The Identity-defining Role of Forgetting in Transformative
Disguise in two Middle English Romances:
Havelok the Dane and *Sir Isumbras*

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the interconnected processes of disguise and forgetting in two

Middle English romances, *Havelok the Dane* and *Sir Isumbras*. The disguises in these

two texts have a transformative function because the protagonists, while disguised, forget

their identities. Because of this, these transformative disguises are immersed in the

genre's well-established narrative of identity construction. The disguise motif, though

common in romance, is rarely studied as a driving force in identity transformation

because it more often functions as a performative plot point. Using medieval theories of

memory, forgetting, and recollection to assess how the processes of disguise and

forgetting occur in the texts, my research has determined that forgetting makes the

transformations into disguise more complete and that recollecting what is important for

both the true and disguised identities creates an improved and changed final identity.

Overall, these romances' use of disguise, forgetting, and transformation presents

forgetting as both a problem and a necessity for effecting change.

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Introduction: Forgetting identity in transformative disguise

This thesis explores disguise and forgetting in Middle English romances and how

these processes intersect, focusing on *Havelok the Dane* and *Sir Isumbras,* two romances

that demonstrate how complicated and rich these processes are. I began this research with

an observation that disguise disrupts the flow of memory in Middle English romances

and that these disruptions can be central plot points. Memorial disruptions in disguise can

happen in many different ways, but the most pronounced way in which disguise

challenges memory, though it is rarely studied, is when romance characters truly live out

their disguised identities and forget, to some extent, who they are. This study asks: what

is the relationship between disguise and forgetting, and what is the narrative purpose of

self-forgetting in disguise?[1] Overall, disguises that are tied up in self-forgetting function

differently than most romance disguises because of how deeply they are implicated in

identity formation and transformation processes. Moreover, the ways in which this

forgetting is resolved through a selective process of recollection is essential to how the

characters form their final iterations of identity. Drawing on medieval theories of

memory, recollection, and forgetting that I outline in Chapter 1, I will examine in

Chapters 2 and 3 the moments where disguise enables forgetting, explore how and why

the forgetting occurs, and indicate how different remembered identities are integrated

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[1] I am using the term "self-forgetting" to describe the process of forgetting personal
identity, though the term is often used to describe altruism. In my use of this term, I am
indebted to Kisha Tracy's analysis of Boethian self-forgetfulness as forgetting an
important part of the self due to a transgression or sin in Middle English romance (her
focus is on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* though she also mentions *Sir Isumbras*). I
am using the term more neutrally: self-forgetting is not only because of transgression
(though it sometimes is) but it is also a natural result of certain changes like exile and
disguise. Kisha Tracy, "Gawain-Poet: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to Forget or not
to Forget," in *Memory and Confession in Middle English Literature* (Springer, 2017): 93-

through recollection. Ultimately I have found that, although these moments of forgetting cause problems in the texts, they also illustrate the ways in which forgetting can be useful, constructive, and generally necessary.

It is widely accepted that the construction and reclamation of identity is central to the medieval romance genre, as Philippa Hardman encapsulates: "the typical patterns of the romance mode –loss and restoration, separation and reunion, exile and return, suffering and redemption, testing and reward, adventure and achievement –figure in their wonder-evoking conclusions the discovery of identity."[2] Reading disguises based on how they function in the identity construction pattern can help us to understand how interiority is constructed through challenges, particularly memorial challenges. Robert W. Hanning, writing on interiority in twelfth-century romance, argues that, "in the Romance genre generally, man is defined in terms of *becoming* not *being*; that is, what he is is a function of what time brings him."[3] My thesis adds to this discussion by showing how disguise and forgetting fit into this recognized pattern. In texts with transformative disguise, becoming over time is very much tied up in disguised time and how the characters become their disguises before they can become their final selves.

Disguises are worn for a number of reasons in romance. Sometimes disguise is used as a form of trickery or deception in order to test a character's qualities, as one sees in the Loathly Lady character in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* or Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Disguises can also be a way for a character to gain access to a

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[2] Philippa Hardman, Introduction, *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: DS. Brewer, 2002), 2. The essays appearing in this collection range from discussions on individual identity, to other forms of identity such as national and generic identity in romance.

[3] Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977): 139.

space where he is not welcome, as in *King Horn* when the protagonist dresses as a pilgrim to interrupt his lover's wedding. Other times, disguise occurs in situations where recognition is dangerous, as it is for Havelok in *Havelok the Dane,* or in order to continue a forbidden love affair as William and Melior do in *William of Palerne.* Disguises are also worn in situations where a character must endure penance, as in *Sir Isumbras.* A character may also wear a disguise as a means of recuperating a damaged reputation, as Ywain does in *Ywain and Gawain.* The forms that disguises can take are also varied. It is quite common for romance characters to take on disguises of lower status: knights or kings disguise themselves as minstrels, pilgrims, beggars, labourers, or merchants. Characters may also disguise in chivalric incognito, when knights wear armour that is not their own so that they are unrecognizable. These questions of why and how characters are disguised are often addressed in romance scholarship because they help to illustrate how the motif functions in romance narratives. My exploration of how disguise contributes to processes of forgetting addresses an equally important question that has not received much scholarly analysis: what does the disguise do to the character?

Although the idea of identity formation is integral to the romance genre, disguises that play a key role in transforming the character's identity are quite rare and, as a result, rarely discussed. The disguise motif occurs in over half of extant Middle English romances, but in most of these instances, disguise is a tool that conceals identity or even communicates a transformation in identity, but does not bring about the transformation

itself.[4] In most instances the disguises are performative, external and deliberate, worn (and easily removed or changed) to serve a purpose. For example, William and Melior in *William of Palerne* disguise themselves as bears in order to continue their forbidden romance. Once their disguises become known to the men searching for them, they exchange the bear disguises for deer disguises. All the while they are wearing their "cloþes, þat comely were and riche" underneath the animal skins (1737).[5] The disguised heroes are aware of both their true appearances and the reason that pushed them to disguise themselves in the first place, and the disguises do nothing to change their awareness of their identities.

The disguises in *Havelok the Dane,* the subject of the second chapter, and *Sir Isumbras*, the subject of the third chapter, go deeper, however: they create lived *disguised identities* that are central to the protagonists' overall character transformations. Forgetting distances the characters' disguised identities from their true ones and allows for the characters' more complete assimilation into their disguised lives; because both Havelok and Isumbras do not recollect their noble or knightly identities while disguised, they both become their disguises, unimpeded by the structures of their former lives. As a result, the disguises serve not as a tool that brings about the protagonist's return but instead as a crucial moment for transformation that needs to be lived out before he can return at all.

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[4] 45 out of 83 romances listed in the online *Database of Middle English Romance* contain the keyword "disguise." *Database of Middle English Romance* University of York, 2012, http://www.middleenglishromance.org.uk. This database also exemplifies how disguise is not easily defined. For example, Emaré's exile, use of a pseudonym, and work as a needlewoman are often discussed as a disguise, but the text does not have the keyword "disguise" attached on this database.

[5] This reference and all subsequent references to *William of Palerne* come from the following edition: G.H.V. Bunt, *William of Palerne* (Groningen, Bouma's Boekhuis, 1985).

Each of these texts provides a different type of transformation. Havelok, a Danish heir who is a toddler when exiled, grows up disguised as a fisherman's son and undergoes a social transformation that ultimately informs how he regains his noble status. In this text, there is one central disguised identity and how this identity is formed, how the true identity is forgotten, and how both are eventually remembered are all essential components of the protagonist's character development. Isumbras, a proud knight required to do penance for his sin, undergoes a spiritual transformation. The multiple disguised identities he inhabits during his penance bring about different forms of forgetting that complete his spiritual transformation but, at the same time, make it difficult for him to re-integrate into his earthly life. Unlike Havelok's disguise, Isumbras's disguises are more episodic and reveal a greater variety of forms of forgetting. Generally, disguises are not the only cause of transformation for these characters (for example, it is Isumbras's penance that necessitates his transformation and his disguises are part of that process) but they play a significant role in how the transformation occurs. In these cases, the disguised identities are foundational in character development so that the moments of revelation present a changed character, influenced by the memorial challenges encountered in his disguises.

Because the more common performative disguises raise the question of what the character does with disguise, most of the scholarship on disguise addresses this type of disguise and this type of question. As a result, very little scholarship has addressed how disguises transform characters. Jane Bliss writes that disguise, in comparison to the use of pseudonyms, functions as a plot device that is more "functional and episodic" and less

"bound up with the thrust of the romance plot."[6] While this may be the case for more performative disguises, it does not apply to the transformative disguises involving self-forgetting that are central to the thrust of the romance plot. Examining disguise as a tool for communication of selfhood, Susan Crane explores incognito knights in romance and their historical counterparts in court settings and suggests that disguise functions as a way of "mov[ing] from one public perception to a higher one," arguing that deliberate performances of disguise allow the disguised character to actively revise public perceptions of their "still visible self."[7] The disguises I examine, rather than externally communicating change to the public and to the audience, craft a process of internal change. These disguises push the characters outside of the social spaces where their true identities are known, making them much less visible than incognito knights like Ywain or Ipomadon (the characters Crane discusses) who conceal their identities but still remain in contact with the other characters from their former lives. Further, forgetting in disguise allows Havelok and Isumbras to remain displaced from their former lives for a long time, further enabling the changes brought on by their disguises.

Because it often crosses class boundaries, disguise is also examined within socio-political contexts, as scholars consider what we can learn about medieval social structures from romance disguises. For example, Debra B. Black examines disguise as a didactic narrative technique that "becomes a microcosmic reflection of the values expressed in the larger text in relation to social identities employed to categorize and thus control

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[6] Jane Bliss, *Naming and Namelessness in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008): 40

[7] Crane, Susan *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War,* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002): 139, 178

individuals within medieval English society."[8] This approach is useful for understanding why the protagonists' estates-crossing disguises are so effective in concealing them, but explains little about how disguise shapes the interiority of the individual character. Although it is not a major focus of her work, Dominique Battles also raises the issue of disguise as having a socio-political significance as something especially noticeable in Middle English romances, where she notes that we see "more disguise, in more forms, for longer periods of the narrative" than in French romance.[9] She suggests that these disguises are also more concerned with issues of national identity: involuntarily disguised characters are "comfortable with who they are" because their disguises "are a symptom of a political, not psychological crisis."[10] This reading of disguise again envisions a character actively remembering his or her former self. Though many disguises do function this way, this approach still operates on the notion that disguises conceal a stable identity. When forgetting is involved, regardless of the conditions that pushed the character to the disguise (political for Havelok and spiritual for Isumbras), identity is not stable underneath.

By studying, through disguise, the processes of forgetting in romance and using medieval thought on memory to do so, this thesis engages a growing scholarly conversation about the ways in which memory informs various aspects of the romance

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[8] Black, Debra B, *Anagnorisis: Revealing Didactic Purpose in the use of Disguise in Middle English Romances* (PhD Diss, Arizona State University, 1998), 1.

[9] Dominique Battles, *Cultural Difference and Material Culture in Middle English Romance: Normans and Saxons* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 114

[10] Battles, *Cultural Difference,* 114. Battles is discussing the exile and return patterns in *King Horn, Havelok* and *Sir Orfeo* when she makes these points, but her development of issues surrounding disguise focuses primarily on *King Horn.* Her comment on "psychological crisis" refers to personal crises of chivalric identity that frequently appear in French romance.

genre. The scholarship on memory and romance can be very generally divided into three interconnected trends. The first of these is the study of cultural and historical memory in the romance genre. Romance has been widely noted as a genre deeply concerned with the past and most romances look backwards to some distant historical time; as Rosalind Field explains, the genre "makes a virtue out of archaism."[11] There has also been a recent surge in scholarship concerning romance's role in communicating less distant historical memory, especially that of the Crusades.[12] The second trend is the study of medieval memory and the romance text. By "the text" I refer to both the composition of the text and the audience reception of the text. The composition of romance texts often envisions an oral performance setting and as a result, attention has been paid to the use of memorial

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[11] Rosalind Field, "Romance in England," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 175. John Whitman, in an edited collection on romance and history, notes that the division of romance genres into "matters" demonstrates the genre's concern with retelling the past. The contributors to this collection approach the varied ways in which different historical pasts are retold and remembered. Jon Whitman, "Romance and History: designing the times," *Romance and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 3-22. Jamie McKinstry's third chapter, "Topography, Redaction, and Inheritance: The Initial Steps of Memory," discusses how romance makes use of earlier tales, by adapting and re-narrating them (i.e. *Sir Orfeo*) and also by referencing them (i.e. the cloth depicting older tales in *Emaré*). *Middle English Romance and the Craft of* Memory (Cambridge: DS. Brewer, 2015): 45-68.

[12] Lee Manion broadly examines how vernacular literature like romance transmits and shapes collective memory of the crusades, "'Perpetual memorye": remembering history in the crusading romance," in *Remembering the Crusades and Crusading*, ed, Megan Cassidy-Welch, (London: Routledge, 2017): 114-28; Suzanne Conklin Akbari considers how poetic representations of sieges in medieval epic and romance tell the history of the crusades, "Erasing the Body: History and Memory in Medieval Siege Poetry," in *Remembering the Crusades: Myth, Image, Identity*, Eds., Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012): 146-173. Much of the scholarship on *Sir Isumbras* considers how the romance tells, remembers, and reflects crusading history, for example: Leila K. Norako, "*Sir Isumbras* and the Fantasy of Crusade," *The Chaucer Review* 48 no. 2 (2013): 166-189; Lee Manion, "*Sir Isumbras's* 'privy' recovery: Individual Crusading in the fourteenth century," in *Narrating the Crusades: Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 67-106.

techniques in romance structure, something that Evelyn Birge Vitz calls "memory-friendliness," for both the reciter and the audience that includes the use of formulae, repetition, and re-narration.[13] A third trend is the study of how memorial processes are represented in the romance events and characters.[14] Because my focus is primarily on character transformations, my study follows the third trend. The latter two trends, however, are frequently interrelated because characters and events are composed by the author and are received by audiences.[15]

Although romance is a genre deeply concerned with the formation of individual identity, work on individual character memory in romance has been, until recently, relatively sparse and mostly focused on Arthurian (mainly French) romance and

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[13] Evelyn Birge Vitz, "On the 'Memory-Friendliness' of Verse Romance" in *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999): 228-266. For considerations of performance contexts, orality, and memorization in specifically Middle English romance see: Murray McGillvray, *Memorization in the Transmission of the Middle English Romance*, Albert Bates Lord Studies in Oral Tradition, 5 (New York: Garland, 1990); Andrew Taylor, "Fragmentation, Corruption and Minstrel Narration: The Question of the Middle English Romances," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 22 (1992): 38-62; For specifically medieval theories of memory and how they influence the construction of a (Chaucerian) romance text, see Mary Carruthers "Seeing things: locational memory in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," in *Art and Context in Late Medieval English Narrative: Essays in honor of Robert Worth Frank, Jr,* ed., Robert R. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994): 93-106.

[14] Brent Pitts focuses on separated lovers recollecting one another and meditating on absence in "Absence, Memory, and the Ritual of Love in Thomas's *Roman de Tristan,*" *The French Review* 63, no. 5 (2010): 790-799; Brooke Hunter considers remembering in mourning and loss in "Remenants of Things Past: Memory and the *Knight's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 23, no. 2 (2011): 126-146; Jon Whitman examines the renarration of events in deathbed testimonials in "Posthumous Messages: Memory, Romance and the *Morte D'Arthur*, in *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages*, ed., Lucie Doležalová (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 241-252; and Kisha Tracy explores how recollecting with reason helps characters to move forward in "Character Memory and the Reinvention of the Past in Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*" *Tristania* 24 (2006): 1-15.

[15] Also considering how these trends connect, McKinstry notes that modern divisions of memory like individual and collective memory are not easily applied to the romance genre, and explores "character, plot, narrative, and literary, social, and historical contexts" as interrelated. Jamie McKinstry. *Middle English Romance,* 19.

Chaucer.[16] A recent contribution that addresses this gap and approaches Middle English romance is McKinstry's 2015 *Middle English Romance and the Craft of Memory*.[17] His broad study engages with all three trends mentioned above and examines moments in several Middle English romances, arguing that memory is essential to romance because the genre calls for "memorial work" that is "shared between characters and audience."[18] On character memory, he writes that, "the [memorial] faculty allows a character to reaffirm and develop their identity whilst simultaneously maintaining the unity of a particular tale as episodes are encountered, stored, and remembered."[19] This approach is very useful in understanding the great number of ways memory interacts with the genre as a whole, but because of its breadth, it is not designed to explore generic conventions, like transformative disguises, that are not the norm. Both forgetting and disguise are considered in McKinstry's book but the ways in which they intersect are not explored in depth. McKinstry's primary concern is the importance of remembering and the work that goes into it while forgetting is considered to be a "temporary lapse" in these processes.[20] As a result, his chapter on forgetting deals with temporary and deliberate forms of forgetting, such as deception and misremembering, and spends very little time discussing self-forgetting.[21] Disguise, too, is generally considered in in its more common temporary and deliberate contexts: disguise as a way of expressing or communicating change rather than effecting such change. Disguise, he argues, signals the need for memory work of

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[16] See note 14.

[17] Five of his eight chapters focus primarily on characters and events of romance.

[18] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance*, 1

[19] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance*, 19, 217

[20] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance*, 161.

[21] This is chapter 6, "Failed Memories: Forgetting, Lying, Obstructing." McKinstry, *Middle English Romance,* 135-162.

comparison on the part of the audience and undisguised characters because, "Only by identifying a figure from the past can we then appreciate how they have changed."[22] My study, in contrast, addresses disguised protagonists' own relationships to their disguised selves. By focusing on self-forgetting in disguise as an essential factor that both shapes and poses challenges for romance protagonists, I explore the processes of forgetting and disguise together, not only as a failure of memory, but also as a necessary part of the transformation of personal identity.

As has been suggested above, disguise does indeed create a memorial challenge even in its more performative contexts, but these challenges happen differently and perform very different functions in the romance narrative. When disguised characters do not forget who they are, misrecognition often creates a short memorial disjuncture for the characters witnessing the disguise. When a disguised character appears to someone who knew them before they were disguised, the change in appearance and the time that has passed make it difficult for secondary characters to associate the disguised person with their memories of the person they knew. During this disjuncture, however, the disguised character's identity remains remembered and stable underneath the disguise, and memorial cues and recognition tokens normally solve the issue.[23]

To exemplify this kind of disjuncture arising from misrecognition, in *King Horn* when Horn disguises himself as a pilgrim to attend his lover Rymenhild's wedding feast, he attempts to resolve the problems of recognition by testing her memory, providing memorial cues in the hope that they will prompt recognition. He first reminds Rymenhild

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[22] McKinstry. *Middle English Romance*, 179-182. McKinstry focuses on the series of performative disguises in *Ipomadon* to develop this point.

[23] Something like this does happen in *Isumbras* when he is reunited with his wife, but the main difference is that none of the actions on the protagonist's part are deliberate.

of a dream she had earlier about her net breaking while she is fishing (662-8).[24] This

prophetic dream signifying Rymenhild's subsequent loss of Horn becomes a reminder

when he returns and tells her:

> Thu wenest I beo a beggere,
> And Ich am a fishere,
> Wel feor y-come by este
> For fishen at thy feste.
> My net lith her by honde,
> Bi a wel fair stronde.
> Hit hath y-lege there
> Fulle seve yere.
> Ich am y-come to loke
> Ef eny fish hit toke. (1141-1150)

Here, Horn is referencing not only the dream that Rymenhild had seven years previously,

but also the direction (este) he has travelled and the seven years that have passed. Horn

ends the memory test with a pun on his own name and his drinking horn: "Drink to Horn

of horne" (1153). These clues, however, are ineffective prompts and Rymenhild does not

recognize him (1157-60). After this, Horn gives her a ring they had previously exchanged

as a recognition token that, although it makes her remember Horn, prompts her to believe

that "Horn y-sterve were" (1187).[25] Horn ultimately needs to tell her directly: "Ich am

Horn of Westernesse" (1217). I have used this example in order to demonstrate how

memorial challenge works with a self-aware disguised character, and it stands as a

contrast to the memorial challenges presented in *Havelok* and *Isumbras*. There is no

forgetting in this scene, but rather the (unsuccessful) use of memory cues by the

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[24] This reference and subsequent references to *King Horn* come from the following
edition: *King Horn,* in *Middle English Verse Romances,* ed. Donald B. Sands (New York:
Holt, Rineheart and Winston, 1966): 15-54.

[25] "y-sterve" is a form of the verb "sterven," defined as "to die, perish" (1a). All Middle
English definitions, unless otherwise specified come from the online edition of the
Middle English Dictionary (MED), University of Michigan, 2001. Last updated April 24
2013, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/

protagonist in an effort to solve the problem of misrecognition by another character. Many of the elements of this recognition scene are present in the two texts that I study: a dream, a recognition token, and a reference to the passage of time, but they have a very different function within those narratives. The transformative disguises in *Havelok* and *Isumbras* are all long-lasting disguises that involve a complete separation from the characters' previous lives. As a result, the memorial disruptions in those two texts are much deeper and much less easily resolved than they are in *King Horn* and other romances that depict performative rather than transformative disguises.

While there is little to no forgetting involved in the memory disruptions brought on by disguises like Horn's, forgetting dominates the narrative in both *Havelok* and *Isumbras* and it is not limited to single moments or episodes. The ways in which forgetting interacts with the transformative potential of disguise are threefold. First, some form of memorial problem precedes the disguise. In *Havelok*, it is a set of factors that challenge both memory formation and access that position him for forgetting when he is disguised. In *Isumbras*, it is the failure to remember something important, his spiritual self, and his resultant penance becomes a process of remembering his spiritual self and forgetting his worldly self. These texts thus suggest that memorial problems are not only the consequence of disguise, but also part of what causes the disguise.

Second, the disguises themselves present opportunities for forgetting in the form of distractions, new routines, isolation, or the passage of extended periods of time. Havelok exists in a contained space that allows him to forget his past, while Isumbras is pushed into a purely contemplative life where he forgets worldly things. These memorial disruptions must be reconciled in order for the disguised character to be revealed, but

they also play significant roles in shaping them. Because of the extent of forgetting in these disguises, recollection and recognition do not happen easily. The characters often require magical or divine intervention in order to prompt both recognition and recollection, such as a prophetic dream and physical exceptionality in *Havelok*, or a griffin that returns memorial objects in *Isumbras*.

The third way in which forgetting interacts with the transformative potential of disguise is seen in the fact that Havelok's and Isumbras's final identities are transformed specifically in relation to recollections pertaining to their disguised lives. Havelok actively remembers the relationships and spaces of his disguised identity and uses them to further his interests as a king while Isumbras remembers the values acquired during his spiritual transformation and uses it to inform his actions as a king on earth. Recollecting both their time disguised and their true identities allows these protagonists to make use of their past from both periods of their existence, which would not have occurred had their memories of their identities stayed stable beneath the disguises.

Because this thesis deals with interiority, the transformation of personal identity, and remembered individual experiences, it is important to note that these characters are fictional representations of individuals. Yet these imagined individuals depict processes of memory and forgetting as they were understood to work in the later Middle Ages that illuminate how challenging experiences can be integrated into identity. Ultimately, these challenging experiences of forgetting in disguise impact how these characters develop, reclaim, and enact their medieval social roles as good (Christian) kings. Moreover, the processes of forgetting and remembering in these romances that shape these characters' identities intersect with larger cultural discourses on memory and cognition that both

enhance our understanding of the complexity of medieval romance's identity formation narrative and resist the notion that Middle English popular romance characters are conventional and unsophisticated.[26] Though these two protagonists do display many conventional features of the romance hero, their complexity is revealed in how their transformative disguises (and the memorial challenges they bring) resist convention. More broadly, these characters' complexities illustrate ways in which the human experience of forgetting, though it is undoubtably a challenge, is often a necessary component of personal transformation and development.

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[26] Here, I am referring to a long tradition of considering Middle English popular romance (and its characters) to be unsophisticated and lacking literary value. This approach has been widely challenged in recent romance scholarship. For discussion of the traditional approaches and how scholarship of Middle English popular romance is changing, see the introductions of the following collections: Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert, eds., *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (Harlow; Longman, 2000); and Nicola McDonald, ed., *Pulp fictions of medieval England: Essays in popular romance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton eds., *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009).

Chapter 1: Understanding transformative disguise through medieval theories of memory, recollection, and forgetting

In transformative disguises time passes, alternative spaces are occupied, and appearances change; all these things challenge memory and contribute to how the characters forget parts of their true identities. The importance of temporal, spatial, visual, and moral factors in medieval thought on memory help to explain how disguises are transformative and also how intricately tied forgetting is to transformation. The memorial processes tied up with disguises in these romances reflect what Mary Carruthers calls a "fundamentally memorial" medieval culture.[1] This thesis will use medieval theories of memory that are relatively contemporary to the texts in order to illustrate some of the processes of remembering and forgetting that are reflected in these romance characters and how these processes inform characters' transformations.[2] Concepts of memory, recollection, and forgetting have the same basic meaning as they do today, but many of the processes were understood differently in the late medieval period. Some of these differences, as I outline below, help to explain the purpose of forgetting in these two romances and demonstrate how retrieved memories are used. For my understanding of these concepts, I am indebted to the foundational work on medieval memory by Mary

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[1] Mary Carruthers. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 9
[2] When I say relatively contemporary, I mean from the twelfth-century onwards.

Carruthers, Janet Coleman, and Frances Yates.[3] Their surveys of general concepts,

readings of the primary texts, and demonstrations of the importance of memory in

medieval culture have informed my own understanding of primary texts on memory.

Many medieval pronouncements on memory either focus on the physiological and

cognitive processes of memory as a function of the sensory soul (how memories are

formed, retained, and recollected), or on how to improve and train memory as a part of

the art of rhetoric (the art of memory).[4] These categories are often interrelated and they

all draw on basic concepts that inform thought on memory processes. I will draw

primarily on medieval pronouncements on memory by Boncompagno da Signa (*c.* 1170-

after 1240), Albertus Magnus (*c.* 1193-1280), and Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) because

they explore the physiological processes of memory formation and indicate possible

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[3] Carruthers is an authority in the study of medieval memory and has written several books and articles about medieval memory and related subjects. Her *Book of Memory* is the most comprehensive study of memory in medieval culture. In it, she interprets the work of medieval writers and their classical influences, explores metaphorical models describing memory, examines physiological descriptions of memory, discusses methods for memory training, notes memory's role in composition and in establishing authority, and explains how mnemonic visualization influenced book layout. Janet Coleman's book, *Ancient and Medieval Memories* is an encyclopedic text in which she categorizes different traditions in thought on memory. *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Frances Yates's *The Art of Memory* is a foundational book on the subject, tracing memory training from the classical period to the Renaissance. The focus of the book is on memory training and models, but she inevitably also explores how cognition and memory were perceived. *The Art of Memory*, Repr. 1966 (London: Pimlico, 2012).

[4] Later medieval theologians and philosophers (though versions of the these ideas also appear in Aristotle and Plato) also considered and debated to what extent memory could also be part of the intellectual soul (*intellectual memory*), referring to memory of abstract concepts retained after death. It is in this area where there are many conflicting opinions, while most philosophers tend to agree on the basics of sensory memory. Because I am considering processes of memory formation and disruption of memory in (fictional) lived existence, the sensory memory is a more useful framework. For a discussion of the intellectual memory in Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus, see John Marenbon, "Duns Scotus: Intuition and Memory," in *Later Medieval Philosophy 1150-1350* (London: Routledge, 1987): 154-169.

disruptions and challenges.[5] Their analyses of how memory is disrupted help to explain

how forgetting occurs in the romances I study. I will also examine structures of memory

training and how they reflect processes of memory formation and retention, drawing on

texts by medieval writers such as Hugh of Saint Victor (*d.* 1141) and Thomas

Bradwardine (*c.* 1290-1341). Although I am primarily using later medieval writers, these

concepts derive from, synthesize, and comment on classical and early medieval sources

so I will also reference these sources when they are useful.

Memory, referred to in the rhetorical tradition as the natural memory, is defined in

Augustine's (354-430) *Confessions* as "like a great field or spacious place, a storehouse

for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses."[6] As suggested

in Augustine, memory was considered to be a function of the sensory soul and refers to

the processes of forming and retaining memories. Though present in neo-platonic and

rhetorical works, the psychological explanations for memory expanded with the twelfth-

century recovery and translation of Aristotle's corpus, including *De Anima* and *Parva*

Naturalia. Aristotle's work was central especially to Albertus's and Aquinas's thought on

the subject.[7] Today, sense perception refers to things perceived by what were in the

Middle Ages considered the external senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and

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[5] Boncompagno is described by Yates as a "somewhat eccentric figure [who] should not be taken as entirely representative of his time." His lists of impediments and supports to memory, however, are very useful because they do reflect concepts that are explained more technically in other medieval memory sources. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 71.

[6] Augustine. Book 10.17, *Confessions*, Trans., R.S. Pine-Coffin (Penguin, 1961): 214. Augustine's "storehouse" reflects the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*'s definition of the natural memory as a "treasure house," a common metaphor for memory. Book III. xvi. 28 *Rhetorica Ad Herennium,* trans. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library 403 (repr.1954, London: Harvard University Press, 1968): 207

[7] As well as frequently discussing Aristotle's *De Anima* and *Parva Naturalia* in their other works, both wrote commentaries on Aristotle's *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* (from the *Parva Naturalia*).

touching. In medieval philosophy, however, sense perception also included the internal

senses: common sense, imagination, the estimative power, and memory.[8] The sense

organs for the internal senses were thought to be in the ventricles of the brain, and were

essentially psychological faculties.[9]

Sensory memory relies on the *memory image,* or phantasm.[10] Carruthers defines

the memory image as "the final product of the entire process of sense perception."[11] The

creation of a memory image works, Thomas Aquinas writes, "like a picture, because the

sense object imprints its likeness on the senses and this likeness remains in the

imagination even when the sense object is absent."[12] The memory image was conceived

of as a physical imprint that if and when it was eventually retrieved would be unmediated

by time and circumstance. This is one of the major differences between the modern

understanding of memory and the classical and medieval one. Modern theories of

forgetting understand memory traces to be more like imperfect copies of past perception

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[8] Thomas Aquinas, "The Internal Senses (ST1a78.4)" in *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae 1a 75-89*. Trans and ed. Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002): 76. I am using Aquinas's division of the sensory powers. In his commentary, Pasnau notes that there is no "settled view" at the time about the number of internal senses. Though loosely based on Aristotle, Aquinas's main influences were Arabic commentators, Avicenna and Averroës (282). Despite the lack of consensus on what the inner senses were, memory is always considered one of them.

[9] Simon Kemp. *Medieval Psychology*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 53. The location of the sense organs comes from Galen's writings on anatomy.

[10] The word from the Latin translations of Aristotle is *Phantasma.* Richard Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004) xiv-xv. Many translators translate *phantasma* as image, while others maintain the word phantasm. I will use the term image because it is the most widely used translation. When I refer to "memory image" I am using it in this specific context.

[11] Mary Carruthers. *The Book of Memory,* 19.

[12] Thomas Aquinas. "Commentary *on Aristotle,* On Memory and Recollection," Trans. John Burchill O.P., in *The Medieval Craft of Memory*: *An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Edited by Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002): 165-166.

that either fade over time or are interfered with by subsequent events.[13] In the Middle

Ages, as Carruthers explains: "Forgetting is a technical error, due to such things as

insufficient imprinting or mis-addressing."[14] The form of forgetting that involves

insufficient imprinting, which I will subsequently refer to as *image forgetting*, is the loss

or incomplete formation of a memory image that was never properly impressed in the

first place.[15] This difference between modern and medieval theories of image or trace

forgetting helps to explain how, in romance, memory of a thing is often either completely

absent or completely present, with little in between. This is especially evident in *Havelok*,

where once he remembers who he is, he is able to recall and retell moments from his past

in detail.

 Aristotle and his commentators stress the importance of memory being "of the

past," and by extension, memory is *temporal*.[16] The episodic structure of romance and its

concern with the passage of time makes remembering what has happened over that

passage of time a central concern for the genre.[17] Individual transformation, change and

growth happen over time in romance, and memorial problems are often tied up in

episodic problems of empty or unspecific time. In the romances discussed in the

following chapters, disguised time is often fluid, unmeasured or fragmented by temporal

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[13] Alan D. Baddeley. *Essentials of Human Memory* (Hove: Psychology Press, 1999): 119
[14] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 78.
[15] This form of forgetting could be loosely compared to modern concepts of memory loss linked to medical problems or stages of life, like various forms of amnesia and psychological repression.
[16] See Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* 449a9, trans. Sorabji, p. 47-48; Albertus Magnus, Albertus Magnus, "*Commentary* on Aristotle, *On Memory and Recollection,*" Trans. Jan M. Ziolkowski, in *The Medieval Craft of Memory*, 127-128; Aquinas, "Commentary," 157-8.
[17] Hanning devotes a chapter to time in the construction of individual identity in chivalric romance and notes that time is presented more specifically in romance than it is related genres like epic and hagiography. *The Individual*, 139-154.

gaps. For example, in *Sir Isumbras*, long temporal gaps exacerbate moments of

distraction that illuminate his challenge of negotiating a spiritual disguised identity with

an earthly identity that incorporates faith. The transformative disguise itself presents a

memorial challenge because it is always long lasting: Havelok is disguised from

childhood to adulthood and Isumbras is disguised for at least fifteen years. The length of

time both exacerbates the transformative potential of a disguised identity and the

memorial challenges it brings.

Recollection (reminiscence) is the activity of retrieving forgotten memories and

engaging with them through rational investigation.[18] It involves beginning with a

"starting point," an idea, thing, or image in the mind that through associations can help to

lead to the image of the thing sought in recollection.[19] This process may also bring about

recollections of many other things and it may be difficult to discern where to locate the

image sought. Albertus notes this challenge:

> [T]he activity of recollection is like an activity that has been interrupted and made
> diverse. It is destroyed or interrupted because it does not reflect on a thing
> unceasingly in the same form, for the reason that it falls into forgetfulness either
> totally or partly. It is made diverse because it results from many forms of similar
> things, antecedents, consequents, places, and various other things which are
> accidental properties of the subject sought through recollection.[20]

Recollection must be approached with reason, and in order to be successful requires skill

in differentiating between images so that the correct images are finally recollected.

Recollective problems create a form of forgetting that is not a problem of memory loss,

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[18] Recollection is defined in Aquinas, "Commentary,"186; Albertus, "Commentary,"142;
Aristotle, *De Memoria*, 453a4, 59. The Latin *Reminiscentia* is most often translated into
English as "recollection," though it is sometimes translated "reminiscence." Unless it is
in a quotation, I will refer to it as recollection.
[19] Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* 451b29. Trans. Richard Sorjabi, in *Aristotle on
Memory*, 55.
[20] Albertus Magnus, "Commentary," 137.

but instead an inability to locate the memory or a finding of the wrong memory; as

Carruthers explains, recollection fails "if the mind's 'eye' cannot see clearly or looks in

the wrong place."[21] Rather than being a problem with the memorial image itself, as *image*

forgetting is, *pathway forgetting* is a problem with finding the pathway to reach the fully

formed image.[22] This can come from an inability to find a starting point because of

neglect or distraction, or from an inability to find the memory because of disorganization

or disorder. This form of forgetting is more common in the two romances studied here,

where the characters frequently experience *pathway forgetting* when memory images are

not lost but are instead not accessed due to factors of neglect, distraction, disorientation,

and disorder brought on by their disguised identities.

When recollection is successful, it is used to inform the present and the future.

Because, as noted above, the images recollected are complete reiterations of the past,

medieval recollection was understood to work differently, as Carruthers explains, from

our modern notion of mimetic memory where "the past is mediated by the present."

Instead, in medieval understandings of recollection "both the present and future, in

human time, are mediated by the past."[23] The reconstructive nature of recollection, then,

is not about recreating the past as modern recollective problems are imagined today, but

is instead about recollecting the correct image and choosing to recollect what is most

useful for guiding the present and future. Carruthers likens recollection to "reading a

book" because it involves "judgment and response (*intentio*) in addition to intellect."[24]

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[21] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 78.
[22] This can be compared to our modern understanding of forgetting caused by commonplace retrieval and accessibility problems.
[23] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 239
[24] Carruthers, *Book of Memory,* 76.

Because recollection involves *using* the most relevant parts of the past in a framework of

the present, when recollection occurs in *Havelok* and *Isumbras*, it is at moments of

forward momentum in the plot. Essentially, it completes transformation.[25] Understanding

recollection as the decision to recall something that is most useful in the present and for

the future also explains another way in which forgetting can manifest: as a kind of

selective forgetting that allows things that do not have a use to remain forgotten.[26] In

contrast to the negative connotations of today's selective memory, medieval selective

forgetting is an exercise of discernment and remembering what is important.

This concept of recollection as a selective process for remembering things that are

important explains why memory was understood to be morally virtuous and why

recollection was considered to be a habit of virtue.[27] Memory is specifically described as

part of the cardinal virtue of Prudence, alongside intelligence and foresight, in both

Cicero's *De Inventione* and in the *Ad Herrenium*.[28] Medieval Christian writers expanded

upon this division of Prudence. In his *De Bono,* Albertus links prudence to recollection:

prudence "uses memory, insofar as it is a function of reminiscence," because it is prudent

to investigate (recollect) things from the past, both the good and the bad, in order to know

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[25] This is similar to the purpose of recollection in moments of confession in Middle
English literature, as Kisha Tracy suggests when she writes that "the process of
recollection [is] a means of initiating transformation." Tracy, *Memory and Confession,*
117.

[26] This is linked to recollective pathway forgetting, but instead of the pathways being
inaccessible or wrongly neglected, they are deliberately not accessed because they are not
relevant.

[27] Albertus Magnus, "*De Bono:* Tractatus IV, Quaestio II, 'De Partibus Prudentiae."
Trans. Mary Carruthers, Appendix B, *The Book of Memory,* 346-347.

[28] Cicero, *De Inventione* II.liii.160, trans. H.M. Hubbell. Loeb Classical Library 386.
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949) 326; *Ad Herennium*, III.ii.3, 163. Both
translators translate the Latin *prudentia* as "wisdom."

if they will be helpful or harmful in the present or future.[29] This understanding of the use of recollection as a virtue is central to understanding how forgetting and recollection occur in *Sir Isumbras*'s penance.

Prudence was also used as a way of linking the rhetorical tradition of the *artificial memory* (memory training) to the Aristotelian concept of recollection.[30] The process of discernment in recollection can be aided by memory training, and by that token, training the memory was a prudent habit. Albertus describes this in his *De Bono*, where he explains that the artificial memory is not to be considered in isolation, but rather as part of the process of the successful use of memory. Albertus explains the artificial memory "made from the orderly arrangement of images and places" is a "perfection of natural talent" that is a useful habit or tool for those seeking to recollect.[31] Moreover, strengthening the natural capacities of memory with the tools of the artificial memory is in itself prudent because the artificial memory's organized structures can aid in the search for "the things-worth-remembering."[32] It is in this context of recollection that I will reference the tools of the artificial memory: places and images can be starting points or pathways, initiating and solidifying the process of recollection. The opposite is also true: places and images that are associated with disguised identities can reinforce forgetting by preventing recollection.

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[29] Albertus, *De Bono* II.1, 346-7.

[30] *Ad Herennium,* III.xvi.28-30, 207-8. Because the rhetorical arts were also arts of composition, scholarship on memory and the composition in romance and related genres generally focuses on the tools of the artificial memory." For example, see Carruthers, "Seeing Things," 93-106.

[31] Albertus, *De Bono,* II, 348, 355-6.

[32] Albertus, *De Bono*. II. Solutio, 6. 354-356.

The training of the artificial memory involves many schemes and techniques for organizing the memory. One of the most relevant to this thesis is the locational memory technique that involved arranging memorial images for retrieval from imagined structures based on human and natural spaces (*loci*), for example, geographical locations or architectural structures.[33] Though romance characters are not deliberately working to train their memories, spaces are often central to the processes of forgetting and recollecting depicted in the texts. Disguise, in both romances, involves becoming uprooted from familiar spaces, which promotes forgetting. Spaces can also influence what characters remember because they recollect the things that are associated with those spaces. As a result, when the disguised character inhabits an alternative space, as Havelok does in Grimsby or Isumbras does in Jerusalem, the space itself helps to direct what is recollected and what is forgotten.[34]

The centrality of the *memory image* in the process of memory formation and the seeking out of memory images in the process of recollection demonstrate the importance of the visual and visualization in the functioning of memory. Thomas Bradwardine justifies his rhetorical method of visualization because: "memory is most powerfully affected by sensory impression, and especially by vision."[35] Similarly, Boncompagno goes so far as to say that everything that visually signifies is "devised for the purpose of supporting the weakness of natural memory," and provides a long list of types of visual

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[33] For detailed interpretations of these schemes for memory training, see Carruthers' *Book of Memory* chapters 1, 3, and 4.

[34] For an examination of how medieval poets used memorial spaces as a guiding principle of composition, see Carruthers, "The Poet as Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 24, no. 4 (1993): 881-904

[35] Thomas Bradwardine, "On Acquiring a Trained Memory," trans. Mary Carruthers, in *The Medieval Craft*, 207. Bradwardine's method for memory training involves creating visually memorable images set in contrasting backgrounds (207).

signs that achieve this.[36] An emphasis on sight helps to explain several things in the

process of disguise, forgetting, and recollecting in the two romances studied in the

following chapters. In romance, signs (sometimes magical) often bring about recognition,

lift the characters' disguises, and prompt recollection, like the bright cross (or *kynmerk*)

that appears on Havelok's skin and reveals his identity or the red cloth that prompts

Isumbras to recollect his family. Vision is also central to the role clothing plays in

keeping characters disguised. For example, despite his almost superhuman physical traits,

Havelok's poor clothing ensures that he is not recognized as a prince. Similarly, despite

demonstrating knightly skill, Isumbras's pilgrim's attire ensures that those around him,

including his wife, see him as a pilgrim. The importance of the visual in memory can also

help to explain how tokens of recognition can become memorial objects (something I

address in my chapter on *Isumbras*) and also how certain images are left forgotten (which

I address in my chapter on *Havelok*).

The medieval concepts of memory, recollection, and forgetting outlined here

provide a useful methodology for rethinking disguise and its connection to memory and

forgetting in the romances examined in the following chapters. Although these concepts

were discussed in depth and debated in monastic and scholastic circles, they present a

specifically medieval understanding of the human experience of memory that is very

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[36] Boncompagno da Signa "On Memory," Trans. Sean Gallagher, in *The Medieval Craft of Memory*, 111. His long list of memorial signs includes several things that appear as memorial cues in romances: "all crosses," "swords of justice," "the various dress and tokens of the religious and the dead," "the insignia of arms," "varieties of colours" "the nods and signals of lovers," and "courteous gifts and small presents" (111).

useful for analyzing romances.[37] The physiological understanding of memory as a

function of the sensory soul and of recollection as a process of investigation helps to

identify the different forms of forgetting that the protagonists experience in these two

romances and illuminate their implications within the narrative. The tools of the artificial

memory demonstrate the importance of familiar and organized spaces and visual cues in

medieval memory, two factors that frequently determine whether these romance

characters forget or recollect. Medieval thought on recollection also illustrates the ways

in which memory images can be selected (or left forgotten) in a way that is considered

useful and even morally good, and is reflected in how these romance heroes recollect

their pasts to form final identities. Because these concepts of memory explain the

processes of the mind and address how individuals both remember and forget in

specifically medieval terms, they provide a model for understanding the crafting of a

sense of interiority in medieval romance characters that, as Jody Enders posits, "avoid[s]

some of the anachronisms of certain contemporary approaches to medieval romance

through psychoanalysis."[38]

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[37] Also addressing the use of medieval memory theory to study romance, McKinstry suggests that the public may have been indirectly aware of concepts of memory, from being "exposed to the faculty itself in church, in human relationships, or in professional life." *Middle English Romance*, 21.

[38] Jody Enders, focusing on courtly love in French romance, makes a case for how rhetorical memory can be a useful critical framework to analyse concepts generally examined by modern psychological theory, "Memory, Allegory, and the Romance of Rhetoric." *Yale French Studies* 95 (1999): 52

Chapter 2: "Weilawei þat euere was I kinges bern": forgetting nobility and the centrality of disguised identity in *Havelok the Dane*

In *Havelok the Dane*, the disguised protagonist undergoes a social transformation that is brought on by several factors that cause forgetting. These processes of forgetting are central to the transformative disguise in *Havelok* because the exiled king's heir forgets who he is while he grows up disguised as a fisherman's son in England.[1] Havelok's disguise is initially worn for protection: when he is exiled, Havelok needs to be disguised because Godard, who has usurped the Danish throne, will kill him if he is identifiable as the dispossessed prince. The protagonist is disguised more than once in the romance, but the disguise I focus on is his life as a fisherman's son, working in the fishing trade and later becoming a cook's apprentice.[2] This disguise is long-lasting and transformative, and involves a complete separation from the protagonist's previous life as a king's heir, which leads to the disguise becoming an alternative identity. In this romance, there is no conscious moment of disguising, but instead there is a moment of

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[1] There is little consensus in *Havelok* scholarship about whether or not the protagonist does forget who he is. For example, G.V. Smithers, arguing that Havelok is well aware of his identity, presents other characters' awareness of Havelok's nobility and his foster family's deferential treatment of Havelok as evidence. K.S. Whetter refutes this argument, suggesting that even if Havelok's foster family is aware of his identity, their awareness does not change the fact that Havelok does forget his identity and is happy to live out a different life. Smithers, Introduction, in *Havelok* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987): xlvi-xlvii; K.S.Whetter, "*Gest* and *Vita*: Folktale and Romance in *Havelok*." *Parergon* 20, no. 2 (2003): 25.

[2] A more performative and episodic disguise appears later in the text, when Havelok returns to Denmark, at this point well aware of his identity, dressed as a Merchant. This disguise coincides with a missing leaf in the manuscript (1445-1625), but the purpose is clearly so that he has the power to reveal his identity when he is prepared to do so. This is the usual type of disguise found in medieval romance, but is not an example of transformative disguise and so is not discussed here.

exile that leads to the protagonist's disguised life. Grim, the fisherman who had been

ordered to kill Havelok, instead escapes to England with his family and with Havelok. He

tells Havelok, "Betere us is of londe to fle/ and berwen boþen ure liues" (697-8).[3] After

this, Havelok becomes integrated into the fisherman's family and is disguised in that

way.

This disguise in *Havelok* has been frequently discussed because it is a rich and

realistic example of a lower status disguise that raises issues about social fluidity and

mobility in romance.[4] The idea that this disguise is a transformation is not new and there

is general agreement in *Havelok* scholarship that the protagonist truly "becomes a lower

class character."[5] Julie Nelson Couch specifically writes, " [Havelok's] experience of

childhood in a fisherman's home seems effectively to transform Havelok's identity from

king's son to fisherman's son."[6] Most discussions of the disguise, however, look outward

and focus on what it means in wide contexts, socially or generically. My discussion, by

contrast, focuses on how this transformation occurs, thereby adding to the critical

discussion an explanation of *why* the disguise is so transformative, a revelation of how

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[3] This quotation and all subsequent quotations from *Havelok* are from the following edition: *Havelok*, ed. G.V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). *Havelok* survives in nearly complete form in only one manuscript (it also appear in fragments in one later one), MS Laud Misc. 108 (*c.* 1300-25). Smithers situates the text's composition between 1295-1310. Introduction, lxiv-lxiii.

[4] G.V. Smithers, Introduction. *Havelok*, lxii In his introduction, Smithers notes that the poem has a "universally acknowledged realism" throughout. Similarly, Crane situates the text in a context where noble and common interests were not mutually exclusive. Crane, *Insular Romance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986): 43-44. The realism of the text has also led to difficulty classifying it as part of the romance genre. For an exploration of generic features, see: K.S. Whetter, "*Gest* and *Vita*."

[5] Roy Michael Liuzza, "Representation and Readership in the Middle English *Havelok*." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93, no. 4, 509.

[6] Julie Nelson Couch. "The Vulnerable Hero: Havelok and the Revision of Romance," *The Chaucer Review* 42, no. 3 (2007): 352n42, 341.

the transformation involves forgetting, and an understanding of how the identity created through transformation is eventually remembered.

First, drawing on medieval ideas about forming and recollecting memorial images, I will outline the processes of forgetting depicted in the text, arguing that the disordered pre-disguise moments of the text initiate a memorial crisis that opens up the space for forgetting and for the consequent formation of Havelok's disguised identity. While exploring the formation of this disguised identity, I will chart the role of the memorial space of Grimsby in solidifying the disguised identity and making it so persistent that miraculous events are required to bring about recognition that lifts the protagonist's disguise and prompt his subsequent recollection of his nobility. Finally, I will demonstrate how even when Havelok's true identity is eventually remembered, his disguised life ends up being carried through and recollected as part of a final transformed kingly identity.

Forgetting Nobility Stage 1: factors that lay the memorial groundwork for forgetting in disguise

The processes that inform Havelok's transformative disguise and promote forgetting originate in the events leading up to his exile and subsequent disguise. Though disguises like Havelok's that are worn to preserve life are not uncommon in romance, other exiled heirs such as the heroes of *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton* remain well aware of who they are. This difference can be explained by two factors that challenge the creation of memorial images and set Havelok up for both forgetting and transformation: age and fear. The physiology of the memory image is central to understanding how

memorial factors influence the formation and use of Havelok's disguised identity,

especially in informing how he forgets his past while disguised and how he opens up the

space for forming a new identity. In modern thought on memory and forgetting,

emotional disturbance, health, and age are considered factors that have the potential to

challenge memory and in the Middle Ages, too, although there was a different language

for it, these factors were very much considered in the physiology of the memory image.[7]

A memory image is required for remembering to take place: it "completes the action of

remembering" and also begins the process of recollection.[8] Memory images are gateways

to remembering, but they are also susceptible to personal failure because they can be

poorly impressed or difficult to access due to many possible circumstances. Forgetting,

both of the image and of the pathway, can result from such circumstances.

  In medieval thought, disruptions to the memorial image were generally attributed

to fluctuations in the humours, the medical system widely accepted in the Middle Ages

that was considered the basis for human health and personality. The doctrine of the

humours was a classical tradition originated by Hippocrates of Cos (*c.*469-399 BCE),

then later revised by Galen (129-199 CE). The four humours are: blood, phlegm, black

bile, and yellow bile. Each of the humours was also associated with a distinctive

temperament: sanguine (blood), phlegmatic (phlegm), choleric (yellow bile), and

melancholic (black bile). A dominant humour was thought to guide individual

temperament, but a balance of all four was required to be healthy. As a result, unbalanced

humours were believed to be the cause of all illness. In the Galenic tradition, physical

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[7] For a summary and analysis of these factors in modern thought on memory, see the sections on repression, childhood memory, and memory and ageing in Baddeley, *Essentials of Human Memory*.

[8] Albertus "Commentary," 135, 140.

qualities were attributed to each of the humours: "Blood is hot and moist, yellow bile hot and dry, black bile cold and dry, and phlegm cold and moist."[9]

Imbalances of the humours are central to understanding problems with the creation of memorial images. Of the hot and moist, Albertus writes: "The hot stirs and upsets mental images; and the moist, especially when stirred by continuous heat, does not retain well."[10] One group dominated by hot and moist humours is young children because they are in the process of growing.[11] Excessive moistness and fluidity in the humours can be likened to trying to impress a seal on water: "the figure would disappear immediately because of the flow."[12] The opposite, the very dry, was also considered to be a challenge to memory formation because the image cannot be impressed. For this, a comparison is made to cement that cannot be changed after it has fully hardened.[13] Hardness, Aquinas notes, can be caused by the freezing of the humours, which is something that occurs "in those who are in great fear."[14] It is those two factors, very young age and fear, that converge in the opening of *Havelok* and create a memorial crisis that leads to the formation of his disguised identity.

Havelok is imprisoned at "þre winter hold," a very young age that prevents memorial images from forming properly (417). As a result, it is not surprising that Havelok forgets his identity, unlike the heroes of *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton* who at the time of their exiles are fifteen and seven respectively (*Horn,* 18; *Bevis*; 54). This

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[9] Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, 95-96.
[10] Albertus, "Commentary," 133; See also Aristotle's *De Memoria* 450a32, 50.
[11] Albertus, "Commentary," 133.
[12] Aquinas, "Commentary," 166. This is in Aristotle's text, *De Memoria* 450a32, 50; Albertus also includes this comparison 2.4, 132.
[13] Aristotle, *De Memoria*, 450a32; reiterated in Aquinas's commentary, 166.
[14] Aquinas, "Commentary," 166.

difference can be explained by the fact that in late medieval culture, "prior to the age of seven (*infantia*), children were not considered fully rational or responsible."[15] Havelok's state of infancy is emphasized when his father Birkabeyn, shortly before his death, needs to choose which of his knights will take care of his children:

> For þorw hem wolde wite
> Hwo michte yeme his childre*n* yunge
> Til þat he kouþen speke*n* wit tu*n*ge,
> Speke*n* and gangen on horse riden,
> Knictes and sweynes bi here side*n*. (367- 371)

This passage suggests that Havelok and his sisters are pre-speech; they cannot yet "speken wit tunge," and they have received no formal education. The poem thus depicts an instance of image forgetting, the absence of a properly impressed memorial image, occurring because of youth. While the romance eventually shows Havelok remembering images from his imprisonment by Godard, he never directly remembers the attributes of Birkabeyn, and when Havelok eventually recollects his noble identity, he simply mentions that he knows his father was a "king of Densche lond" and does not mention his father's name or reference his actions or reputation (1404-1406).[16] The vagueness surrounding Birkabeyn becomes especially pertinent in the foundation of Havelok's disguised identity. Havelok's forgetting of his true father can help to explain how Grim the fisherman becomes the central father figure to be remembered and memorialized in the text. Moreover, when Havelok's disguise is lifted and he recollects his pre-disguised

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[15] Daniel T. Kline, "That child may doon to fadres reverence': Children and Childhood in Middle English Literature," in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, edited by Adrienne E Gavin, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012: 22.

[16] Birkabeyn's reputation and his resemblance to Havelok are mentioned later in the text, but they are noticed and mentioned by Ubbe, a Danish nobleman who presumably remembers Birkabeyn's rule (2148-50, 2210).

past, his most specific recollections are primarily about Godard's violence and injustice, which occurred after his father's death. This suggests that it was not until the period of imprisonment that Havelok was old enough to form memorial images.

Although he is still very young when he is imprisoned following his father's death, Havelok demonstrates an ability to speak clearly and attempts to reason with Godard. He clearly expresses what he and his sisters need:

> 'For us hu*n*greth swiþe sore' –
> Seyden he [he] wolden more:
> We ne haue to hete, ne we ne haue
> Her-inne neyþer knith ne knaue
> Þat yeveth us drinke*n* ne no mete. (455-459)

This sudden ability to speak implies that Havelok undergoes some form of development while imprisoned and is now able to speak clearly and express his needs for warmth, food, and drink. He can even acknowledge his social position as a king's heir: a "knith" or "knaue" should be giving him these things. Although the protagonist is still three, which was not yet the age considered the beginning of reasoning, his age does coincide with a transition within the *infantia* stage of life when children were weaned and became more independent.[17] In terms of memory, this independence can change things because memories of those "who are going about the world for the first time" are more secure.[18] In addition, Albertus writes that the young, though they do not impress memorial images well due to "excessively fluid moistness," do retain memorial images when they "are planted deep within [them] because of marveling or great emotion of sorrow or joy."[19] While Havelok's youth is an impediment to the creation of memory images and does

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[17] Kline, "That child," 22; Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): 66.
[18] Aquinas, "Commentary," 166.
[19] Albertus, "Commentary," 152.

seem to make him permanently forget details about his real father, his transition to an independent and verbal, more rational state provides some potential to create new images as he finds himself in a situation where he experiences sharp emotions of sorrow and confusion due to hunger and cold and can describe those experiences verbally.

Despite Havelok now having the potential to form memorial images, there are other factors at play that suggest that the memorial impressions are being made with some instability due to the fear and confusion dominating his imprisonment and final days in Denmark. In medieval thought on memory, it was generally understood that frightening and confusing events were problematic for remembering, both in the formation of memorial images and in the later accessing of those memorial images. As mentioned earlier, this is because of fear's freezing effect on the humours, which means that "nothing can be impressed."[20] Treatises on the art of memory also reflect the disruptive potential of confusion: the artificial memory is meticulously ordered and structured because, as Hugh of St Victor writes: "Confusion is the mother of ignorance and forgetfulness."[21] During his last undisguised days in Denmark, Havelok's life is dominated by fear and confusion. The imprisonment itself comes with no explanation for the children; they are simply detained in the castle where they "greten ofte sore/ Boþe for hunger and for kold" (415-6). The text does not make it clear for how long they are kept in the tower, but it is enough time for Godard to take control of the land and "Al þe folk tilled intil his hond" (438). All the children know is that time passes and that they are hungry and cold until Godard returns and they "aren ney ded" (464). The unknown

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[20] Aquinas, "Commentary," 166.
[21] Hugh of St Victor, "The Three Best Memory Aids for Learning History," trans. Mary Carruthers, in *The Medieval Craft*, 33.

passage of time creates confusion, and the starvation creates a fear of death.

Boncompagno includes "fasting beyond necessity" in a list of memorial impediments

because the weakening of the body's natural capacities weakens its ability to retain

memorial images.[22] Though Havelok also goes days without eating during a famine later

in the text, it is not expressed as severely. In Lincoln, he is "fastinde," while in Denmark,

he "hungreth" (866, 455). The MED defines "to fasten" as "to go without food for

various reasons" (2a), while it defines "to hunger" as "to suffer from hunger" (1a).

Though in both situations Havelok is without food involuntarily, the first time denotes

more suffering. The severity in this case causes a greater memorial challenge.

      Fear of death in this moment arises not only from starvation and cold, but also

from the more immediate fear of Godard's violence. The nature of Godard's extreme

cruelty creates an environment of both fear and misery, two more of Boncompagno's list

of impediments.[23] Havelok witnesses Godard cutting his sister's throats and mutilating

their bodies and is faced with the possibility that he will meet a similar end. The

following passage demonstrates the shocking imagery of the scene and explicitly affirms

that Havelok sees it all:

> Of boþen he karf on two here þrotes,
> And sitþen he*m* al to grotes.
> Þer was sorwe, wo-so it sawe,
> Hwan þe children bi þ[e] wawe
> Leyen and spraulede*n* in þe blod!
> Havelok it saw and þe[m] bi-stod –
> Ful sori was þat seli knaue. (471-7)

The memorial image of this violence later becomes a starting point when Havelok

ultimately recollects his true identity, so it seems that this image is the type of image that

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[22] Boncompagno, "On Memory," 108.
[23] Boncompagno, "On Memory," 108.

is "planted deep within" the young due to "great emotion or sorrow."[24] In this moment,

however, confusion and fear also disrupt the organization of the memory so that,

although the impression is made, the pathway is disrupted and the memory is not able to

be accessed until much later. In this scene, Havelok is a witness to violence more visually

descriptive than is normally seen done to children in romance, and it prompts him to

consider an alternative identity where he would be safe.[25] The disorientation brought on

by Godard's violence ultimately drives the young protagonist to imagine an alternative

life where he is not a king's son, a life that prefigures the life he actually ends up living in

his disguised identity. Out of "mikel dred" for his own life, Havelok begs Godard to

spare him (478) and offers to pay homage to his captor and leave him "al Denemark" in

exchange for his life. As part of his plea for mercy, Havelok even offers to become

someone else:

> Today I wile fro Denemark fle,
> Ne neueremore comen ageyn:
> Sweren Y wole þat Bircabein
> Neuere yete me ne gat. (492-5)

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[24] Albertus, "Commentary," 152.

[25] This level of graphic violence does not appear in either of the romance's two Anglo-Norman antecedents, a section of Gaimar's chronicle, *Estoire des Engles* (1135-40), and an anonymous text based on Gaimar's account, *Lai d'Aveloc le Danois* (*c.* 1190-1220). In the *Lai*, he has no sisters and he and his mother escape. During their journey, outlaws attack and Grim rescues him (93-120). This reference and all subsequent references from both Anglo-Norman Sources are from the following edition: *Lestorie Des Engles Solum la Translacion Maistre Geffrei Gaimar*, Eds. Thomas Duffus Hardy and Charles Trice Martin. (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1888; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Couch also considers how unusual this graphic violence inflicted on children is for romance when she argues that childhood vulnerability in *Havelok* revises conventions of romance. She argues that the realism of Godard's "diabolical child abuse" becomes the "dragon of romance remade into the physical suffering of children." Couch, "The Vulnerable Hero," 336.

Although this can be read as Havelok doing anything possible to survive, read in the context of his later disguise where he *does* become someone else's son, it can also be read as wishful thinking: he does not want to be the son of a king after all of this. Earlier, he says more generally, "Wo is us þat we were born!" (461). Now he says "Sweren Y wole that Bircabein/ Neuere yete me ne gat" (494-495). Again, shortly before he is revealed to Grim, he says something very similar: "Weilawei / þat euere was I kinges bern" (571-2). Here, we see a transformation from wishing not to have been born at all to wishing to be someone else. This wishful thinking becomes a reality when Havelok is disguised. In this moment of fear and violence as a child, it is this imagined identity, one not associated with fear and confusion, that becomes the image he impresses and remembers, and it is the memory of this image that allows his subsequent disguise to become transformative later in the text.

The depiction of mental confusion does not end when Godard assigns Grim the task of drowning the child. First, Havelok is subjected to extreme physical violence at the hands of Grim and Leve. Grim binds and gags him in so that he is in "ful strong pine" and Leve "caste[s] the knave so hard adoun/ Þat he crakede [þer] his crowne" (540, 568-569). Grim's initial violence is unique to the Middle English text, and is never recollected later in the text.[26] When recollecting what happens, Havelok only mentions that Grim was ordered to drown him, not that he almost did so willingly (1369, 1417). This is, as

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[26] Grim's violence is often viewed as an inconsistency in the romance and Grim's change of heart on recognizing Havelok has been used as an argument for the text's aristocratic interests. Maldwyn Mills reads Grim's violence as an iteration of a "brutal fisherman" folktale character in the Germanic tradition. "Havelok and the Brutal Fisherman," *Medium Aevum* 36, no. 3 (1967). Ken Eckert also provides a convincing reading of this inconsistency, suggesting that Havelok has a redemptive presence and that the change in Grim is a direct reflection of this. "The Redemptive Hero and 'Inconsistencies' in *Havelok the Dane*," *Philological Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (2015): 229-231.

Maldwyn Mills interprets it, a kind of selective forgetting because "it serves no purpose to recall [Grim's] less engaging characteristics."[27] It is the version of Grim who participates in the disguised identity and not the version of Grim who enacts violence on Havelok that is remembered and ultimately memorialized by the protagonist. The memory of Grim's violence is not only potentially poorly impressed due to the circumstances of the protagonist's youth and the confusion and violence he endures, but there is also no constructive use in seeking to recollect this memory because it would neiter serve the protagonist in the present nor in his future.

Forgetting Nobility Stage 2: Grimsby as a space of containment for a disguised life

Grim becomes benevolent when Havelok's identity is revealed by the *kynmerk,* a red-gold cross that appears on his shoulder to signify, along with light emerging from his mouth, that he is the king's heir. This revelation prompts Grim to disobey his orders to drown the boy and instead he and his family escape with Havelok to safety in England. This moment of revelation is dominated by a dissonance between the clear indication of Havelok's nobility (the kynmerk) and Havelok's own very practical concerns, a dissonance that persists while protagonist is disguised. Once his identity is revealed to Grim, Havelok informs him that he is "ney ded,/ Hwat for hunger, wat for bondes" (635-6). Upon realizing that the boy is a king's son, Grim initially has the intention of raising Havelok within his noble identity, promising that he will feed him until he "cone ride*n* on stede" and "ful wel bere / helm on heued, sheld and spere" (623-5). This kind of training never does happen while Havelok is in Grim's care in England because of similar

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[27] Maldwyn Mills, "Brutal Fisherman," 220.

practical concerns for being fed. In addition, this does not happen because it is not what

Havelok asks of Grim; when Havelok is living his disguised life he again only asks for

food and comfort.

In exile, Havelok leaves the space where he was an heir and, with his adoptive

family, inhabits a new space isolated from social hierarchies. Grimsby is a contained

space for the disguised protagonist, and also a space that carries memorial weight and is

revisited at pivotal moments later in the text.[28] Grimsby becomes a space where not only

is Havelok disguised, but so too are the memorial images he creates, effectively

transforming him into his disguise. Grim founds what later becomes the town of Grimsby

by making a "litel cote" where they are "herborwed" (735, 743).[29] For several years,

Havelok is safe in this home, and as a result he forgets his former identity and creates

memorial images in connection to his new one. Together, these things make Grimsby a

place of shelter, a place of work, and a complete "departure from the world of

sovereignty."[30] In Grimsby, Havelok receives the education not of a prince, but of a

fisherman, and he uncomplainingly embraces the habit of labour that comes with this

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[28] I have borrowed the term "containment" from a modern psychoanalytical concept developed by W.R. Bion that refers to organizing emotional spaces to contain "oneself and one's experience (even traumatic ones)." Aida Alayarian, *Trauma, Torture, and Dissociation: A Psychoanalytic View* (London: Karnac, 2011): xix. Because this concept imagines the organization of the mind and memories into separate spaces, this modern concept provides an interesting parallel to the spaces of the medieval artificial memory. Though neither a direct representation of modern psychology's containment nor of the medieval artificial memory, Grimsby's role in this text highlights this parallel concerning a spatial conception of the mind: spaces, both physical and imagined can determine what experiences are remembered, and what ones are forgotten.
[29] The MED defines "herborwed" as "of a house, city, etc" (3a)
[30] Aaron Hostetter, "Food, Sovereignty, and Social Order in *Havelok the Dane*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 100, no. 1 (2011): 64.

identity as he grows up. This is a form of *pathway forgetting* where new memories are incompatible with the old ones.

In his formative years when he normally would have received his princely education, Havelok learns completely different things. Kline explains that generally, the time between age seven and fourteen "saw the development of personal awareness and social accountability."[31] In Havelok's case, this time is mostly spent in Grimsby where there is little contact with the outside world. This separation at this time of life has a major impact on the formation of memories. On the nature of how boyhood education is well retained, despite the memorial challenges faced by the very young, Aquinas explains the following:

> …the things which one receives in boyhood are firmly held in memory because of the vigor of its movement, just as it happens that things about which we wonder are imprinted more in memory. We wonder, especially, however at the new and unusual: hence, a greater wondering about things, as if they are unusual, affects the young who are going about the world for the first time; for this reason, they remember securely.[32]

Havelok's infancy was a hindrance for the creation of memorial images because of a combination of his young age and the conditions of his imprisonment. Now, in the safety of Grimsby, Havelok is "going about the world for the first time" and is able to begin his education and learn things that are "new and unusual." This cottage and the life with Grim's family is, until famine hits, a positive experience for the protagonist because he lives without the fear and confusion that dominated his early life in Denmark. Havelok's education is, however, not the princely one Birkabeyn wanted for him, with "Knictes an sweynes bi here siden," or the preparation to "ful wel bere / helm on heued, sheld and

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[31] Kline, "That Child," 22-23.
[32] Aquinas, "Commentary," 166-7.

spere" to which Grim had alluded previously (371, 624-5). Instead, Havelok's education is in the fishing trade. Grim's desire to prepare Havelok for a princely education seems to be completely forgotten in the Middle English text.

In contrast, in the Anglo-Norman *Lai D'Haveloc*, Grim eventually sends Havelok to Lincoln to establish himself in a king's court: "En la curt a un riche roi / Te met, beau fiz" (place yourself, dear son, in the court of a rich king) (176-7). Meanwhile, in the corresponding moment in the Middle English text, Grim simply tells Havelok that he can no longer feed him and if he goes to Lincoln he will be able to "[his] mete winne," and provides no instruction that betrays any interest in Havelok regaining his nobility (853). In addition, in the Anglo-Norman versions, Grim himself is a "un baron de la contree" (a baron from the region) disguised as a fisherman, as opposed to being a real fisherman and "thral" as is the Middle English Grim (*Lai* 57, *Havelok* 527). This means that not only does the character in the Anglo-Norman texts show an interest in reconnecting Havelok with his nobility, he also has firsthand knowledge of how to do so. The type of situation, although it contrasts the Middle English *Havelok*, does appear in other Middle English contexts. For example, the young exiled prince in *William of Palerne* is raised by a cowherd, who gives him advice, learned from his "kourteour" father about how to act "in faire manere" for his "state" (339-342). This creates an exiled hero who, although he does not know who his father is precisely, becomes aware of his nobility and is reconnected with court society long before he becomes aware of his true identity. In the Middle English *Havelok*, however, the separation between noble identity and disguised identity is more distinct, and as a result, allows for more complete forgetting.

The Middle English Havelok's education is entirely cut off from his nobility. For the first years of his exile, Havelok witnesses the "economic potential of Grim's skill and knowledge."[33] Grim's skill is outlined in what has been termed a "catalogue of fish"; he is a "fishere swiþe good," who is able to catch and sell a variety of types of fish, and ultimately use the money to feed his family (750-776).[34] Grim also demonstrates the value of hard work, as it is this work that is, as Liuzza notes, the "object of his prosperity."[35] Grim's position as an authority as a fisherman is significant when compared to the Anglo-Norman Grim, who is a baron simply disguised as a fisherman (*Lai* 57). Since Havelok is the only one truly disguised in the Middle English version, his disguised life as a fisherman's son is more genuine. As John Halverson argues, "Havelok, himself, [is] utterly a peasant in every way, who is secretly a king. And in his rise, there ensues a train of transformations completely alien to the French Story."[36] Havelok's experience in the Grimsby cottage is of being well fed because of Grim's work as a fisherman, and as a result this creates an environment to remember securely.

At twelve years old (nine years after arriving in Grimsby), Havelok notices that while Grim is working hard, he himself is staying at home. He expresses his desire to help provide for his family:

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[33] Hostetter, "Food, Sovereignty," 62.

[34] Liuzza discusses the catalogue of fish, arguing that it is "part of a system of exchange in which money rather than chivalric honor is the source of value." Liuzza, "Representation," 510.

[35] Liuzza, "Representation," 510.

[36] Halverson, "Havelok the Dane and Society." *The Chaucer Review* 6, no. 3 (1971): 149. Halverson's argument that the tale is a kind of "peasant fantasy" for a lower class audience has been widely refuted by more recent critics due to the text's ultimately aristocratic interests (See Crane, *Insular Romance*, 43). This statement, however, is still useful because the portrayal of Havelok as truly inhabiting this world does certainly transform him, and is uncommon in romance.

> …Ich am nou no grom!
> Ich am wel waxen, and wel may eten
> more þan euer Grim may geten.
> Jch ete more, bi God on liue,
> Þan Grim an hise children fiue!
> Jt ne may nouth ben thus lo*n*ge.
> Goddot, Y wile with þe[m] gange
> For to leren su*m* god to gete.
> Swinken Ich wolde for mi mete –
> Jt is no shame forto swinken!
> Þe ma*n* þat may wel ete*n* and dri*nke*n
> Þat nouth ne haue but on swi*n*k long –
> To ligge*n* at hom it is ful strong. (791-803)

This is the first time the reader hears directly from Havelok since he begged Grim for food prior to leaving Denmark. At this point, he self-identifies as no longer being an infant and is glad to help his family by learning their trade and working for his food. Not only is he showing a desire to help to feed himself, but he is also demonstrating a sense of duty to his foster family, believing that it would be "ful strong" (reprehensible) not to help.[37] While learning Grim's trade, Havelok forms new memorial images of fish "giueled als a stac" and of the silver he brings home from the market each day (815, 821). He also learns that this work, and the money obtained from it, prevents his huge appetite from burdening his adoptive family. This depiction of the protagonist's self-awareness and active involvement in the working life of his disguised identity is unique to the Middle English version of the text. In Gaimar's chronicle, description of his time in Grimsby is only received second-hand during the revelation scene where Grim's daughter re-describes how Grim provided for Havelok (431-468). Similarly, in the *Lai,* actions are only ever done to, not by, the protagonist; for example, Grim, "son seignur nurrit" (fed his lord. i.e. Havelok) and his wife, "bien le seruit" (served Havelok well) (143-4).

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[37] Smithers glosses "strong" in this context as "reprehensible" (212).

Because the Middle English Havelok is so active in learning the trade and participating in

his foster family's life, he has the opportunity to create new memorial images that

correspond with his physical disguise. His royal status is incompatible with this life and

is, as a result, forgotten.

These experiences are all new and unusual to Havelok when he first learns them,

but when they are repeated daily, his life becomes organized and secure. Havelok is

unwittingly following a pattern that is conducive to retaining memorial images. While

change is conducive to impressing memorial images, habit is vital for recollecting them.[38]

Boncompagno lists "habit" and "contemplation" as things that strengthen memory.[39]

Thomas Aquinas similarly explains: "We are inclined to recollect by habit" and that

"habit is like nature in a way: as in nature there is a certain order in which something

comes into existence after something else."[40] Recollecting memorial images fails when

something "irregular and unintended occur[s]" that destabilizes the habit.[41] By contrast,

Grimsby, for most of the time Havelok is there, is a stable and recollection-stabilizing

location.

Grimsby remains stable for approximately nine years, which is long enough for

Havelok to establish his disguised identity. In scholarship on the text, there is a tendency

to focus on forgetting as a result of work, drawing on the end of this time period when

Grimsby's stability is disrupted by famine and Havelok must work in Lincoln. For

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[38] Habit in this context is similar to the modern meaning of the word as a repetitive routine but it also means disposition to being arranged. In Arisotle habit (*habitus)* is a "portion of [such] a disposition" where "excellence of parts" becomes a "habit of the whole thing." Aristotle. *Metaphysics* 5.18.20.1022b, Translated by W. D. Ross in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001) 771-772.
[39] Boncompagno, "On Memory" 109.
[40] Aquinas, "Commentary," 181
[41] Aquinas, "Commentary," 181

example, Hostetter suggests that Havelok's "humble disguise," involves a "day-to-day existence…dominated by the need to work" so much so that he "estranges himself utterly from his innate sovereignty."[42] The need to work, however, is only part of why Havelok forgets his noble identity and inhabits this disguised one. Early on, it is Grim who needs to work to provide for the family, while Havelok does not work himself until several years have passed. In this time his position is that of a passive witness to Grim's successful work providing him with an ordered and secure life in Grimsby. Because of the lack of disruption, the nine years leading up to Havelok's decision to start fishing cover only 55 lines of text (735-790). The order and stability of this time, however, is central to developing the disguised identity to a point where, when Havelok does have to leave, this disguised identity is his remembered identity. The stability and length of Havelok's time in Grimsby create a sense of memorial order in the disguised identity that distances him from the memory of his true past.

Work does play a role in making Havelok exist more fully in his disguise and forget his noble origins, but its role is secondary to the stability that precedes the work. It is not clear how much time passes between when Havelok starts fishing and when the famine hits, but some time does pass because he has time to get into a daily routine (812-825). From this time, until he is forced into marriage, Havelok's life is very much dominated by work. When he learns to fish, Havelok goes out daily so that "he neuere at home lay" (823-4). This continues when he goes to Lincoln; he works so hard that "wold

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[42] Hostetter, "Food, Sovereignty, 64-65. Also along these lines, Gary Lim suggests that Grim's influence and the preoccupation with work and survival creates a "phase of life where he is unable to remember that he is a king's son."[42] Gary Lim, "In the Name of the (Dead) Father: Reading Fathers and Sons in *Havelok the Dane, King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton," Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 110, no. 1 (2008): 41.

he neuere haue*n* rest" (944). Here, "overwork," one of Boncompagno's listed

impediments to memory, serves as a distraction that prevents the access to memorial

images.[43] As Albertus writes, "meditation make[s] memory healthy," and working with

no rest provides little chance to meditate or access memories.[44] Even without work,

however, in the nine previous years the foundation has been set for a disguised identity,

and the work is a product of living out that existence.

Although Havelok needs to leave Grimsby when famine hits, his later return to

the town reinforces it as a place of refuge. After living in Lincoln as a cook's apprentice,

Havelok is forced by the English usurper, Godrich, to marry Goldboru, the dispossessed

princess of England.[45] This prompts Havelok to flee again to the safety of Grimsby. The

sequence of events involving this flight occur immediately before miraculous recognition

demonstrates the depth of Havelok's disguise and the importance of Grimsby as a space

essential to it. Not wanting to bring "wike blame" to his wife, Havelok decides that he

"sholden þenne fle/ Til Grim, and til hise sones þre" (1193, 1196-7). On his arrival he

finds out that Grim and Leve are dead, but that their sons and daughters are thriving, they

have "alle gode" things (1222). The space becomes, as it did many years before, a space

of safety and order where he is well fed (they "ne wanted þere no god mete," 1244) he is

offered shelter ("wel is hus we sen þe on lyue," 1218) and he is emotionally secure (the

return makes him "glade and bliþe," 1246).

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[43] Boncompagno, "On Memory," 81

[44] Albertus, "Commentary," 136.

[45] The romance begins with parallel stories: the story of Goldboru, heir to the English throne and how Godrich imprisons her, and the story of Havelok, heir to the Danish throne and how Godard imprisons him.

Havelok's return to Grimsby allows the disguised identity to persist and

reinforces forgetting brought on by the disguise. McKinstry notes a general trend in

romance where journeys towards, and returns to, remembered ritual spaces bring about a

sense of safety and often prompt recollections.[46] Though Grimsby is a space of safety, its

safety is connected to the disguised identity and it therefore provides an opportunity for

Havelok to remain there and avoid any recollection of his identity as a Danish prince. It

also becomes a kind of transitional space, where Havelok takes up a position like that of a

lord, but still does not recollect his identity as a Danish heir. When Havelok and

Goldboru arrive in Grimsby, there is a brief episode often considered to be an

inconsistency in the text: Grim's sons greet Havelok as their lord, kneeling to him and

offering him everything they own, saying that "þou shalt ben louerd / þou shalt ben syre,"

and Havelok readily accepts this offer (1230).[47] It seems in this moment that Grim's sons

are aware of Havelok's nobility, but they also state that they do this because it was what

their father, Grim, told them to do: "Gold, and siluer and oþer fe / Bad [Grim] us bitaken

þe" (1226-7). In addition, their reaction is also a reaction to Goldboru's presence because

their offer of service is to both of them: "we sholen seuren þe and hire" (1231).

Effectively, Grim's sons, despite treating Havelok like a nobleman, promote the

continuation of his forgetting because they provide him with an opportunity to remain

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[46] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance,* 69

[47] The inconsistency in this episode is widely discussed, but there is little consensus in
scholarship on its significance. Smithers, suggesting that Havelok is aware of his identity
before it is revealed, argues that the inconsistency is that Havelok fails to tell Goldboru
who he is. Whetter argues the opposite: Havelok is unaware of his identity, and therefore
Grim's sons treating Havelok as a lord and his ready acceptance of this treatment, is the
inconsistency. Smithers, Introduction, xlvi; Whetter, "Gest and Vita," 25.

indefinitely in Grimsby as a lord only over their household.[48] Havelok, in accepting this offer, comes no closer to remembering his identity as the overlord of the entire realm of Denmark.

Havelok and Goldboru's intention when they return to Grimsby in the Middle English text is quite different from what happens in the Anglo-Norman analogues. In both Gaimar's *Estorie* and the *Lai* the return to Grimsby occurs after Argentille (Goldboru) has a prophetic dream. In the *Lai,* Argentille has a hermit interpret her dream as meaning that Havelok was of royal birth, "Il serra roi et tu reyne" (he will be king and you queen) (524). They decide to return to Grimsby to see if they can receive information about his birth from Grim's family (Gaimar 305-309, *Lai* 521-531). In addition, in both Anglo-Norman versions, Grim's daughter tells the story of Havelok's ancestry as soon as they arrive (Gaimar 345, *Lai* 583). Conversely, in the Middle English text, the return to Grimsby comes with no expectation of some revelation of a noble birth. Instead, Grim's family is content to welcome Havelok back to the town, and he is "glade and bliþe" to accept their offer (1246). In contrast, Goldeboru is still "sory and sorwful" for being married below her rank (1248). To rectify this marital discord created by Havelok's forgetting, recognition needs to happen miraculously in order for the plot to move forward and recollection to occur.

The persistence of disguise and forgetting and the need for miraculous recognition

A miraculous recognition scene occurs the night after Havelok and Goldboru arrive in Grimsby and becomes a starting point for recollection, which in turn prompts

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[48] There is actually no indication that anyone but Grim's family resides in Grimsby. Grimsby's absence of other people is also noted by Hostetter, "Food, Sovereignty," 63.

Havelok to reclaim his position in Denmark. This recognition scene is, even considering

the fantastic elements of romance, excessive: it involves a prophetic dream dreamed by

Havelok that shows him possessing "Al þat in Denemark liueden" and "Engelond --/ Al

closed intil [his] hand" (1300, 1311), a glowing k*ynmerk* and light emanating from his

sleeping body (1263-5), and an angel appearing "uth of heuene" that tells Goldboru that

Havelok will be "king strong and stark / Of Engelond and Denemark" (1277, 1272-3).

The meaning of these events is so abundantly clear to the audience (and to Goldboru),

that Havelok's question of "hwat may this be?" is almost comical (1312). Before

examining how this scene prompts recollection, I will address the question of why

Havelok's identity needs to be revealed in such an astonishing way.

 In many earlier moments of the text, Havelok's nobility also asserts itself, but it

is not sufficient to challenge his disguise. For example while Havelok is working as a

cook's apprentice in Lincoln and the cook provides Havelok with clothing, Havelok is

likened to a king:

> Jt was neuere ma*n* þat yemede
> Jn kinneriche þat so wel semede
> King or cayser for to be,
> Þan he was shrid, so samede he. (976-979)

This idea that even disguised nobility is recognizable by characteristics of physical beauty

or by physical stature or strength is not uncommon in romance situations involving

disguised noblemen. In other situations, however, it becomes part of what reveals the

character. For example, in *William of Palerne,* the Roman emperor sees the young

William in the forest and is impelled to inquire about his heritage and eventually to take

him to court, certain of the foundling's noble birth because of his visible "curteys

countenance" and "fairenes" (230-1). Similarly, later in *Havelok*, when the protagonist

returns to Denmark in a performative disguise as a merchant, their host Ubbe suspects

that Havelok is not who he says he is. Looking at Havelok's stature, Ubbe says, "Qui ne

were he knith" (1651). In Lincoln, however, Havelok's disguise is so successful that even

his resemblance to nobility does not reveal him. The disguise is so convincing despite

Havelok's appearance that Godrich's confidence in Havelok's disguise as "sum cherles

sone" prompts Godrich to use him as a tool in his plan to ensure Goldboru has no claim

to England (1093). Ironically, it is specifically Havelok's physical markers of nobility

that prompt Godrich to use him in this way. The news of Havelok's success in a stone-

putting contest, "hw he was fayr" and "hw he was strong" travels "þoruth England" and

reaches Godrich (1065-7). Godrich, uses the disguised Havelok's strength and fairness as

a way to deceptively keep his oath to Athelwold (Goldboru's father) that he will find

Goldboru "þe beste, þe fairest and [and] þe stra*n*gest" man to marry (1082).[49] Ultimately,

the persistence of visual markers of Havelok's nobility does reconnect him to nobility

through marriage, but it is only because Godrich believes his disguise. Because Havelok

is so convinced of his own disguise, the reconnection to nobility only prompts him to

return to Grimsby and continue to live out his disguised identity, making it necessary for

his nobility to assert itself forcefully and cause him to recollect his heritage.

  The recognition scene plays out in the following way: First, Goldboru sees the

light emanate from Havelok's mouth and the kynmerk, "a noble croiz" of red gold,

appears on the sleeping Havelok (1257-1264). After Goldboru sees this, an angel appears

and informs her of the meaning of the mark, that Havelok is a "kinges sone and kinges

eyr," and of Havelok's future role as king of "Engelond and Denmark" (1273). This

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[49] "strangest" is defined in the MED as "having physical strength" (1a).

knowledge allows Goldboru to interpret the second part of the miraculous recognition

scene, two consecutive dreams that appear to Havelok. In the first dream, Havelok sees

himself on a hill in Denmark, growing long enough arms to posess "Al þat euere in

Denemark liueden" (1295-1300). In the second, he sees himself similarly possessing

England (1307). The dream's prophetic function is easily interpreted as meaning that

Havelok will be the ruler of both realms, especially when Goldeboru is aided in her

interpretation by the angel. Havelok's dreams thus end up serving both a prophetic

function, presenting an image of Havelok's future, and a memorial function, because

these dream images, when recollected, serve as a starting point for the protagonist's

recollection of his past in Denmark.

Because of the presence of the angel and cross-shaped *kynmerk,* these dreams are

very clearly divinely inspired, reflecting a general belief in the Middle Ages that dreams

"could be divinely inspired and tell the future."[50] The mental processes of dreaming,

especially in Aristotelian thought, were very closely connected to memorial processes:

the dream image and the memory image are both types of *phantasma,* but the dream

images differ because they are created by indirect sense perceptions that "arise

spontaneously" through the imagination.[51] Dream images can become memory images

when the dreamer awakens, remembers the dream and "place[s] [it] into mnemonic

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[50] Steven F. Kruger. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 7. Kruger points out that not all dreams were thought to be prophetic, some were thought to be demonic deceptions, and some were considered to simply be coincidental (7, 85). As a result, the subject of dreaming was approached with both "anxiety and fascination" (7). The dreams of romance, however, with the exception of magically induced visions, almost exclusively have some kind of prophetic function.
[51] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 73

position."[52] When dream images are remembered they can become starting points for

recollection, and Havelok's dreams serve this kind of dual function. Though the purpose

of the dreams is primarily prophetic, they provide Havelok with images that help him to

recollect his forgotten home country and his role as heir to the throne.

The memorial function of Havelok's dreams is more subtle than that served by

memorial dreams in other romances. An example of the clear use of a dream for

memorial purposes is when the protagonist of *King Horn* uses images from the fishing

dream that his lover Rymenhild had seven years previously in order to test her memory

(1149-1153). Rymenhild initially dreamed that she was fishing and lost her fish when her

net broke (666-9). In this dream, the fish she loses represents Horn who is exiled shortly

afterwards (705). The use of this dream for memorial purposes is clear: Horn returns

from his exile, reminds his lover of the images from the dream, and hopes that his

reminders will make her recognize him. This use of a dream illustrates the point that, as

McKinstry posits, dreams in romance can "creat[e] dreamed memories that can be

revisited."[53] In *Havelok* the dreams' memorial role is less explicit. Aside from the initial

retelling of the dreams, they are not revisited, but they do provide clear and recognizable

images of Denmark, a country Havelok has not seen since his distant past:

> Me þougthe Y was *in* Denemark set,
> But on þe moste hil
> Þat euere yete kam I til.
> Jt was so hey þat Y wel mouthe
> Al the werd se, als me þouthe.
> Als I sat up-on þat lowe
> J bigan Denemark for to awe,
> Þe borwes and þe castles stronge;

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[52] Aristotle, "*Parva Naturalia:* On Dreams," Trans. J.I. Beare, in *Basic Works of Aristotle,* 618.
[53] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance,* 118-125.

> And mine armes were*n* so lo*n*ge
> Þat I fadmede al at ones
> Denemark with mine lo*n*ge bones. (1287-1291)

When taking into consideration the notion that dream images can become memory images when remembered, Havelok's understanding that he was "in Denmark set," and his image of the country present a memorial pathway to his past. This is the first time he "sees" his home country and its "borwes and [its] castles stronge" since his exile. The clear images of this dream contrast the images appearing in the corresponding dream in the Anglo-Norman analogues. In both Gaimar's account and the *Lai*, the dream is dreamt by Argentille (Goldboru) and occurs before the return to Grimsby. The dream in those texts includes unclear allegorical animal images: bears and foxes try to attack Cuaran (Havelok), but they are fought off by boars and lions that end up kneeling to him (Gaimar 195-237; *Lai* 395-485). These dream images, because they do not appear to Havelok himself and because they are not familiar, serve more as a tool of recognition for Argentille and prompt Havelok to seek out his parentage. In the Middle English text, however, the memorial connections to Denmark provide Havelok with an image that corresponds with his forgotten past and prompts recollection of it.

The use of selective forgetting

The divinely inspired dream images and the appearance of the kynmerk and angel do three things: remove Havelok's disguise, force him to remember his past, and encourage him to plan for his future. Significantly, the first thing Havelok remembers about his past is the image of Godard murdering his sisters, an image which, as previously discussed, had been deeply impressed. The scene of miraculous recognition,

then, in revealing Havelok for who he is, allows him to access some of what he has

forgotten. The morning after the recognition scene, Havelok goes to the church "Or he

dide ani oþer dede" and falls to his knees in a prayer where he both recollects his past and

asks for help in avenging Godard's wrongdoing and in reclaiming his rightful place

(1355-1359). In this recollection, he explicitly focuses on what he saw:

> Haue merci of me, Louerd, nou!
> And wreke me yet on mi fo
> Þat Ich *saw biforn min eyen* slo
> Mine sistres with a knif,
> And siþen wikde ne mi lyf
> Haue reft, for in þe se
> Bad him Grim haue drenched me. (1363-1369)[54]

It is especially salient that his memory begins with "biforn min eyen," as this signals the

recollection of a specific image. Remembering what he saw is also central to the retelling

Havelok does for Grim's sons:

> For *Y saw* þat fule fend
> Mine sistres slo with hise hend:
> First he shar a two here þrotes,
> And siþen hem al to grotes,
> And siþen bad in þe se
> Grim youre fader drenchen me. (1412-1420)

Again, "Y saw" is crucial. Vision was central to the medieval understanding of how

memories were accessed. As Thomas Bradwardine specifies, "memory is most

powerfully affected by sensory impression, especially by vision."[55] In addition, images of

"great emotion or sorrow," as discussed above, were those most readily impressed.[56] This

image reappears now to Havelok because he is now able to make use of it, as he tells

Grim's sons:

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[54] Emphasis mine.
[55] Thomas Bradwardine "On Acquiring," 207.
[56] Albertus, "Commentary," 152.

> But nou Ich am up to þat helde
> Cume*n* that Ich may wepne welde
> and Y may grete di*n*tes yeue. (1436-9)

At this point, he is ready to remember his noble identity and, consequently, shed his disguised one.

The centrality of this image of Havelok's sisters being murdered demonstrates how recollection itself, as a reconstructive process, is "like an activity that has been interrupted and made diverse," and is guided and informed by "antecedents, consequents, places, and various other things."[57] This recollection is of the experience that matters most in connection to the present and the future. Ultimately, Havelok needs to remember Godard's violence because it impels him to seek revenge and reclaim his place; now that he has access to this memory, he can no longer retreat into his disguised identity and must act. Couch refers to Havelok's retelling to Grim's sons, focusing on Godard's violence rather than Grim's, as "rhetorical performance of selective memory" where retelling is "linked to the identity and personal connections the hero must forge at particular moments."[58] She examines how Havelok assigns all of the blame for his struggles to Godard but Grim's initially willing involvement is "carefully left unmentioned," when addressing Grim's sons.[59] While I certainly agree that this revision to memory is made, within the context of medieval recollection it seems to be more a selective forgetting than a deliberate selective remembering and representation. Grim's role in the violence is not just left unmentioned; it is left *forgotten* because the activity of recollection only accesses those memories that are useful for the present and future.

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[57] Albertus, "Commentary," 137
[58] Couch, "The Vulnerable Hero," 343
[59] Couch, "The Vulnerable Hero," 343

Because there is no use for remembering them, the memories of Grim's initial

involvement are left forgotten

The image of Godard's violence is the recollected image because it can be *used* to

move forward, and the memory of Grim's violence is not accessed because there is no

use for it: Grim is dead while Godard is alive and still unlawfully ruling Denmark. The

image of the brutally murdered sisters is used not only to bring Grim's sons to Havelok's

cause but also to recruit Danish knights when he is back in Denmark. This time, the story

of the sisters murder is told by Ubbe: "for þe maydenes here lif, / Refte he boþen with a

knif" (2223-4). Ubbe uses this narrative in his plea to other Danish noblemen to "cometh

alle hider and swiþe / manrede youre louerd for to make" (2248-9). This image is also the

dominant evidence used to justify Godard's capture and execution: Grim's son, Robert

the Red, repeats it when he captures Godard (2395-6). Finally, it ends up being the image

that memorializes Godard's cruelty after he is flayed and drawn for his treachery. A

plaque above Godard's gallows is written:

> 'Þis is þe swike þat wende wel
> þe king haue reft þe lond il del,
> And hise sistres with a knif
> Boþe refte here lif" –
> Þis writ shal henge bi him þare.
> Þe dom is demd –seye we namore.' (2483-2488)

Recollecting this image over and over consistently leads to Havelok's reacquisition of

Denmark and to justice for Godard's treachery. Godard's trial and execution, which have

been identified as reflecting the legal practices contemporary to the text, depend upon the

repeated recollection of Godard's most violent wrongdoings as the central evidence that

brings him to justice.[60] Ultimately, recollecting this image is necessary for Havelok's

return to power because it prompts him to return and reclaim his position. Just as

Godard's violence is useful to remember, Grim's violence from the romance's opening is

useful to forget, because recollecting the disguised identity, the subject of the next section

of this chapter, where Grim is the one who treated Havelok well and "fed and fostred"

him is even more useful in Havelok's return to power (1435).

Reacquisition, commemoration, and the enduring memory of the disguised identity

Although Havelok can no longer exist in his disguised identity after being

revealed, he still remembers it and uses it in his process of returning to his noble status.

Grim's sons, whom Havelok makes his knights and protectors, and the space of Grimsby

itself, where Havelok memorializes Grim, are instrumental in both his reclamation of

Denmark and his acquisition of England.[61] This action of bringing relationships from his

disguised life with him emphasizes the transformative nature of the disguise because

Havelok is committed to remembering it and using these relationships to create a stable

future. The sense of continuity and progression from Havelok's disguised identity to his

final noble one is something that is unique to the Middle English text. In the Anglo-

Norman versions of the story, the protagonist, while disguised in England, is given the

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[60] See Crane, *Insular Romance*, 48 and Roger L. Wilkie. "Re-capitating the Body Politic: The Overthrow of Tyrants in *Havelok the Dane. Neophilologus* 94, no. 1 (2010): 141-143.

[61] Havelok's return to Denmark has been described as an "anticlimax" and full of "shortcomings" regarding "narrative economy and logic." Hostetter, "Food, Soverignty," 72; Mills, "Havelok's Return," 32. Part of the logistical problem with this section is that there is a missing leaf in the manuscript (1446-1625). In this missing section Havelok and Grim's sons travel to Denmark disguised as merchants and meet with a Danish nobleman, Ubbe. The text starts up again when they are in Denmark, still disguised, and at Ubbe's court.

pseudonym Cuaran, and is presented as two separate people with two separate lives. For example, the *Lai* introduces him as two different people: "Si lappelerent de son non / Et Havelok et Cuarant" (He was called by name both Havelok and Curarant) (22-23). This presents the revelation in the Anglo-Norman texts as an exposure of a true and separate identity to be reclaimed, while in the Middle English text, the maintenance of the protagonist's name signals that it was still Havelok who had the experiences of his disguised life and that he is now integrating two versions of his identity.

Grim's sons, as Havelok's knights, prove to be instrumental to Havelok's successful return to his position of power in Denmark. After telling them his story, Havelok offers to make his adoptive brothers "riche men" and to give each of them "castles ten," if they go with him and help him reclaim Denmark (1442-3). The brothers' role in Denmark can be read as Havelok using his disguised identity insofar as he uses the relationships he formed while living in his disguise in order to reclaim his heritage. It is also more than that: it is a convergence of the disguised identity and the noble identity and an expression of the necessity of the period of time during which he lived out a different life. Grim's sons, Robert the Red, William Wenduth, and Hue Raven, serve a vital role as extensions of Havelok while he is in Denmark, even at times saving his life.[62] First, they are in charge of protecting Goldboru from "ani haue[de] hire misseyd" at

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[62] My reading of Grim's sons as extensions of Havelok is informed by Wilkie's reading of this episode in as illustrative of the *Body Politic* where the king, Havelok, is the head and the officers and soldiers, Grim's sons and the Danish noblemen, are the hands. Wilkie. "Re-capitating,"141-2.

Ubbe's court (1687-1693).[63] Second, they fight beside Havelok several times, including a

moment when they are surprised by "mo þan sixti þeues" (1879-1894, 1957). Third,

Grim's sons even speak for Havelok. Perhaps the most striking example of this is when

Grim's oldest son, Robert, captures Godard and repeats the remembered image of

Havelok's sisters' murder:

> Cu*m* to be king swiþe and raþe!
> Þat sendes he þe word and bedes,
> Þat þu þenke hwat þu him dedes
> Hwan þu reftes with a knif
> Hise sistres here lif. (2392-2396)

Here, Robert is a messenger who speaks for Havelok and conveys Havelok's memory of

past events. Havelok's trust in others to do his bidding demonstrates the kind of passivity

that Rosalind Field suggests makes him "one of the more ineffectual of romance

heroes."[64] While Havelok takes on a rather passive role as a king, he is not ineffectual

insofar as he uses what has been made available to him, including the relationships from

his disguised identity, in order to achieve what he set out to do when he left for Denmark:

reclaim his position as king and take revenge on Godard.

Despite the romance being noted for realistic depictions of law and society, the

movement of Grim's sons from fishermen to knights has generally been considered to be

unrealistic. Eckert notes that the social mobility that Havelok offers his adoptive brothers

would have been very unlikely in late thirteenth-century society, and Halverson reads it

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[63] It is unclear in the Middle English text exactly why Goldboru requires protection from
Ubbe's men, but it is likely the result of something in the missing leaf. In the Anglo-
Norman texts, Argentille (Goldboru) is abducted by some of Sigar's (Ubbe) squires
during a feast (*Lai* 697). Perhaps something similar happens in the missing leaf. For an
analysis of the mood in this episode and a comparison to the Anglo-Norman texts, see
Mills, "Havelok's Return," 20-23.
[64] Rosalind Field, "Romance in England," 166.

as "class structure…turned on its head."[65] The historical unlikeliness of the situation

emphasizes the necessity of the disguised identity, and the use of Grim's sons in

Denmark presents a kind of communal memory where they serve as extensions of

Havelok's identity.[66] Havelok's brothers, the fishermen with whom he grew up, have

been elevated to their knightly status at the same time as Havelok himself is elevated to

his kingly one. He essentially brings his disguised identity with him into his ascent to

power, accentuating its role in his development.

The central role that Havelok's disguised identity plays in his actions as king

becomes even more evident when he returns to England, specifically Grimsby, to

memorialize Grim by building a priory in his name (2523). As mentioned previously,

Havelok does not memorialize Birkabeyn in the same way as he does Grim. As soon as

Havelok's identity as Birkabeyn's son is established (2197), Birkabeyn's name falls out

of the text completely and is even surprisingly absent from the scenes of Godard's trial

and execution despite Godard's broken oath to Birkabeyn being central to his crimes. In

contrast, memorializing Grim by building the priory becomes crucial to how Havelok

acquires England. This is a departure from the *Lai d'Haveloc* where Havelok invades

England so that Argentille (Goldboru) can regain her heritage (*Lai* 983-4). In the Middle

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[65] Eckert, "Redemptive Hero," 232; Halverson, "*Havelok the Dane* and Society," 149. Eckert notes that it would have been historically possible in Anglo-Saxon society and there is debate in *Havelok* scholarship as to whether or not the text envisions the Anglo-Danish relations of pre-conquest England. For a discussion of the text being set in the Anglo-Saxon past, see Dominique Battles, "Reconquering England for the English in *Havelok the Dane,*" *The Chaucer Review* 47, no. 2 (2012): 187-205. The society depicted in the text, however, has been noted to reflect that of late thirteenth-century England, the time in which the text is thought to have been composed. See Crane, *Insular Romance*, 40; and Christopher Stuart, "'Havelok the Dane' and Edward I in the 1290s" *Studies in Philology* 93, no. 4 (1996): 349-364.
[66] Similarly, Crane writes that the way Havelok rewards Grim's sons "signal[s] the communal nature of his enterprise." Susan Crane, *Insular Romance*, 47.

English text, Havelok's return to England is peaceful. It is driven by the memory of his

foster father and a desire to create a physical memorial in Grimsby, the space central to

Havelok's disguised identity:

> Þo swor Hauelok he sholde make,
> Al for Grim, of monkes blake
> A priorie to seruen inne ay
> Jesu Crist til Domesday,
> For þe god he hauede him don
> Hwil he was pouere and *iu* el[l] o-bon.
> And þer-of held he wel his oth,
> For he it made, God it woth,
> In þe tun þer Grim was graue*n*,
> Þat of Grim yet haues þe naue[n]. (2521-2528)

Here, we see Havelok return to Grimsby for the express purpose of memorializing Grim.

This represents a larger trend in romance that McKinstry notes where there is a "security

that comes from visiting familiar locations, whether literally or mentally."[67] What is

different here is that normally these spaces are associated with a past or with values that

the character is trying to reclaim, while here it is the space of disguised identity that

Havelok has already shed. Grimsby, while Havelok was disguised, was for the most part

a space of security and of order, and the choice to build a priory, a place of refuge and

contemplation, reflects his memory of this. Overall, Havelok's actions here are

illustrative of how he recollects Grim as a foster father and Grimsby as a secure space.

That Havelok builds the priory for the "god [Grim] hauede him don/ Hwil he was

pouere" paints Grim as generous and self-sacrificing and immortalizes him in a space that

is dedicated to serving "Jesu Crist til Domesday" (2123-6).

Havelok is also the builder of this priory, which adds to its memorial significance.

It is mentioned twice that he is the one who makes it: Havelok swears that "he sholde

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[67] McKinstry, *The Medieval Craft*, 49.

make" the priory, and then when he accomplishes it, it is "he [Havelok] that it made" (2521, 2528). Though we learn later that Havelok is in England with his knights, depicting Havelok as the builder of this memorial to Grim and to his disguised identity is significant. As Carruthers posits, building tropes carry memorial weight because of the centrality of buildings in the architectural and locational conceptions of the artificial memory.[68] More specifically, she notes that monastic buildings were considered "meditational aids" for those living in them and "ideal backgrounds" for memory work.[69] For example, Thomas Bradwardine's artificial memory scheme provides advice for how to construct mental places for memory storage, suggesting that "it is very useful if your places are real" because they can be "frequently inspect[ed], and thus through repetition mentally confirm and secure their appearance."[70] Havelok's physical building of the priory in memory of Grim and the suggestion that it will be there "til Domesday," solidifies its permanence as a part of Havelok's own memory and signifies for the reader Grim and Grimsby's importance in Havelok's own construction of identity.

This place of refuge quickly transforms into a place of battle, followed closely by acquisition. Although Havelok did not return to England to fight Godrich and lay claim to Goldboru's birthright, Godrich hears of his arrival, assumes he is there for those reasons, and brings battle "toward Grimesbi"(2543-4, 2618). With Grim's three sons and his Danish knights at his side, Havelok captures Godrich (2760). The Englishmen accept Goldboru as the "rith eyr" and Havelok as their king (2770-1). It is no accident that the stage for Havelok's acquisition of England is Grimsby. The location, and the memorial

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[68] Carruthers, "The Poet as Master Builder," 881-883.
[69] Carruthers, "The Poet as Master Builder," 895.
[70] Thomas Bradwardine, "On Acquiring," 207.

reasons that he first went there, highlight the importance of the disguised identity in shaping Havelok as a king.

Immediately after acquiring England, Havelok arranges alliances that further demonstrate a convergence of both his disguised and kingly lives. He marries one of Grim's daughters to the earl of Chester (2865-8). Havelok then gives Bertram, Godrich's cook for whom he worked in Lincoln, an earldom and marries him to Grim's other daughter (2915-6). Lim suggests that these alliances demonstrate how the protagonist "insures his right to rule by using marriage as a political tool."[71] I would add that Havelok, in creating these alliances, is doing what he did with Grim's sons, and what he did when he built the priory in Grim's memory: remembering the relationships that shaped his disguised identity and making use of them to shape his final identity as a king.

Conclusion

In *Havelok*'s narrative of exile and return, the return becomes a setting for remembering two identities, both a disguised identity and noble one. Though the disguised identity involves forgetting and distraction, it is central in character development, as shown by how Havelok remembers and uses his relationships from it once he claims his rightful role as king. Havelok's disguised identity involved existing in an alternative space, Grimsby, in which he formed memories of his foster family and of his work as a fisherman that superseded his poorly formed memories before his exile. That space becomes a memorial space and guides his reclamation of his nobility. As a *transformative* disguise, Havelok's life as Grim's son is a central and unifying factor in

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[71] Lim, "In the Name," 49.

the romance's plot. This chapter showed how one central disguise and the space where the disguised life occurs socially transform the character and how forgetting is what enables this transformative process. Ultimately, while the recollections of his distant past push Havelok to reclaim his position as a king and to overthrow the usurper, it is the disguised identity and the forgetting that enabled it that allows him accomplish these things and, in the end, shape his final identity. While Havelok's disguise and the alternative memories that went with it guide how he expresses himself as a king, the next chapter will explore how some similar disguises in *Sir Isumbras* provide different forms of forgetting that lead to a more spiritual transformation.

Chapter 3: "For a pore palmer he was": penitential disguises, spiritual transformation, and the necessity of Prudence in *Sir Isumbras*

       This chapter examines disguise and forgetting within the context of a penitential journey and spiritual transformation in *Sir Isumbras.* Forgetting is directly stated to be the root of the protagonist's sin and the reason for his penance: Isumbras is introduced to the reader as a knight who has "foryete[n] what [he] was/ For pryde of golde and fee" (50-51).[1] Forgetting, however, is not only the problem that brings about Isumbras's penance; it also appears in different forms while he undergoes his penitential journey. As a penitent, Isumbras needs to forget his earthly life in order to separate himself from his sin and bring himself closer to God. Later, however, he also needs to recollect prudently by using both the good and evil of the past in order to return to his earthly life in a way that ensures a future for his soul. Isumbras's transformative disguises dramatize this process of forgetting and prudent recollection. Unlike *Havelok*, where the protagonist's life lived in his disguise transforms him, Isumbras's disguises are transformative in how they guide his penitential journey. They offer memorial challenges and impede his progress, yet at the same time they are necessary because they provide Isumbras with ways to address those memorial challenges and to make use of his spiritual transformation when he

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[1]Unless otherwise specified, references, from *Sir Isumbras* are from the following edition: *Six Middle English Romances* ed. Maldwyn Mills, (London: Dent, 1973): 125-149. *Sir Isumbras* survives in nine manuscripts (four complete ones). Mills uses MS Cotton Caligula A.ii (1446-60) as his base text. He notes in his introduction that this particular base text sometimes contains variations, as it "is often conventional, and it frequently disrupts the original division of the poem into stanzas" (xxxi). Because of this, some moments are laid out more clearly in other versions of the story, and I will draw on those moments when relevant. Though the oldest manuscript in which it appears, in fragments, is in Grays Inn, MS 20 (mid fourteenth-century), *Sir Isumbras* is believed to have been composed earlier because it is referenced in the *Cursor Mundi* (*c*. 1300).

eventually returns to his earthly existence. In the end, the push and pull of forgetting and prudent recollection dramatized by the disguises help to negotiate the challenge of balancing advancement in a contemplative spiritual life with advancement in an active worldly life.

I will begin by addressing the driving factor for disguise, Isumbras's sin of pride, as itself a form of forgetting necessary for understanding the processes that come later in the text. Next, I will explore the processes of forgetting and disguise in depth. Isumbras's disguises prompt different forms of forgetting and each informs his transformation differently. The first transformative disguise is as a smith's apprentice. In this disguise, Isumbras experiences pathway forgetting brought on by distraction from living in the present. This forgetting is eventually resolved by a process of recollection involving a different form of more performative disguise, chivalric incognito, where Isumbras exhibits a way of being a knight within the context of his penance. His second disguise, as a pilgrim, involves a form of virtuous and contemplative pathway forgetting that means he lives in the future of a purely spiritual existence. This disguise completes Isumbras's spiritual transformation by bringing him closer to God, but it also creates a memorial challenge that keeps him disguised long after his penance is over. In the end, Isumbras requires the external help of recognition tokens and needs to rebuild his relationships in order to demonstrate his ability to wield worldly power in a way that uses his past experiences to ensure the future of his soul. As a shorter romance, *Isumbras* does not have the space to explore the protagonist's inner senses and personal relationships as *Havelok* does; instead, forgetting is expressed through temporal gaps and fluidity, processes of recollection are explored through the use of material objects, and the

transformations brought on by disguise are externally expressed.[2] Ultimately, the

protagonist's forgetting in multiple disguises allows him to advance in his spiritual

existence while simultaneously preventing him from engaging with his earthly existence.

The prudent recollections that overcome these processes of forgetting are necessary

because the end goal of Isumbras's penance is to use his spiritual transformation to live

out a virtuous earthly life.

Pride of forgetting God as a driving factor for disguise

Before exploring the disguises, it is important to explore what pushes Isumbras

into them: he forgets God because of pride. The opening of *Sir Isumbras,* read in the

context of the protagonist's sin of pride*,* demonstrates how living in the present and

focusing on a courtly identity can cause the individual to forget God. In the text's

opening, Isumbras is described as the "kynge" of "curtesye" whose "gentylnesse hadde

non ending" (28-29). He is also described as "ryche," "dowghty," and "fre" (13, 7, 21).[3]

Sir Isumbras presents this glowing picture then shows that "fful good m[e]n" are still

susceptible to vice and, as a result, susceptible to forgetting God (24). Isumbras does not

outwardly denounce the Church, as the prideful hero of *Robert of Cisyle* does when he

says that he is so powerful that no one can "bring [him] lowe."[4] Instead, Isumbras's pride

is explained as something that has developed over time and is a sin of neglect: "Into his

herte a pryde was browghte / That of God yafe he right nowghte" (37-38). Essentially,

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[2] Samara Landers similarly suggests that "external signs" as opposed to "thoughts and feelings" are a "way of knowing the figure." Samara Landers, "'And He was Loved with All': Identity in *Sir Isumbras*," *Orbis Literrarum* vol. 64, no. 4 (2009): 352.
[3] The MED defines "doughty" as "brave, valiant" (1a) and "fre" as "generous" (2b).
[4] *Robert of Cisyle*, in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. Edward E. Foster, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 2007).

the protagonist has two selves that are currently at odds: an earthly self and a spiritual self. In pursuit of success in his earthly existence, Isumbras has forgotten his spiritual Christian self. This is because the pride that is rooted in Isumbras's identity as a courtly figure has prevented him from thinking about his spiritual self.

The idea that forgetting comes out of pride is also evident in other medieval sources.[5] For example, an Early Middle English dialogue, *Vices and Virtues* (ca. 1200)*, references the pride of people in powerful positions: "ȝif he bie of hiȝe kenne, oðer ȝif he bie hiȝe menstre, oðer ȝif he hafð sum hei obedience" they can "forȝieð to swiðe hem seluen wið-innen, and harkieð to ðe idele werkes wiðuten."[6] Individuals with power can forget their inner spiritual selves if they focus on external idle works. This idea also reflects a general cultural anxiety that powerful knightly classes were more susceptible to pride.[7]

Isumbras's sin of pridefully forgetting God results from his external expression of his role as a knight. Isumbras is greeted in the woods by a messenger bird who confronts him about his pride, explicitly states that forgetting is part of the problem, and informs him that he must do penance: "Thow haste foryete what thou was/ For pryde of golde and fee" (50-51). These lines suggest that Isumbras's material lifestyle is the reason that he

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[5] Kisha Tracy provides several examples sources that list forgetting as associated with sin, and specifically with the sin of pride. Kisha G. Tracy, "Memory, Recollection, and Forgetting," in *Set Handbook of Medieval Culture* vol 2., ed. Albrecht Classen, (DeGruyter, 2015), 1035.

[6] *Vices and Virtues*: *A Soul's Confession of its Sins, with Reason's Description of the Virtues*. Ed and trans. F. Holthausen (1888 repr, London, Oxford University Press, 1967): 7. Holthausen's translation of this passage is: if they are of high family, or if they are of high office, or if they have some high command [authority]….they forget too much themselves within, and hearken to the idle works without" (6).

[7] For a general discussion of the cultural construction of pride and its link to knighthood see: Lester K. Little, "Pride Goes before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Cristendom," *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (1971): 31-37.

forgets his spiritual self. Tracing backwards to the opening of the text, it also becomes

clear that Isumbras's distribution of wealth is in the service of his own pleasure, and is an

example of the kind of "idele werkes wiðuten" associated with prideful men. This is

exemplified in how he distributes his wealth to his minstrels:

> Menstralles he hadde in his halle
> And yafe hem robes of ryche palle,
> Sylver, golde, and fee. (25-7)

While this initially appears to be a form of largesse, it really is not because Isumbras has

selected who receives his wealth for his own entertainment. In addition, because they are

given to servants in "his halle," the minstrels' rich robes also publicly communicate

Isumbras's prosperity. Historically, moderation was also a concern regarding how knights

clothed their servants. As Joanna Crawford explains, "by appareling their servants in the

latest styles and with the richest robes, such men were in reality staging impressive

performances of their own prestige and worship."[8] Andrea Hopkins examines this

moment and explains: "it is certainly worth noting that giving money to minstrels was not

smiled upon by churchmen," and that Isumbras "ought to have been giving alms to the

poor instead of robes to the minstrels."[9] Giving to the poor, however, does not

communicate prestige as giving to minstrels does, and this fact indicates the type of pride

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[8] Joanna Crawford, "Clothing Distributions and Social Relations c. 1350-1500," in *Clothing Culture,* 1350-1650, ed. Catherine Richardson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 158. Historical efforts to control clothing, for example sumptuary laws, further demonstrate that excess in rich clothing was a complex cultural concern. Sumptuary petitions in England (the two in the fourteenth-century were in 1337, 1363), defined what was appropriate and inappropriate for different classes to wear and focused heavily on higher classes (ie. Knights). They were more concerned with economic protectionism or with creating visible class distinctions, but they were supported by moralists who promoted moderation. Kim M. Philips, "Masculinities and Medieval Sumptuary Laws," *Gender and History* 19, no. 1(2007): 23-24

[9] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 132.

Isumbras is guilty of in the opening of the romance: he is generous in order to make himself look good. *Vices and Virtues* also addresses this form of pride and explains that when a man does good works, like giving alms, with the intention of boasting and gaining praise, it is pride; the speaker warns: "Ðencheð herof ȝe ðe doð ȝewer god teforen mannen" (32).[10]

Isumbras's punishment for his sin involves a complete loss of the things attached to his earthly life. He immediately changes and accepts his losses with a kind of passivity that has been described as "saint-like."[11] Rather than neglecting his spiritual self and focusing only on his worldly identity as he had done previously, he now neglects this earthly self and says "Of myselfe have I no thowghte" (124). Isumbras's penance is in many ways, as Landers suggests, a "process of remembering."[12] This process of remembering, however, is only a process of remembering the spiritual self, because there are different forms of forgetting pertaining to his earthly self that turn up within the penitential journey. These forms of forgetting arise from living too much in either the present or the future and not referring to the past. Landers suggests that the way in which Isumbras focuses on the present while in disguise makes his penance exemplary: "He fully accepts his status at any given time, whether it is pilgrim or blacksmith, and never refers to his past or what he hopes will come in the future; Isumbras lives in the present

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[10] *Vices and Virtues*, 5. This short passage is translated by Holthausen as "Think hereof ye that do your good [deeds] before men."

[11] Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 121. This idea that Isumbras is "saint-like" is not surprising since the story is based on the Saint Eustace legend and the romance has itself been designated as secular hagiography. Isumbras, however, is not a saint, and he does eventually need to remember his earthly self.

[12] Landers, "Identity in *Sir Isumbras"* 369.

and focuses only on his penance."[13] This is the correct way of doing penance, as

exemplified in Bartholomew Iscanus's (d. 1184) "Conditions of Penance," where he lists

some things that may relax or remit penitence: "useful manual labour," "poorness and

roughness of clothing," and "pilgrimages."[14] Isumbras engages in all three of these

things during his penitential journey, but although they contribute to his spiritual

transformation, they also present memorial challenges. Isumbras's penance is exemplary,

but the focus on the present and even the future without addressing the past becomes a

challenge in the text because it prevents him from using his spiritual transformation to

guide his earthly existence. Such forgetting prevents forward momentum in the text.

It takes a very long time for Isumbras's sins to be absolved, and this is *because*

he is not recollecting his past. Dieter Mehl points out the length of Isumbras's penance

and writes: "we cannot say that the long series of sufferings is necessary to bring him to a

consciousness of his sinful state."[15] Mehl further suggests that the reason that the poem

makes the penance so long is that it "combine[s] two quite different patterns: the

punishment and purification of a sinner and the prolonged demonstration of patience and

constancy in adversity."[16] This analysis of the length of time, however, demands more

exploration of the forgetting that occurs within those years. While Isumbras does

demonstrate patience and constancy, the temporal gaps in this time provide a memorial

problem. If Isumbras's ultimate goal is to remember his spiritual self, living in only the

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[13] Landers, "Identity in *Sir Isumbras,*" 361.

[14] Bartholomew of Iscanus. "Conditions of Penance," in *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, ed. and trans. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York: Octagon Books, 1965): 347.

[15] Mehl, Dieter, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries.* (London: Routledge, 1968): 133.

[16] Mehl, *The Middle English Romances,* 133.

present or future will not enable him to attain his goal because he requires the memory of

his sins in order to atone for them and use them prudently to guide his future on earth.

Prudence and memory

The notion of remembering sin in order to create a future is central to the

medieval understanding of how prudence makes use of memory. This idea comes from

classical writers who considered memory to be a part of prudence, alongside intelligence

and foresight. As Cicero writes in *De Inventione* (84 BCE), "Memory is the faculty by

which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it

ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to

occur before it occurs" (II.liii.160).[17] Albertus notes that prudence uses the "function of

reminiscence" to make rational and moral judgments.[18] Thomas Aquinas identifies

prudence as a virtue that is, more than other virtues, especially useful for living in the

world and explains: "prudence is necessary to live a good life."[19] Prudent use of memory

helps create a good life by giving the individual a method of resistance to impulse and

vice. Albertus explains how memory functions in prudential recollection in the following

passage:

> Prudence is the knowledge of good and evil factions; this knowledge, moreover,
> is greatly aided by events that have already happened, because by means of the
> past it will know in what way it should manage itself in the future; therefore
> memory should be a part of prudence...We say that memory is a part of prudence
> insofar as memory comes under the definition of reminiscence. When Prudence

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[17] Cicero, *De Inventione*, trans. H.M. Hubbell. Loeb Classical Library 386. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949) 326.

[18] Albertus Magnus, "*De Bono*," 346-347.

[19] Thomas Aquinas, "*Summa Theologiae* I-II Q57A5," trans. English Dominican Fathers (New York: Christian Classics, 1981) in *The Collected Works of St Thomas Aquinas: Electronic Edition*, Intelex Past Masters.

distinguishes those things by which it is assisted from those by which it is impeded in its work, it is necessary for it to proceed by a process of inquiry, and thus for it to progress from a pre-determined starting point.[20]

Such prudential recollection that uses the memory of both good and evil of the past is essential to Isumbras's penitential journey. Once Isumbras remembers the more virtuous man he once was, he also has to remember the sinful man he had become as he proceeds in his journey. When, in disguise, he struggles to do this, time stagnates and he moves no closer to regaining what he has lost and living a good spiritual life as a knight.

The need to remember the evil with regards to past sins is also a vital component in medieval discourse about penitence and confession. Kisha Tracy argues that in "confession tracts and manuals, particularly those in the Middle English period, recollection, including anxieties about forgetfulness, is ever present in the discussions of and the actual act of confession."[21] This is exemplified in St. Augustine's (354-430) *Confessions*: "Allow me...to trace again in memory my past deviations and offer you a sacrifice of joy."[22] It also appears in the Middle English *Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen* (*c*. 1400): "For wiþoute askynge he may not haue forȝeuenes; and hou schal he repente him and aske forȝeuenes of þat he haþ forȝete?"[23] If Isumbras lives in the present, how can he remember his past sins? If he focuses only on future forgiveness and forgets his past sins, how can he rebuild himself? In the smith's disguise, he lives in the present, and habit and routine bring about forgetting. In the pilgrim's disguise, Isumbras lives a contemplative life where he lives too much in the future, which also causes him to forget. These moments delay his ultimate prudential recollection that requires considering the

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[20] Albertus Magnus, "*De Bono*" 346.
[21] Tracy, *Memory and Confession,* 7.
[22] Saint Augustine. Book IV.I. *Confessions*, 71.
[23] *Myrour* (120.34-42) as quoted in Tracy, *Memory and Confession,* 16.

past as well as the present and the future. Though these moments create some forgetting,

the text ultimately resolves each instant by providing memorial cues that, in turn,

exemplify and emphasize the process of prudent recollection and further the protagonist's

spiritual transformation.

Living in the present: from "smythes mann" to incognito knight

The first disguised identity Isumbras takes on involves entering a town and living

a life of labour. He begins by collecting iron for a smith, and then learns to work as a

smith for "mannes hyre" himself (395-400). Lower status disguise is not uncommon in

romance, but it frequently functions as a performative disguise or a tool used for

mobility.[24] For example, King Horn disguises himself as a beggar to enter the castle

where Rymenhild is to be married (1132-6). Isumbras's disguise as a smith does the

opposite: it immobilizes him. Isumbras, as a smith, stays in one place for at least seven

years (404). In this way, his disguising bears many similarities to Havelok's. As in

Havelok, Isumbras falls into a routine with his labour. In almost the exact same words as

Havelok, Isumbras expresses that he is more than willing to work to feed himself: "for

mete I wolde I swynke fayn" (292). Isumbras's disguise as a labourer differs, however,

because unlike Havelok who develops strong relationships in his disguise, Isumbras

isolates himself, "viewing his punishment as a separation from society of all kinds."[25]

This isolation, although it is part of Isumbras's penance of forsaking all "worldes

welthe," also stagnates his progress (58). In addition, Isumbras's nobility, unlike

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[24] Bliss, *Naming*, 37.
[25] Landers, "Identity in *Sir Isumbras,*" 364.

Havelok's, does not assert itself and attempt to break the disguise.[26] This is because, for

Isumbras, spirituality, not nobility, is the end goal; Isumbras's ultimate ascent to king is a

product of his penitential journey and not its end goal.

Isumbras's routine of daily labour creates temporal gaps in the narrative. First, he

bears the firing stone for a smith "Tyll twelve monthes wer come and gone" (398). This

first year is coded as being a part of penitent bodily mortification: he bears the stone "out

of a fowll depe slowghe," and "wroughte his body mykyll wo" (396, 399).[27] Once

Isumbras learns to be a blacksmith, however, an even larger temporal gap appears in the

text: "Sevenn yer he was smythes man ther" (404). These seven years pass in under ten

lines of text while earlier time is measured in small increments: early in the text,

Isumbras and his family go without food for six days and they walk through the forest for

seven days (163, 225). Once Isumbras is in the labourer's disguise, however, time is

described in months, and then in years, creating a sense that disguised time is empty time.

The emptiness of this time presents an uncomfortable space that raises the

question of whether or not this time has disappeared because Isumbras has forgotten his

penitential purpose. Albertus Magnus writes that "it happens thus that whatever is more

corporeal always impairs what is more spiritual and hinders it in recollection."[28] Just as

Havelok does, Isumbras lives a life that is dominated by the necessity of physical labour

that impedes memory.[29] The space of seven years represents a routine of living in the

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[26] I am referring to how Havelok's "kynmerk" breaks his disguise three times (605, 1254, 2140)

[27] "Slough" is defined in the MED as "a muddy place" (1a).

[28] Albertus Magnus. "Commentary on *Aristotle*, on Memory and Recollection," trans. Jan M Ziolkowski in *The Medieval Craft*, 6:137.

[29] "Overwork" is listed in Boncompagno da Signa's list of impediments to memory. Boncompagno, *"On Memory,"* 108.

present. Coleman, discussing Albertus Magnus's arguments about prudence and memory writes: "Prudence for Albert is a moral *habitus* and hence, reminiscence [recollection] is a psychological *habitus,* an active, discontinuous, syllogistic search among mental similitudes."[30] The temporal gap that occurs while Isumbras is disguised as a smith achieves the opposite of the habit of prudent recollection: it creates a passive, continuous, and indefinable space without any direct action or careful investigation of memory. Isumbras is learning a trade, and learning is emphasized in memory treatises as an example of something that is in the present. For example, Aquinas writes in his commentary on Aristotle, "When someone first learns or undergoes a sensory experience, no recollection is recurring at that time."[31] In this case, living in the present does not make Isumbras prideful but it still prevents the forward momentum of his journey.

The problems associated with living in the present can be traced back to the events that led Isumbras to the town: the loss of his entire family, which was the last remaining connection he had to his earthly existence. Two of his sons are carried off by a lion and a leopard early in the text (179, 184). Next, his wife is taken by the "heathen kynge" he had asked for charity (225-30, 291). Finally, his last son is carried off by a unicorn and Isumbras is left with nothing (370). As a result of these losses, Isumbras prays to God:

> He seyde, 'Dere Godde, wo is me,
> I have loste my wyfe and children thre,
> And am myselfe alone.

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[30] Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories,* 416. Coleman is referring to the following definitions in Albertus's *De Bono,* he defines these two types of *habitus*: "…memory has two functions…it is a condition for what we know rationally [*habitus cognitivorum*], and it is a condition for making ethical judgements [*habitus moralium*]." Albertus Magnus, *De Bono,* 347.
[31] Aquinas, "Commentary,*"* 353,

> I am as kerefull a manne
> As any with tonge telle can,
> To God I make my mone. (376-381)

In this moment, Isumbras is in the present and focusing on the things that he has lost. Although sorrow for past sin is part of penance, this sorrow is focused on Isumbras's own present loneliness.[32] In previous instances of sorrow, Isumbras shows acceptance of his losses. For example, when his first son is taken from them, he comforts his despondent wife, and tells her "take we gladly Goddes wyll,/ Hertyly I yow praye" (188-9). Although Isumbras also has "carefull herte" and is "syknge sore" in this instance, his sadness prompts him to look to the future and be confident in God's guidance (181-2). The moment where Isumbras makes his complaint to God following the loss of his wife and his last son is different, however: he is alone and friendless and looks for guidance. Hopkins argues that in this moment, "[Isumbras's] prayer to God is a confession of his own helplessness, and places him entirely in God's mercy."[33] He does not, however, put himself in God's mercy in the same way he did in other parts of the text. Rather than accepting, as he did earlier, that "God bothe yeveth and taketh," he beseeches God to help him meet his bodily needs (which, later in the text, he willfully neglects) and "wysse [him] the way to som towne," not to further his penance directly, but instead to seek "mete for charité" (100, 388). These practical concerns for food, not unlike those in the opening of *Havelok*, foreground the needs of the present and also work to prevent recollection. Together, the overwhelming loneliness and practical bodily needs become the distraction that promotes forgetting and stagnates time in the smith's disguise.

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[32] Tertullian. *On Penitence* 11, in *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*. Trans. and ed. William P. Le Saint (Westminster: Newman Press, 1959): 35.

[33] Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 135.

The forward momentum of the plot returns through a materially reconstructive

process that becomes a reminder of knighthood. In his last months as a blacksmith,

Isumbras learns to make armour "all that fell for a knyghte" (405-7). This armour

becomes a memorial object that prompts him to recollect what it means to be a knight.

The profession of blacksmith, a very material profession, reflects Isumbras's prior

fascination with the material, but this ultimate use of the profession demonstrates that his

connection with material things, though still present, is transforming. He learns to build

knights' armour, which then prompts him to remember his knightly identity and

ultimately move forward:

> By thenne he cowthe armour dyghte,
> Al that fell for a knyghte,
> To batell when he shoulde go. (406-408)

It is only in the months following the seven year gap that Isumbras is able to make the

knight's armour.[34] This moment in the text has frequently been read as the reason why

Isumbras has become a blacksmith in the first place. For example, Landers suggests that,

"As far as Isumbras is concerned [the blacksmiths] are there only to show him how to

forge armor and weapons."[35] The problem with reading this episode as deliberately

planned is that it is impossible to tell in the text if Isumbras actually chooses to become a

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[34] In Harriet Hudson's edition of the text that uses the Caius and Gonville MS (1425-50)
as a base text, the number of months is specified as two (396). Also, the process of
creating armour is much more active in this version instead of "By thenne he cowthe
armour dyghte," this version states: "By that he hadde hym armes dyght" (397). This
suggests that Isumbras has a more active role in recreating his identity than is
demonstrated in the Cotton MS. Still, it is only in the last two months that Isumbras takes
on this activity, so the temporal gap is still a problem. *Four Middle English Romances:
Sir Isumbras, Octavian, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Sir Tryamour*. Ed. Harriet Hudson,
(Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 2006)
[35] Landers, "Identity in *Sir Isumbras*," 365. This argument is in the context of exploring
why Isumbras does not make himself known to others.

blacksmith with the goal of rebuilding a knightly identity in mind.[36] In fact, there are

indications that Isumbras enters the trade by accident: it happens to be a smith who needs

a labourer at the time that Isumbras is asking for "mete for charité" (386). Isumbras is

thus working for survival rather than planning for a future. As a result, he only learns to

build knight's armour because it is part of his role as a smith. Learning to make knights'

armour, rather than being a direct and deliberate goal from the beginning, is an indirect

reminder of a past knightly identity.

  The armour, when read this way, is a starting point for recollection. The armour

reminds Isumbras of his identity as a knight, but in this case he needs to use his past

experience of being a knight in a way that fits the framework of his penance; as the

opening shows, simply being a good knight is not enough. An opportunity for him to

prudently combine his past skill as a knight with his present ability to forge knight's

armour in order to achieve spiritual goals is offered to him when the "hethen kynge," who

has been battling on Christian lands for the whole seven years, brings his battle to "a

lytell ther bysyde" the town in which Isumbras is working (410-420). This prompts

Isumbras to remember prudently with the goal of winning back those Christian lands. In

visual representations of the cardinal virtues, Prudence is often depicted with three eyes:

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[36] Elizabeth Fowler negotiates this inability to know Isumbras's motivations in this moment by presenting the reconstruction of the knightly identity as the work of the poet rather than the work of the character. She writes that Isumbras "rebuild[ing] his social body as he builds the armour" in order to "'own' the social position of the knight," is "the poem's most interesting use of the topos of investiture." Elizabeth Fowler. "The Romance Hypothetical: Lordship and Saracens in *Sir Isumbras*," in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, eds., Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (Harlow: Longman, 2000): 100, 102.

"one eye on the past, one eye on the present, and one eye on the future."[37] This represents

the necessity of vision in all three directions (memory, understanding, and foresight) in

order to live prudently. The moment when Isumbras forges the armour and goes into

battle is an example of this three-eyed action. His eye on the past is his memory of his

former place in society as a knight who is "hende and good" (433-434). His eye on the

present is how he connects his ability to make armour to the battle where "the Cristen and

the hethen mette/ a lytell ther bysyde" (414-415). Finally, his eye on the future is that he

can see how this version of knighthood, fighting for a "Cristen kynge," can fit into the

framework of his penance and help him to "kevere [his] wo" and transform spiritually

(336).[38]

When Isumbras goes into battle, he does so as an incognito knight and his

namelessness emphasizes his spiritual intent. It is also an example of the prudent use of

recollection: he uses his past experience as a knight and reconstructs it in a way that

shows humility rather than pride. Isumbras fights valiantly so that "no man withstode his

dynte," he slays the "hethene kyng," and sustains "evell" wounds (437, 452, 465). He

demonstrates his devotion and prays to Jesus to "yeve hym grace in that felde," and

crosses himself before going into battle (430-1, 435).[39] After the battle, Isumbras accepts

no reward and refuses to give the Christian king his name and earn renown, only telling

him that he is a "smythes manne," and asking for food and drink (467). By acting in this

way, Isumbras does not break away from his penitential distance from society despite his

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[37] Shibanoff, Susan. "Prudence and the Artificial Memory in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *ELH* vol. 42, no. 4 (1975): 513.

[38] "kevere" is a form of the verb "coveren," defined in the MED as "to relieve (suffering)" (4b). In this text it seems to have a meaning similar to the modern "recover."

[39] For line 435, Mills glosses "And blessed [hym], sothe to sayn" as "crossed himself."

closeness to his former peers and their willingness to bestow worldly fame upon him.

Susan Crane defines chivalric incognito as "self-presentation" rather than "self-concealment," and argues that, "the pivotal function of chivalric incognito… is to establish or revise the perception of others concerning the disguised knight's merits."[40] Isumbras is, in many ways, doing this: he is revising his knightly identity to be built upon his spiritual merits. The way in which Isumbras adopts chivalric incognito is, however, not to establish worldly, public renown, but instead to establish a more spiritual version of renown as a nameless knight for the Christian faith. Isumbras maintains his penitential distance from the Christian king because he was not fighting for the king, but rather for the faith that this king represents. His self-presentation, then, is not to a worldly king but instead to God, referred to as "hevenne kynge" (529).[41] Because of these different motivations, Isumbras's incognito also differs from examples in other romances where chivalric incognito is adopted with the intention of future revelation. For example, Ipomadon presents himself in incognito several times in order to gain the favour of La Fere, and once that is accomplished reveals his identity as prince of Apulia. Conversely, Isumbras appears to have no intention of eventually revealing himself to this Christian king. To further his anonymity, despite self-identifying himself as "smythes manne," he does not return to that disguise. Instead, after he recovers from his injuries in a nunnery, he leaves the area and disguises himself differently, this time as a pilgrim (481, 491-9).

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[40] Crane, *Performance,* 132-3.

[41] Throughout the romance, God is often referred to heaven's king or king of heaven. Although this is not an uncommon formula, referring to God or Christ as King emphasizes Isumbras's role as specifically a knight serving a kind of king. For a list of other places in Middle English Romance that include this formula, see Roger Dalrymple's Appendix in *Language and Piety in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2000): 149-150.

Living in the Future: pilgrimage, absolution, and inactivity

In his pilgrim disguise, Isumbras completes his spiritual transformation by living

a contemplative life, separating himself from earthly time, space, and bodily concerns.

Isumbras's choice to become a pilgrim could be read as simply a continuation of penance

instead of as a disguise, but the text's focus on the external aspects of Isumbras's

transformation indicate that he is disguising himself in this moment. The moment of

disguising is described as follows:

> He hym purveyde schryppe and pyke
> And dyghte hym a palmere lyke,
> Ageyn that he wolde wende. (493-5)

That Isumbras "dyghte" himself "lyke" a pilgrim suggests that there is some disguising in

this action. Mills glosses "dyght" as "dressed," while the MED defines the verb

"dyghten" more generally as "to make (sth.into sth. else), change, turn, transform" (3b).

Both of these definitions suggest there is a conscious effort to transform appearance as

well as to become a pilgrim. In doing this, Isumbras cuts himself off from the renown he

has just gained from battling as a Christian knight, and focuses on the more

contemplative aspects of his penance. Lee Manion connects Isumbras's pilgrim attire

with the fact that "crusading had been associated with a long history of pilgrimage" and

with the movement in the fourteenth century that "express[ed] dissent from crusade

leaders" who were more militant, favouring instead the pilgrim's attire that

communicated "simple purity."[42] While this reading provides an understanding of

Isumbras's pilgrim disguise within a historical context, there is a long delay in this

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[42] Manion provides a nuanced look *Sir Isumbras* in the context of crusading efforts as pilgrimage, especially 1309 and 1320 reform movements of 'self-signed crusader[s]…associated with the spirit of reform." Manion, "*Sir Isumbras*'s 'privy' recovery," 82-83.

disguise before Isumbras eventually acts like a crusader, and during this time he acts instead like a contemplative pilgrim. As a pilgrim, his disguised identity is formed through devotion and this devotion ultimately completes his spiritual transformation. This disguise, however, like the smith's disguise, also immobilizes Isumbras because it prompts a different form of forgetting.

In the pilgrim disguise, forgetting is the result of living too much in the future, which is a kind of *pathway forgetting*.[43] After the text maps out Isumbras's journey to the Holy Land, there is another temporal gap: "And sevenn yer he was palmere thare, / With schrippe and pyke in sorowe and care" (508-9). This temporal gap is different from the one in the blacksmith disguise because the blacksmith disguise prompts forgetting through present routine and distraction whereas the pilgrim disguise prompts forgetting through devotion and too great a focus on what is to come. Here, forgetfulness is forgetfulness of the world and Isumbras only has his eye on a heavenly future: "forto fulfylle Goddes werke" (515).

This shift in focus is not coded as a negative thing: Isumbras's time as a pilgrim transforms him into someone who is more connected to God, but at the same time it also causes a challenge for when he does eventually integrate back into his worldly life. This form of virtuous forgetting is explored in the mid-fourteenth-century mystical treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing*. In this text, it is recommended that, "tyme, stede, &

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[43] The form of forgetting that is a lack of recollection. The memories may be well formed, but living in the future prevents the character from seeking pathways to reach the fully formed image

bodi…suhulden be forȝeten in alle goostly worching (59).[44] Here, forgetting time, place, and body allows a man in contemplation to come as close as possible to an understanding of God by forsaking the "reason and senses" of his worldly existence.[45] This virtuous forgetting for Isumbras involves an eye only on the future: he is looking ahead to knowing God as fully as possible and being forgiven for his past sins. Forgetting, in this context, is more of a separation from the world than a failure to remember.[46] Isumbras separates himself from time, as seven years pass while he is in a contemplative state. By wearing the same "pore wedes" for those seven years and going without "mete ne drynke," he is forgetting his body (517, 517).

Isumbras's use of place in this disguise is also telling of his transformation to a contemplative life. His movement is directed toward the Holy Land, "As Criste hym thyder gan sende" (501). Isumbras himself does not seem conscious of where he intends to go, and instead allows himself to be directed by his faith. Isumbras ends up "[b]ysyde the borrow of Jerusalem" without any "hows to harborow inne" (520, 519). Jerusalem as a space represents a duality of the earthly city and the heavenly city, as Augustine distinguishes in his *City of God*: "The two cities then were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city by a love of self carried even to the point of contempt for God, the

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[44] "Stede" in this context means, "place" (MED 1a). *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958): 111.

[45] Hodgson, Introduction, *The Cloud*, liii.

[46] Carruthers discusses a similar idea of spiritual forgetting having to do with conversion in a sermon by Bernard of Clairvaux, and clarifies that this forgetting is not erasure of memory, but rather "is a matter of *willed* 're-placement' and displacement." Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998): 97.

heavenly city by love of God carried even to the point of contempt for self" (14.28).[47]

Jerusalem as a space at the end of Isumbras's penitential journey is available to him as a

place that encompasses his separation from the world. It is no surprise that it is while he

is there that he is forgiven for his sins, as an angel comes and tells him:

> …Palmere, wellcome thou be:
> Hevenne kynge thus greteth the,
> And foryeveth the synnes thyne. (526-8)

At this point, Isumbras has completed his journey to the heavenly city, and has made a

sufficient spiritual transformation. Leila Norako, examining place names, suggests that

the geographical markers in this moment, being the only named places in the text,

"enhance 'virtual crusade' aspects of romance by establishing the territorial and cultural

landscapes of Isumbras's crusade and recovery projects."[48] Isumbras's crusade and

recovery actions, however, happen much later, and in this moment, his contemplative

existence allows him to forget the earthly significance of the space he is in for seven

years.

　　　　Although Isumbras's contemplative life and the virtuous forms of forgetting that

come with it lead to him being forgiven for his sins, he does not then stop existing in this

state. Isumbras no longer needs to do penance, but the kind of earthly forgetting

facilitated by his contemplative disguised life disorients him and he remains disguised as

a pilgrim. Although forgiven, Isumbras is still unsure of what to do: "Yet wyste he nevur

what to do / but forto lyve in care and wo" (535-536). This sense of hopelessness is a

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[47] Augustine *City of God: Volume IV: Books 12-15*. Trans. Philip Levine, Loeb Classical Library 414, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966): 405

[48] Norako, "*Sir Isumbras* and the Fantasy of Crusade," 182. The link to specific places is more evident in other manuscripts because they specifically refer to Acre as the place where Isumbras first arrives (Mills n.504, 139, Thorton MS; Hudson ed. 496, Caius and Gonville MS).

result of a sense of detachment between his former prideful self and his more recently

penitent self. The text, by delaying his happy ending, raises a pertinent issue of whether

or not the lifestyle of a nobleman contradicts the lifestyle of a virtuous Christian. This

question has already been given a partial answer when Isumbras fought for Christianity

as an incognito knight. In that instance, however, he maintained his anonymity because

he was still required to continue his penance. Now, he seems unsure of how to remember

himself as he once was.

In this moment, there is no indication that Isumbras remembers his family or

considers searching for them, and as a result, the reader is left with a sense that worldly

life is purposeless. Landers suggests that Isumbras cannot return to his past life because it

has been "interrupted and shattered…and since he was consciously eschewing any

material goods, all Isumbras has at the end of this period is a newly refined identity, free

of pride and joy in material possessions."[49] Yet it is troubling that his past life has been

"interrupted and shattered" to the extent that he cannot fathom any other life than to

wander "in sore pyne" (537). Somehow he had been able to negotiate his spiritual and

earthly identities in the distant past, as is implied when the bird first tells him "Thow hast

foryete what *thou was*" (50).[50] This is one of the most significant differences between the

romance and its hagiographic analogue, *St Eustace*. In the saint's life, Eustace is a pagan

general, and the purpose of his penance is a conversion to Christianity. The messenger (in

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[49] Landers, "Identity in *Sir Isumbras,*" 366.
[50] Italics mine.

this case, a stag) tells Eustace that he is the "god þat þou *knowest* nouȝt" (22).[51] Isumbras, however, must have previously been a good Christian knight in order to forget what he was. If it was possible for him to balance nobility and devotion to God before the opening of the text, then it follows that balance should be possible again.

It is also clear early in the text that Isumbras wants to return, after his penance, to his worldly life. In the opening, the messenger bird asks Isumbras to choose to complete his penance "in yowthe or elde" (53). He chooses to do his penance "in yowthe" so that he can have "welthe in [his] elde" (65-66). Landers suggests that this "assumption" that he will have wealth in his old age reflects a continuation of Isumbras's reliance on material wealth and indicates that Isumbras is "forgetting that he should focus only on his ultimate salvation and redemption after death."[52] Because the romance does end with Isumbras returning to wealth and *also* earning his salvation after death (he "lyved and dyed in gode entente" (790)) the end goal of the penance does seem to reflect his assumption. In fact, Isumbras's eventual return to power is an essential part of how his salvation and redemption play out. By the conclusion of the text, Isumbras is able to live out his earthly existence and interact with the wealth it brings without pride, and this helps him to achieve his spiritually driven goals. Isumbras's ultimate assimilation of his spiritual and earthly identities allows him to physically spread Christianity on earth, by winning "thre kynges londes" and converting their inhabitants (781-2). In the end, he

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[51] Italics mine. This version of the legend of Saint Eustace legend is from the South-English Legendary. *The Early South-English Legendary or Lives of Saints*, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS Original Series 87 (repr., London: Trübner & co, 1887, New York: Kraus Reprint Co, 1973). 393-402.

[52] Landers, "Identity in *Sir Isumbras*," 361.

accomplishes more by remembering his earthly existence, his family and his role as a knight, than he ever would have if he remained a penitent pilgrim.

Isumbras's post-forgiveness hopelessness demonstrates that he *needs* to recollect his past sins in order to return to his noble status without falling into the same prideful way of living. Prudent recollection provides a path to reconciling these identities. Albertus Magnus writes on the necessity of memory of the knowledge of both good and evil for prudent living: "this knowledge...is greatly aided by events that have already happened because by means of the past it will know in what way it should manage itself in the future."[53] If Isumbras forgets his past sins and only remembers his penance and devotion to God, he has no way to manage his future and will remain in the liminal space in which he resides after he is forgiven. Aquinas notes that living the purely contemplative life, as Isumbras does when he is a pilgrim, is "not properly human, but superhuman," and that the life of pleasure, Isumbras's life before his penance, is "not human but bestial."[54] Aquinas then explains that, "the properly human way of life is the active life which consists of living out the moral virtues."[55] The final step of Isumbras's journey is to live in this properly human way. It is necessary for him to remember his position in the world: his relationship with his family, his role as a (Christian) knight, and his role as a leader in ways that incorporate virtues. To accomplish this, the important

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[53] Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, 346

[54] Thomas Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on the Cardinal Virtues," trans R.E. Houser, in *The Cardinal Virtues: Aquinas, Albert, and Philip the Chancellor* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 163

[55] Aquinas, "Cardinal Virtues," 163. Although in this context Aquinas refers to all of the moral virtues, elsewhere he signals that prudence can be a means of preventing sin and has an especially important impact on the individual's lived existence (see p. 73)

components of his past earthly experiences must be recollected prudently within the context of his spiritual growth in order to fashion his improved final identity.

Prudently recollecting the past through memorial objects

Following Isumbras's forgiveness, the remainder of the text explores the ways in which the protagonist becomes reacquainted with his past, his family, and his martial ability and then selects which parts of his past life he can prudently rebuild. Much of the remembering that happens requires tokens of recognition that serve as memorial objects. The ways in which Isumbras interacts with these objects indicate a changed relationship to things: they are now memorial rather than material. In these final scenes, it also becomes evident that Isumbras needs to reintegrate with society in order to move on, and Isumbras's wife plays an integral role in setting an example of a virtuous ruler and reconnecting him to his worldly life in a way that will allow him to move forward and reconcile his spiritual and earthly existence.

Still disguised as a pilgrim, Isumbras arrives in a city where a "ryche qwene," whom we later learn is his lost wife, welcomes him and offers him charity (539-558). At the queen's court, Isumbras is in a space that connects him to many of the structures of his former life. In her hall, the queen "rewed hym most of all" and requests for him to "sytte above" everyone else (560, 567). Despite having been offered forgiveness, Isumbras demonstrates a reluctance to reenter these structures and continues to live in a penitential way, remaining disguised as a pilgrim for a long time. When he is brought food, he "ete right nowghte" (595). Isumbras's commitment to depriving himself even after he has received God's forgiveness challenges his ability to live prudently because

the disguise divides him: his disguised self has no real past to draw upon for the reconstructive process of prudent recollection. As a result, his past self with his family and noble status will have no future. By remaining disguised as a pilgrim, Isumbras is holding onto the memory of his spiritual journey (and what he lost to undertake it) and avoiding his past as a sinful knight, which had harmed him. "Living out the moral virtues" prudently requires him to recollect both of these things, and then use that recollection to reconstruct a better identity.[56]

In the queen's hall, Isumbras begins to remember his past, but there remains a disconnect between who he has become in his disguised life as a pilgrim and who he needs to become to re-integrate into worldly life. In seeing "game and gle / that he was wonte therin to be," Isumbras is reminded of how he once lived (571-572). This memory of what he once had overpowers him and brings him sorrow: "Theres he lette down falle" (573).[57] This demonstrates that when Isumbras recollects his past as a knight, he is also overwhelmed by the loss of it.

Although there is, at this point, no recognition of Isumbras by his wife, there is a sense that something about the pilgrim reminds the queen of her lost lord.[58] She initially shows an interest in him because he is the "poreste" of the men who come to her gate, but when she sees his sorrow, she is interested in knowing his whole story (558). She inquires about his past, and he tells her "his leye" (585). She responds to his story in a way that suggests that he reminds her of her former lord:

> For my lordes sowle Y wyll yeve the,

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[56] Aquinas, "Disputed," 163.
[57] Mills glosses "Theres" as "Tears"
[58] In contrast, in the Saint Eustace legend, Eustace's wife recognizes him right away (234).

> And for his love if he on lyfe be,
> Evurmore cloth and mete;
> And a chamber fayer and fre,
> And a page forto serve the,
> Withinne my castell yate. (589-595)

That she feeds, clothes, and houses the "pore palmer" for her "lordes sowle" suggests that Isumbras's story of his "aventours" connects her with the memory of her lost lord (580, 589, 584). This association between the poor pilgrim and her lost lord is instrumental in reintroducing him to court life.

The queen not only reintroduces Isumbras to structures of courtly life by giving him a place in her household with "a page forto serve" him, but she also sets an example of how to live out the virtues.[59] When Isumbras first arrives at her gate, she is demonstrating the "proper application of wealth" by giving alms to the poor and taking in "seke men that myghte not go" (557).[60] Such examples show a selflessness and humility that contrast Isumbras's earlier rule where his distribution of wealth was to his more visible servants to recognize the entertainment he received rather than to attend to sick individuals' human needs.

Recollection still happens slowly after Isumbras is in the Queen's castle despite the return to courtly structures and the example from his wife of how to live virtuously. As seen earlier, temporal fluidity often represents moments where Isumbras's disguises present memorial challenges. In this section, Isumbras remains in the Queen's castle as a pilgrim for an unmeasured amount of time while he is recovering his strength: "Now is

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[59] Christian virtue as being coded as feminine has been much discussed in studies of Chaucer, and also seems to be reflected in the characterization of Isumbras's wife. For brief survey of this scholarship see: Patricia DeMarco, "Violence, Law, and Ciceronian Ethics in Chaucer's "Tale of Melibee," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 30, no. 1 (2009): 130-131.

[60] Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 132.

syr Isumbras lafte thare: / I wote he is wele of his care" (595-6).[61] This is a different type

of temporal gap than the ones that appear earlier in the text because the time is not

measured in days, months, or years. It does, however represent a similar form of

forgetting to when Isumbras worked as a blacksmith. He is now very much focused on

the present and on becoming strong. Isumbras even takes up a position in the household

that resembles that of a knight, and even gains renown in that position: "He was so

myche and so hye, / All they of hym hadde envye" (598-9). Here, Isumbras re-integrates

into a knightly existence, but he is still ultimately disguised as a pilgrim. This episode's

narration even reflects this kind of dual state: the narrator refers to Isumbras, when he is

acting alone, as "the knyghte" (619, 644) but when he is interacting with other characters

or those other characters are speaking of him he is always a "palmere" (640, 661, 667,

679, 682). The text places Isumbras in this transitory position where he seems ready to

become a knight again, but remains disguised. This is not unlike the moment in *Havelok*

where Grim's sons treat the protagonist as a lord although his true identity has not yet

been revealed. As in *Havelok*, Isumbras needs external forces to reveal his identity and

help him to remember who he truly is. In this case, recollection occurs through the return

of memorial objects.

The process of recognition and subsequent removal of the pilgrim disguise begins

with the return of two memorial objects: red cloth and gold. Memorial objects are objects

of association that serve as starting points for recollection: "we begin [recollection]

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[61] This passage indicates more time in other versions. In this one, the temporal gap is not
clear and could be anywhere from days to years. Mills footnotes how these lines are
different in the Thornton MS (*c* 1440): "He duellid there full many a year / Til that he
was bothe hale and fere" (595-6, 142). These lines suggest that a very long time passes
with little action before there is any recognition.

sometimes from a likeness, sometimes from an opposition, and sometimes from an association."[62] Tokens of recognition become memorial objects by their associations with the moment they were first exchanged. Memorial objects in romance are often exchanged between lovers who have to be separated and they ultimately overcome the memorial challenges of disguise brought on by time. As McKinstry writes, "they recall both the time when they were last seen or encountered and also all that has happened since that point in time."[63] These objects, which had initially been given to Isumbras in exchange for his wife but were carried away by a griffin, are returned by the same griffin that took them (619-626). When he sees them, Isumbras remembers his losses:

> And whenne he syghe ther that golde,
> He thowghte his wife therefore was solde
> His sorowe he hadde in mynde (625-7).

These objects' position as memorial objects is clear: immediately upon seeing them, Isumbras recollects the moment and the significance of the moment he received them. As a result of this memory of sorrow, Isumbras focuses on the past.

The way in which Isumbras interacts with the gold and the mantel demonstrates a changed relationship to material things because these objects function memorially rather than as material wealth. The text emphasizes the use of the objects as memorial by linking memory to visual sensation. The importance of the visual goes beyond the formation and recollection of memory images, as is demonstrated in *Havelok* when he remembers the specific moment of his sisters' murders; the visual is also an essential reference in the process of recollecting or remembering abstract concepts. Aquinas stresses the importance of sight in the discussion of intellectual memory: "the

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[62] Albertus Magnus, "Commentary," 142.
[63] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance*, 106.

imagination would not be able to form shapes of figures pertaining to the sense of sight

unless there pre-existed forms which had been received and stored up in the treasure

house of memory or imagination."[64] Sight of concrete forms, in *Isumbras* the red cloth

and gold, is required to make connections to abstract things, such as the memory of an

integrated spiritual and courtly identity. Seeing the "rede clothe" is a reminder of a point

in Isumbras's journey when he had a family and also a reminder of how he lost his family

for the pride that stemmed from how he used very similar objects of wealth. The cloth

and gold were given to him in exchange for his wife, and they are also associated with the

loss of his last son. Shortly before he disguises as a smith, Isumbras is distracted by

following the griffin carrying the "rede cloth that he syghe," when his youngest son is

carried off by a unicorn (365-366). Finding these objects not only evokes the mental

images of the family that Isumbras has lost but, by association, they evoke what his

family brings with them: his place in earthly existence. Now that his penitential journey

is over, he needs to make use of the memories that these objects bring with them,

memories both of good (his family) and of evil (why he lost them).

    Isumbras reacts to the memory of his family returned to him through the mantel

and the gold by hiding them in his chamber and containing the memories in that space:

> Thawgh he were nevur so mylde of mode,
> Whenne he to his chamber yode,
> He syked al that daye;
> And so he dede at nyghte also,
> Whenne he might no forther go,
> In his chamber ther he laye,
> Ther he lyved and ledde hys lyfe (631-637).

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[64] Thomas Aquinas*, Questions on the Soul* (Q4:R.2). Trans. James H. Robb, (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1984): 79. *The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Electronic Edition*, Intelex Past Masters.

Although these objects demonstrate how Isumbras has a changed relationship to material

goods, the memories they bring cause him to be overwhelmed with unhappiness for his

losses; "he syke[s] al that daye" and retreats to his chamber because he "might no forther

go." While the mantel and gold are hidden, another unmeasured period of time passes,

during which Isumbras mourns his wife and children. He stays in his chamber, and

"lyved and ledde hys lyfe" there.[65] In this period of time, Isumbras is focusing on the past

in a way that makes it impossible to move forward. This is an example of remembering,

but not using the past to inform the present and the future, and instead living in the past.

Despite causing Isumbras to live too much in the past, these objects still reveal

that he has transformed. Upon finding the gold and mantel, "there is no indication that he

perceives it as a relief to his poverty."[66] Instead, these objects are not items of monetary

and material value to Isumbras, but now have an entirely memorial value. The changes in

the ways in which Isumbras interacts with "golde and fee" are woven into the text.

"Pryde of golde and fee" was his sin and having "nother golde nor fee" was his

punishment (15, 153). Gold was part of what separated Isumbras from his family, and in

the end it is what reunites them (189, 646). McKinstry, writing on the memorial function

of gold in the text explains that "gold functions not only as a thematic contrast between

material and spiritual wealth, nor as a conduit between loss and gain, but as an emblem in

the way memory develops and re-interprets experiences in order to reconcile apparent

oppositions."[67] This reconciliation, however, does not come easily. As discussed earlier,

when Isumbras finds the gold and mantel, he hides them where he cannot see them and

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[65] In Hudson's edition (Gonville and Caius MS), this line reads "So *longe* levede he that lyf," emphasizing the passage of time (637).
[66] Landers, "Identity in *Sir Isumbras*" 368.
[67] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance,* 112-113.

becomes overwhelmed with his sadness. At this moment, he is referring to the past by remembering his losses, but the meaning of these objects is not complete because he does not yet know that he is actually in his wife's castle. He requires his wife to see these objects and interpret their meaning in order to have his pilgrim disguise lifted.

As soon as Isumbras's wife discovers the gold, she remembers: "This hadde my lorde syr Isumbras" (654). She acts on this memory and confronts the pilgrim about the gold. One notable thing about this moment is that Isumbras's wife focuses on the meaning of the gold and its connection to her lost husband. Conversely, Isumbras is more concerned with the red mantel, not the gold, as symbolic of the loss of his family: it is the "rede clothe," "wavynge with the wynde," that he follows in the woods (620-621). This is an echo of earlier in the text where he follows the "rede cloth" the griffin is carrying and loses his last son (366). Finally, when Isumbras is confronted about the gold he answers: "I have lorne my wife and children thre; / My scarlet matell was born fro me." (676-677). Here, the loss of his family is the primary concern, and the scarlet mantel is remembered for its connection to that loss. This focus on the meaning of the mantel and its connection with the loss of his family, instead of on its value in itself, reveals Isumbras's changed values. He is now recollecting the material things of his past prudently: this cloth, symbolic of his losses, can now be used to reunite him with his wife, which then ultimately leads to him becoming a king.

Isumbras's recollection of how he lost the mantel and gold along with his family

ultimately enables his wife's recognition and brings about their reunion.[68] Recognition

occurs immediately after Isumbras explains the significance of these objects: his wife

kneels to him and "thank[s] God of His grace / that they togedere wer mette" (673-5). In

reuniting Isumbras and his wife, these memorial objects have served their purpose and

are never again mentioned in the text. Once reunited, Isumbras and his wife bring

everyone together and Isumbras is crowned king:

> A ryche brydale dede they bede,
> Ryche and pore thedyr yede,
> Welcome who so wolde.
> They corownyd Ser Ysumbras right
> And made hym kyng, that noble knyght. (682-6)[69]

Isumbras's wife's position as queen allows him to become king, but it is everyone, the

"ryche and pore," that crowns him. That he is now providing for anyone "who so wolde"

presents a contrast to the Isumbras of the opening whose generosity was self-serving.

Isumbras's position of king now also allows him to enact and recollect his transformed

spiritual identity within the context of a powerful earthly one.

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[68] In this paragraph, for my discussion of Isumbras's reunion with his wife and
Isumbras's ascent to king, I will be referring to Hudson's edition because its base text
(Caius and Gonville MS) better reflects the general patterns of this episode while Mills'
base text (Cotton) contains variations from how the other manuscripts containing this
episode present it. One major variation is that the Cotton MS includes a third token of
recognition, a ring that was "broken betwyx [them]," that solidifies the husband and
wife's reunion (684). Isumbras's story of how he lost the mantel and gold seems to bring
about initial recognition as it does in the other versions, but this last token which (unlike
the mantel and the gold) was shared privately between husband and wife when they were
parted (320-324) stands as proof that his story is true. I will, however, discuss the more
common version of the romance where only the mantel and the gold appear.
[69] These last two lines do not appear in the Cotton MS (Mills' edition), but this is again a
variation that does not reflect the general pattern. The coronation at the feast is made
even more explicit in the Ashmole MS (1475-1500), which specifies that "crowned he
was that iche nyght" (712). *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Middle English Verse*.
Ed. George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 2008).

The Changed self and its rewards

After Isumbras's disguise is lifted, it becomes clear that he is able to use his spiritual transformation to define his actions as a king. Although he now is "in more welthe then evur he was," he does not become overly invested in the material world as he was in the opening (719).[70] Instead, his spiritual goals come first, as is demonstrated when his first action as a king is an attempt to convert "hem that hethene were" in his "many ryche londes" to Christianity (723, 717). In doing this, Isumbras finally achieves the balance of remembering both the spiritual and the earthly self.

When they are about to go to battle Isumbras and his wife are abandoned by their people. At this point, they both are prepared, despite having regained everything, to lose it all for their spiritual goals. Expecting to die in battle, Isumbras tells his wife: "Now have good daye, / For now and for evurmore" (146). She responds by offering to join him, "If Jesu wolde us grace sende/ That we myghte togydur ende" (742-3). Although this willingness to die for their faith may seem to be a situation where the spiritual self eclipses the earthly one as it did during the penance, this action is different and reflects the dual role of the medieval Christian on earth who, as Jaques LeGoff describes, "must simultaneously renounce the world, which is only his transitory resting place, and opt for the world, accept it, and transform it, since it is the workplace of the present history of salvation."[71] These spiritual goals for which Isumbras is willing to die as a king are unlike his penitential goals, which were to ensure his own salvation. Instead, this action

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[70] This line, that Isumbras is "off more welthe thenne evere he was," is repeated in the final stanza in Hudson's edition (760).

[71] Jaques LeGoff, "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages," in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980): 31.

that involves spreading Christianity on earth considers many souls beyond his own. The

difference is an important one when comparing the focus on the earthly in the romance to

its hagiographic analogue. In the saint's life, Eustace, though also a soldier, is not

martyred in battle, but instead is martyred for expressing his personal piety by refusing to

engage in pagan worship and telling the Roman Emperor that he "belieue[s] a-mis" (282).

In the end, while Eustace is martyred (but canonized for his personal devotion), Isumbras

is rewarded for remembering both his spiritual and earthly identities, and attempting to

use them together in an effort to transform the world.

For his efforts in spreading Christianity on earth, Isumbras is rewarded with the

opportunity to continue his life. Miraculously his three sons, who are now knights, are

returned just in time to help Isumbras and his wife win the battle (751-2). When the sons

identify themselves, they inform him of how they were sent: "The grace of God us hyder

dede sende" (766). After the initial battle, Isumbras, with the help of his sons, is able to

continue to work towards his goal of winning the surrounding lands for Cristendom:

"And aftur, thre kynges londes gon they wynne, /And cristned all that were therinne"

(781-2). In the end, by using his position as a king on earth Isumbras accomplishes much

more in the service of God in his actions on earth than he ever did during his penance,

and the protagonist ultimately achieves a balance between his earthly and spiritual selves.

He not only achieves this balance for himself but also, in the end, passes that same

balance down to his sons, whom he crowns "kynges with his honde" (785). In the end,

we are shown the end result of all the trials Isumbras endured during his penance:

> [Isumbras and his sons] lyved and dyed in gode entente,
> Her sowles I wote to hevenn wente,
> Whenne they dede ware. (780-792)

With the understanding gained from his spiritual transformation, Isumbras recollects his

transformation prudently and is able to live devoutly on earth. As a result, he secures not

only his own soul's future after death, but also those of his family and his subjects.

Conclusion

Although Isumbras does not directly commemorate his disguised identities as

Havelok does, without the experiences of forgetting and transformation that the disguised

Isumbras underwent during his penance, he would not have been prepared to live

virtuously. Aquinas writes: "Now experience is the result of many memories…and

therefore prudence requires the memory of many things."[72] Throughout the romance,

Isumbras's many experiences teach him how to live prudently. He learns the effect of

living too much in the present in the smith's disguise, which manifests itself in forgetting

from distraction; he learns the effect of living too much in the future in the pilgrim's

disguise, which manifests in forgetting the earthly self; and he learns the effect of living

too much in the past when he remains disguised after he has received God's forgiveness,

which manifests itself in despair and the inability to use the past to move forward. In

order to successfully combine his spiritual and noble identities, Isumbras needs to use his

disguised experiences to employ his recollected past, to understand the present, and to

plan for the future and live prudently. Isumbras's disguises are transformative because

they transform him into both a hard-working smith who uses that skill to fight for

Christian lands as an incognito knight and a contemplative, spiritual pilgrim whose

virtuous forgetting leads to his forgiveness. The disguises are also transformative because

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[72] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* II.II, Q48A1.

the memorial challenges they pose lead to his ability eventually to balance earthly and

spiritual existence.

Conclusion: The experience of transformative disguise and the value of forgetting

This thesis began with the following questions: how do disguise and forgetting intersect and what does self-forgetting in disguise do in the narrative? In these explorations of the disguises in *Havelok* and *Isumbras* that involve self-forgetting, I have established that the disguises dramatize and bring forth for the audience's consideration the role of forgetting in the process of identity transformation. I have found that there is interplay between these two processes: forgetting is implicated in the circumstances that force a character to conceal his identity, and it also occurs while the character is disguised, making the disguises themselves more convincing and long lasting. In these two examples, disguise becomes a unifying element of the plot, one that transforms identity rather than simply concealing or communicating it. The chapter on *Havelok* traced how the protagonist develops from a toddler to a young man in an alternative identity as a fisherman's son, forming strong relationships and finding success within those structures. The chapter on *Isumbras* traced the penitential journey of its protagonist who, in several penitential disguises, remembers his spiritual Christian identity while simultaneously forgetting his earthly one.

The above findings were expected based on my initial observations of the distinctive function of disguise in these texts. More unexpectedly, this study has also demonstrated how in the moments of reclamation and recognition, the protagonists remember the significance of disguised identities in conjunction with their true identities in order to form the final iteration of their identities. In *Havelok*, the protagonist explicitly uses the relationships from his disguised identity to reclaim his position as king of

Denmark and acquire England. In *Isumbras*, this process of forming an integrated final identity is expressed more generally: when the protagonist is reacquainted with his earthly identity, he uses the spiritual transformation from his penance to guide his actions as a specifically Christian leader on earth. The two texts chosen were the examples that I found that had the longest moments of forgetting in disguise and depicted the most defined disguised identities. In each text, forgetting is both problematic and useful: although forgetting causes disruptions in the plot in the forms of distraction and inactivity, none of the final identity-defining recollections could happen without first forgetting.

Although the disguise motif is very common in romance and romance is a genre that is deeply concerned with identity formation and transformation, disguises very rarely operate so as to effect change in identity and self-knowledge. What this study adds to the discussion of the genre is an exploration of a rarely studied form that the popular disguise motif can take. More often, the disguises of romance serve as tools that are linked to identity only insofar as they conceal it or outwardly assert it. Because of this, these external and performative disguises are the forms of disguise that receive the most scholarly attention. They, however, only tell part of the story of identity. If, as Crane posits, instances of performative disguises demonstrate how "performance is a reliable measure of who one actually is," the instances of transformative disguise that this thesis has addressed demonstrate how the disguised character becomes who he eventually is.[1] By asserting that these characters depict a complex sense of interiority, this thesis's communications about disguise, memory, and identity have resisted the traditional

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[1] Crane, *Performance*, 176.

narrative about Middle English popular romance characters as flat and generic. Further, by exploring an exception to romance patterns, this thesis promotes the study of variation, complexity, and creativity within the genre.

At the same time, though these transformative disguises that involve self-forgetting are exceptions, they are also still rooted in romance patterns, so understanding how forgetting and disguise intersect can be very useful in understanding the genre's variations more broadly. Acknowledging and defining this form of transformative disguise provides a framework for future scholars to examine if it appears in other traditions like French and German romance, or to compare this function of disguise to the use of disguise in other genres of medieval narrative such as hagiography, chanson de geste, epic, or chronicle.[2]

More broadly, because identity formation is so essential to the romance genre, what these texts convey about memory and forgetting models how individual experience and change can be integrated into identity. Disguise is by no means the only way in which identity transformation is brought on by change or experience in medieval romance. Romance narratives often include supernatural transformations and metamorphoses or moments of loss of identity through madness or lovesickness. Many of these moments have been identified as identity-defining and transformative, but scholars

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[2] My brief discussions of the Havelok story in Gaimar's chronicle *Estorie des Engleis,* and of Isumbras's hagiographic analogue, the legend of Saint Eustace, suggest that perhaps this function of disguise is not the same in other genres, but these genres may have their own unique communications about forgetting and disguise.

may wish to consider the role that processes of memory and forgetting play in integrating these changes into identity.[3]

Medieval theories of memory formation, disruption, and recollection were essential in locating moments of forgetting in these texts and distinguishing between types of forgetting and how they occur. These theories, though they come from completely different contexts than the romances, provide a general representation of how memory and forgetting were thought to function at the time when the romances were composed. It cannot be denied that forgetting is an important issue in a culture that, as Mary Carruthers' asserts, "was fundamentally memorial."[4] In the monastic and scholastic contexts whence most of the late medieval theoretical texts on memory emerged, forgetting was to be avoided and understandably so, because it would have been damaging to the task of acquiring, synthesizing, and sharing knowledge as scholars, teachers, orators, and preachers. This is why it is important to examine memory and forgetting in other cultural products of medieval society like romance. In the endings of both these romances, recollection provides a sense of closure and presents the protagonists' final identities, but it is the forgetting in disguise that precedes those final identities that does the work of transformation. What this study has shown is that romances do not always place memory and forgetting at odds with one another, but rather can depict them as interconnected processes to be balanced constructively in efforts to define social roles.

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[3] For a discussion of madness and identity in French romance see: Sylvia Huot, *Madness in Medieval French Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Caroline Walker Bynum, in her study of metamorphosis and identity in a variety of medieval contexts, also briefly explores werewolves and personal identity in romance. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).
[4] Carruthers, *Book of Memory,* 9.

Although these romances are hundreds of years old, these texts' communications about how life experience, forgetting, and recollection shape identity are important even today. Philosophers have long considered memory to be a key component of self-knowledge. In the fourth century, Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*: "in [my memory] I meet myself."[5] Several hundred years later, John Locke (1632-1704) in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) asserted that memory is the basis of a stable personal identity over time.[6] Today, psychologists have specific terms to represent the concepts I have discussed in medieval contexts: the term for our memories of past personal experiences is the autobiographical memory and the term for experiencing the self through memory is autonoetic awareness.[7] Modern thinkers in many different areas debate what types of memory are required for shaping a personal identity, the unreliability of autobiographical memory, and how identity changes and develops over time. These concerns are also widely discussed outside of academic circles. For example, a greater awareness of memory disorders like Alzheimer's disease has driven the general public to consider questions about how to preserve identity when memory is failing. Additionally, themes of memory, forgetting, and identity are pervasive in popular culture; these range from stories of amnesia patients who forget who they are to undercover agents who live out their alternative identities and forget their duties.

If memory and identity are so inextricably linked, then to what extent is forgetting a loss of identity? Alternatively, can forgetting open up the space for new memories and

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[5] Augustine *Confessions* X.8, 215.
[6] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.27, 9-10. (1689) Ed. Peter H. Niddich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975): 335
[7] Robin Fivush, "The Development of Autobiographical Memory," *The Annual Review of Psychology* (2011): 561.

perhaps even transform identity productively? Such questions are pertinent now that digital memories can record and store the past indefinitely, including episodes that maybe should be forgotten. The medieval romances explored in the preceding chapters, in their own way, have something to add to contemporary readers' understandings of how memory and forgetting shape personal identity. This thesis has demonstrated that, in Middle English romance, disguise can become a moment for forming a new identity if individual characters forget enough of their past. In these texts, forgetting the past does not prevent new memories (and new identities) from forming. Instead, forgetting plays a role in transformation, and what is eventually recollected from the transformative disguises can inform the re-articulation of identity. In the end, the lesson these romances teach us is a very human one: forgetting undoubtedly causes problems, but is also a necessary part of life.

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