaptation of classical distinctions between metaphoric, figurative, and colloquial writing. These distinctions are reworked in the Middle Ages and refer, in a broad schema, to subject matter. The subject matter of "King Horn" seems to be presented in the high style, appropriate for a courtly audience.