

MALE FRIENDSHIP
IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

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One of the more touching scenes in the Middle English romance *King Horn* is the reunion of the two lovers, Horn and Rymenhild, after a separation of seven years. "Hi kuste hem mid y-wisse / And makeden muche blisse" (1219-20). Just a few lines later, however, is described with strikingly similar language the reunion of Horn and his best friend, Athulf, after the same long period of separation. "He him overtok y-wis— / He makede swithe muchel blis" (1243-44). The action has focussed largely on Horn's return to Rymenhild, which suggests that the love bond is the more significant of the two relationships; yet the presence of the intensifying adverb "swithe" used in the Horn-Athulf reunion suggests that, of the two, the reunion with Athulf is more significant to Horn than the one with Rymenhild. In the end one can say perhaps that Rymenhild and Athulf are equally important in Horn's life. This pairing of Rymenhild and Athulf as the two emotional centers of Horn's life is also apparent earlier in the poem when lover and best friend must be separated from their hero. Rymenhild swoons, her distress is so great (744). Athulf manfully weeps and sighs (759-60). Clearly the text indicates that Horn has two important relationships in his life that define his character: he is Rymenhild's lover and Athulf's best friend. This pairing of female lover/male best friend is a pattern that is repeated in medieval romances over and over again. Havelok, as he climbs the social ladder on his way to regaining both his throne and his rightful equal status to Goldeboro, gains appropriate male companions devoted to his cause each time. Sir Launfal is Dame Tryamour's lover and Arthur's beloved steward. Even in *Sir Orfeo* the hero inspires devotion from both his wife and his steward, who faints when falsely told Orfeo is dead and who "Over and over the bord . . . threwe / And fell adoun to his feet" (554-55) when in his gladness he too is reunited with his lord. Certainly the most complex treatment is in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* where the relationships between hero, lover, and friend are particularly interfused—Launcelot is both Arthur's best friend and worst foe, being Arthur's wife's lover. To say the least, the hero's relationships with other male characters in these romances cannot be disregarded.

Much has been written recently on women in the romances (cf. Archibald, "Women and Romance" 153-69; Kooper, "Love and Marriage" 171-87 in *Companion*) and certainly the love aspect of the romance as a literary form cannot be ignored, even if the heroines in

medieval romance tend to be one-dimensional, pallid, and passive creatures. Yet women such as Rymenhild and Goldeboro act primarily as the motivators of the men in their lives and add very little to the hero's development as a character beyond this plot device. Thus to focus upon the hero/heroine relationship is to have a very limited view of the romance as a genre. Such a view also ignores the fact that, as John Stevens and Elizabeth Archibald have individually argued, "'romance reading upon the book' . . . emphasize[s] what goes on inside the man's head" (Stevens 43) and "most medieval romances are overwhelmingly concerned with male values, male pursuits" (Archibald 168). Chivalry, no matter how poorly a poet may have understood or portrayed the concept in his poetry, is a military institution—the *brotherhood* of knights—that involves men fighting with and against other men. It is a male world in which the woman has an uncertain place. The attitudes expressed in many of the romances themselves neglect this uncertainty. As said before, Rymenhild in *King Horn* and Goldeboro in *Havelok the Dane* are little more than plot devices—something for the hero to rescue and protect as a means to prove himself. Chivalry is indifferent to them otherwise. Other romances regard women with suspicion as invasive, intrusive beings that disrupt the harmony of men. The evil Gwenere in *Sir Launfal* disrupts the Round Table by breaking the bond that existed between Arthur and Launfal for ten years. Even Dame Tryamour can be said to break the Round Table when she removes Launfal from the human world at the end of that poem. Malory's Guenevere is undoubtedly the ultimate example of a woman whose presence among men brings chaos—although even here the woman is usurped in importance by men and male concerns. The discovery of Guenevere's adultery might begin the sequence of events that leads to the collapse of Arthur's Round Table, but the deaths of Gareth and Gaheris and Gawain's insistence upon revenge mark the point of no return. The bonds between male associates, indeed, are as important as any courtly love relationship in the romances between a man and a woman.

In spite of the male domination of the romance world, very little has been written on the minor male characters in the romances and even less has been done on how the lesser male figures relate to the hero. Such is the point of this paper. The male friendships can in fact be broken down into four large categories of relationship. There is the relationship, such as between Havelok and his foster brothers or Orfeo and the steward, that is one of marked social inequality —

in effect, a master-and-servant relationship. A second type of friendship is that between the up-and-coming hero and a mentor, as can be seen between Horn and King Aylmar and King Thurston as well as between Havelok and several characters in that text, most notably perhaps Sir Ubbe. Here the mentor is, at least for a time, superior in some respect to the hero. The third type of friendship is between near social equals, of which Horn and Athulf or Launcelot and Tristram are prime examples. This category is closest to a true male friendship. The fourth category cannot be described as a friendship but is nevertheless a significant male bond in the romance, that is, the relationship between the hero and the villain. *King Horn* notably elaborates upon only two of Horn's twelve male companions—Athulf and Fikenhild: "Athulf was the beste / And Fikenhilde the werste" (29-30).

In terms of characterization, what can be said of most of the minor supporting male characters in the romances is that in general they are colorless and even more one-dimensional than the hero and heroine. Often they have one identifiable feature that sums them up. Athulf is characterized by his loyalty to Horn, Havelok's foster brothers by their willingness to be used in any way that advances the cause, Orfeo's steward by his faithfulness to his absent lord. In some respects three of the four kinds of male associates are most identified by absence—actions that they do not take suggest there are qualities that they do not possess. Rymenhild, for example, makes advances to Athulf in her mistaken belief that he is Horn:

Heo sette him on bedde;
With Athulf child heo wedde;
On hire armes tweie
Athulf heo gan leie. (303-306)

In spite of the obvious sexual temptation presented him, Athulf immediately tells Rymenhild the truth and adds, "Ich nolde him ne thee bigile!" (324). Athulf's loyalty to Horn is evident here, but so too is the absence of licentiousness in his nature. Likewise, we know that the steward in *Sir Orfeo* lacks personal political ambition as much from what he does not do—that is, he does not make himself king even after ten years have passed since Orfeo disappeared and Orfeo himself had instructed his people to choose a new king after a reasonable time had elapsed—as from what he does do—his joyful reaction at Orfeo's return. Ubbe in *Havelok the Dane* also

demonstrates absence of political ambition and absence of sexual licentiousness in his treatment of Havelok and Goldeboro. There is never any suggestion in the text that his actions are motivated by anything other than at first admiration for Havelok and then loyalty to his true king.

The exception is the villain, who is given a full set of evil characteristics: Fikenhild, for example, shows himself to be disloyal, envious, underhanded, violent, proud, and sexually rapacious. All in all he displays a veritable wealth of negative qualities compared to loyal, chaste Athulf, proving again perhaps that vice always seems to be more interesting than virtue. Villains tend to be one-dimensional in their evil, especially in the less sophisticated romances. The only absence here is usually the absence of virtue. Fikenhild has no redeeming characteristics; he is thoroughly vile. Godard in *Havelok the Dane* proves himself to be a prudent military commander and brave warrior, as well as an impious, tyrannical usurper. Unlike the simply villainous Godard, who dies in a cowardly manner roaring and crying for mercy, Godric meets his no-less-grisly and shameful death with stoic silence. He is granted some small measure of respect in the poem. More sophisticated romances like *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* blur the line between blackhearted villain and reliable friend to an even greater extent. Other than the abduction of Herodis, the King of Faery does not act in the typically villainous manner. He causes no harm to come to Herodis and treats the disguised Orfeo with courtesy. Given the moral lesson involved, it is hard to tell if the Green Knight is more villain or best friend to Gawain. And Launcelot, the best knight in the realm and Arthur's right hand man, is also a traitor, usurper of Arthur's bed, slayer of innocent knights, and a man unable to resist sexual temptation. Vice indeed seems more interesting than virtue.

But the focus of the romance is the hero, not the subordinate characters. And, indeed, the minor characters exist to do more than advance the plot. They exist to help give depth to the character of the hero, each type of male associate in his own way. The first category, that of the social inferior, shows the hero in social interaction with a class of men who are vulnerable to the abuse of authority. Havelok's relationship with his three foster brothers best illustrates this kind of friendship. It is certainly unequal. Havelok is a king's son and they the sons of a simple fisherman. They may have been raised together as one family, but Havelok is obviously superior to them in all ways—in his enormous appetite, his massive height, his great

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strength, his physical attractiveness, and his royal bearing. He is, as Godric himself ironically notes, "The hexte man that mighte live, / The beste, the fairest, the strangest ok . . ." (1080-81). It is no surprise then that Grim's sons and daughters kneel when they greet their "lord" Havelok returning with his new bride and then promise faithful, unending service:

Thou maght us bothe selle and yeve;
Thou maght us bothe yeve and selle,
Withthat thou wilt here dwelle.

.....
Thou shalt been loverd, thou shalt been sire,
And we sholen serven thee and hire. . . . (1218-1239)

There is no evidence that Grim told his children the secret of Havelok's identity. They seem to know by instinct their proper subordinate relationship to him. What then is the reader to make of this unquestioning affirmation of loyalty? On one level it is a testimony to Havelok's presence as a character. He has an inborn magnetism that attracts a succession of male characters to his aid, first Grim, then Bertram the cook, then Grim's children, then Ubbe, Bernard Brown, the lords of Denmark, and finally the lords of England who accept him as their king. But Havelok's return to Grimsby does more than confirm again for the reader his charisma. The pledge the brothers make is extreme: it amounts to a willingness on their part to be sold into slavery on Havelok's behalf. Donald Sands argues that "the phrase is mere declaration of loyalty to Havelok" (89n), as if the promise is unimportant, but such a view misses the nuances of the occasion. It is important that Havelok be shown to be capable of inspiring such extreme loyalty, yet it is equally important that Havelok be shown *not* to take the brothers up on such an offer. There is trust here on both sides of the friendship. Havelok trusts that his brothers will come through for him no matter how desperate the situation; the brothers trust that Havelok will not presume too much from them. Absence defines Havelok's character here as one not given to the abuse of authority. His treatment of his brothers reassures the reader that Havelok is indeed a hero, a just man like his father rather than a tyrant like Godric and Godard.

Another demonstration of the same point can be seen in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain does not have much to do with men of inferior station, but three brief instances where he does

bear testament to his innate goodness as a hero, as a man who has due regard for the services rendered him by menials. The first is upon his arrival at Hautdesert in his encounter with the porter (807-814). This first episode underscores Gawain's decorum and politeness. He addresses the porter with the familiar "pou" and is responded to by the porter with the correct, formal "3e" and "yow." Their choice of pronouns mutually marks out the significant difference in rank between them. Otherwise Gawain treats the porter with respect. He calls the man "Gode sir" and phrases his request that the lord of the castle be informed of his desire for harborage as a question ("woldez pou go my ernde" 811), rather than a command. On one level Gawain's actions here contrast with the arrival of the Green Knight at Camelot. Gawain asks permission to enter Hautdesert; the Green Knight "hales in at þe halle dor" (136) of Camelot without invitation. Yet even if the main focus here is upon Gawain's decorous attitude toward a social equal, the lord of the castle, still the reader learns something more about him as a man. Gawain too is defined by absence. He is not arrogant, he is not unkind in his treatment of the powerless. The second instance reinforces the reader's sense of Gawain's fair treatment of underlings. Upon his departure from Hautdesert, Gawain "prayses þe porter bifore þe prynce kneled" (2072). Instead of simply having the hero depart, the poet makes a point of having him acknowledge the efforts of the porter to please him. Thus the reader understands that Gawain's courtesy extends beyond lords and ladies to porters as well. He does not ignore the lowly.

The third instance is rather different. The servant who directs Gawain to the Green Chapel first describes the Green Knight in truly horrific terms and then makes Gawain an offer to swear to remain silent if Gawain flees the scene (2097-2125). This is quite obviously another test of Gawain's honor. Because all of Camelot and all of Hautdesert knew of his promise to meet the Green Knight, Gawain could hardly fail to do so without losing face. In this instance, however, it would be his word as a knight against the word of a mere servant, and one who swears at any rate to remain silent. The temptation is clear: Gawain could keep his reputation and escape unscathed from the Green Knight's axe. He of course refuses the opportunity as unworthy of a knight. Yet his response to the man's offer is also telling:

"Grant merci," quop Gawayn, and gruchyng he sayde:

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“Wel worth þe wyȝe, þat woldez my gode,
And þat lelly me layne I leue wel þou woldez.”

(2126-2128)

Coming from a social inferior, the man's offer is an impertinent affront to Gawain's honor. How dare such a man question a knight's courage or attempt to dissuade him from fulfilling a promise! Use of the word, “gruchyng,” reveals Gawain's negative feelings at the man's offer. Nevertheless he does not respond to the insult with anger or violence. Nor does he question in turn the man's integrity. Instead he thanks the man politely for expressing concern. Gawain again proves that he does not abuse his power over social inferiors. He is indeed a hero.

The first kind of friendship defines the hero's character externally in terms of social interaction with other male figures. The other three relationships develop the hero internally as mirror images of the hero in three different aspects. The second friendship, that of a mentoring relationship usually between a younger hero and an older man, serves to model what the hero is aspiring to become. Sometimes this mentor is the hero's own dead father, as is the case in both *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, where “good” King Murray and the exemplary kings Athelwold and Birkabein are the ideals that Horn and Havelok must emulate. To restore their kingdoms, both must follow in their fathers' footsteps and come to exemplify the same kingly virtues their fathers did—in both cases piety, courage, and leadership. Lesser mentor figures in both romances act as reminders of what the hero will become if successful. Kings Aylmar and Thurston remind us and Horn that he is a king's son, while Havelok works his way through a succession of fatherly, advising figures, outstripping each of them in turn until he becomes the man his royal, idealized father was. The common factor of the mentor figure is that he is somehow superior to the hero and possesses something that the hero has not yet acquired but can find through him. Malory's Launcelot illustrates the mentoring relationship in his connection with Gareth. Launcelot, not Gareth's elder brother Gawain, is Gareth's chosen mentor for knighthood, as is seen by the facts that Gareth asks to be knighted by him (181) and that Gareth refuses to take up arms against him, both on the tournament field (646-647) and finally on the field of battle where, unarmed, he meets his death, ironically, at Launcelot's own hand (684). Launcelot is to Gareth the very model of knightly behavior: “For there was no knyght that sir Gareth loved

so well as he dud sir Launcelot; and ever for the moste party he wolde ever be in sir Launcelottis company" (224).

The superiority of the mentor is often, but not always, to be found in greater age and a higher social station and the qualities that they imply. It can entail other kinds of superiority as well. Floris in *Floris and Blancheflour* relies upon the advice of several male characters, such as Daris the bridgekeeper and the "cruel and feloun" porter (*FB* 658) who possess inferior social station but superior worldly wisdom. Sometimes the mentor possesses moral or spiritual superiority, such as Archbishop Alryke in *Athelston* or the various hermits and palmers and even his own son, Galahad, in Malory's Grail quest, who guide Launcelot to the course of right action. Always, however, the hero by the end of the romance has incorporated the qualities of the mentor that he previously lacked—Horn and Havelok have royal status and royal virtues, Gareth has proven himself worthy of knighthood, Athelston has learned prudence, Floris adult intelligence, Launcelot spirituality enough to be granted a glimpse of the Grail.

The best friend, in contrast, is a subdued version of the hero and highlights the hero's own best traits. Athulf, for example, in *King Horn*, is a lesser version of Horn himself, and thus he acts as Horn's substitute several times in the story. Athulf is sent by Athelbrus in Horn's place to find out Rymenhild's intentions; Athulf is designated Rymenhild's protector during Horn's seven-year absence; Athulf is promised in marriage to Reynild in Horn's place fulfilling Horn's obligation to King Thurston; Athulf's reunion with his father is matched by Horn's reunion with his mother. But Athulf is more to the poem than a handy plot device. Since Athulf is so connected to Horn as friend and substitute, Horn can be said by extension also to possess the qualities that Athulf demonstrates. Athulf demonstrates the ability to withstand sexual temptation when he resists Rymenhild's advances. He is a chaste man. Horn's name on the other hand suggests the opposite of sexual restraint. It suggests in fact virility and sexual appetite—horniness—and invites perhaps speculation that the old sexual double standard exists here—Rymenhild as the heroine must remain a virgin throughout the story, but Horn does not. Yet we know, in spite of his phallic name, that Horn is chaste in essence because his double Athulf shows himself to be restrained in the face of similar sexual temptation. Likewise, Athulf's loyalty to Horn in the face of adversity is matched by Horn's loyalty to Rymenhild when the easier prospect of marriage

to another king's daughter—Reynild—is offered him, and by Horn's loyalty to his people and his father's memory. Every good quality that Athulf possesses, Horn can be said to possess also.

Tristram in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* has a similar relationship to Launcelot. That he is a mirror image of Launcelot is clear in the joust between them when they fight for hours without pause and without defeat. Upon their discovery of the identity of their opponent,

therewyth sir Launcelott kneled adowne and yeldid hym up his swerde. And therewithall sir Trystram kneled adowne and yeldid hym up his swerde, and so aythir gaff other the gre. And than they bothe forthwithall went to the stone and set hem downe uppon hit and toke of their helmys to keele them, and aythir kyste other an hondred tymes. (351)

The equal physical prowess, the identical actions, the identical phrasing, the merging of the singular pronouns "hym" and "his" into "they" and "hem" all suggest that Tristram and Launcelot are identical in all other aspects as well. Tristram, however, is an ironic version of the best friend, for while he does mirror all of Launcelot's excellent qualities, such as prowess in battle and generosity of spirit, he also highlights all of Launcelot's worst attributes in an exaggerated, unseemly fashion. Launcelot's adultery with Guenevere is matched, but also outdone by the adulterous and incestuous passion of Tristram and Isolde. As Launcelot betrays his friend, Arthur, in his bed, so Tristram betrays his uncle, King Mark. These two "best knights of the realm" both persevere in their folly, turning the virtue of fidelity into the vice of lechery. Through Tristram, in fact, Malory both praises the great potential of Launcelot as a knight and underscores the sinfulness which holds Launcelot back from realizing that potential until the very end of the text, when Launcelot finally turns from the earthly chivalry of Tristram to the spiritual chivalry of his son and mentor, Galahad.

If the best friend mirrors the hero's best traits, the villain possesses the negative qualities that the hero also potentially possesses and so must control or quash within himself. Fikenhild, for example, "gan wende / Rymenhild to shende" (1413-14) in an action exactly contrary to that of Athulf earlier in the poem and exactly identical to his own false accusation to King Aylmar that Horn "lith in bure / Under coverture / By Rymenhild thy doghter— / And so he

doth well ofte" (699-702). Yet more than mere disloyalty is involved here, since Fikenhild's lust for Rymenhild reminds the reader of Horn's own phallic nature.¹ Unrestrained sexual impulse, however, is not a heroic trait in *King Horn* and so Horn must be shown, more emphatically than his connection with Athulf, to be able to control this aspect of his manhood. Fikenhild's death at Horn's hand accomplishes this task, for in killing lustful Fikenhild Horn symbolically kills this tendency in his own character.

Similarly, Godric, more so than Danish Godard, functions in *Havelok the Dane* as Havelok's "evil twin" as can be seen by the fact that, while Godard is handily captured by Robert, one of Havelok's foster brothers, only Havelok himself can defeat the villainous Godric in single combat, and not with one easy blow. On one level, Havelok's victory over Godric is the final proof of Havelok's worthiness as a king. He does not need to rely on others to handle his military affairs for him, as he relied on Ubbe and his foster brothers in Denmark. On another level there is a more subtle aspect to the Havelok-Godric confrontation hinted at in Havelok's appeal to Godric's sense of honour before their climatic battle:

Thou wost full well, yif thou wilt wite,
That Athelwold thee dide sitte
On knees and sweren on messe-book,
On caliz and on patein ok,
That thou hise doughter sholdest yelde,
Than she were wimman of elde,
Engelond all everilk del.
Godrich the erl, thou wost is well!
Do nu well withuten fight;
Yeld hire the lond, for that is right. (2708-2717)

Why is such an appeal to the villain's sense of rightful obligation made? It certainly demonstrates Havelok's willingness to be a merciful ruler, but more importantly it reminds the reader of Godric's major faults. Godric is not one-dimensionally cruel like Godard. He is no more violent in his actions than any of the other characters, including Havelok. Nor can the fact that he threatens the lords of England to gain their support against foreign Danish invaders be held against him since Ubbe acts in a similarly coercive manner toward the Danish lords—"he weren for Ubbe swithe adrad / And dide sone all that he bad" (2304-05)—and with less patriotic cause. Godric's

particular villainy lies in the fact that he is forsworn. He did, unwittingly, fulfill his pledge to marry Goldeboro to the best man in the realm, but he also made an unfulfilled oath before God to hand the kingdom over to Goldeboro when she was of age. As such, Godric is a secular authority who trusts in his own worldly power and scorns the divine. Havelok, in contrast, is consistently throughout the text associated with the divine. He is exceptionally pious, praying in church and pleading for God's mercy before undertaking the sea voyage to Denmark. The mark that identifies him as Birkabein's son is in the shape of a cross, and an angelic vision reassures Goldeboro that she has married a "kinges sone and kinges eir" (1267). God, indeed, is on Havelok's side. But Havelok also becomes a secular authority, just as Godric did, and thus the potential exists that he too will come to put more stock in worldly, temporal authority than the divine. The defeat of the model of secular impiety at the hands of pious Havelok, however, indicates through action that this will not happen. Unlike Godric, Havelok has the balance correct between secular and the divine.

The four types of male associate described here are, of course, stereotypes, but romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* gain a level of sophistication in part by playing with the reader's expectations of the genre, including its handling of character types. Bertilak as host and fellow gamester at Hautdesert acts like Gawain's hearty good-natured chum; but as the monstrous Green Knight and a key participant in Gawain's misfortunes, he has villainous overtones as well. On the other hand, the lesson that Gawain learns about himself and the fallibility of human nature comes through Bertilak's agency, and Bertilak takes on a spiritual mentoring role in his "absolution" of Gawain's fault and his advice that Gawain put his experiences in perspective. Bertilak thus incorporates three of the four kinds of male friendship, leaving out only the social inferior—unless one wishes to make a tantalizing leap of logic and suggest that the guide who leads Gawain to the Green Chapel and who tests Gawain's sense of honor one final time in offering to tell everyone that Gawain kept his appointment with the Green Knight is really the shapeshifting Bertilak in yet another disguise. Bertilak's character, then, is developed almost to the same extent as Gawain's own, and he ceases to be an easily defined character.

Malory, too, plays with stock character types to create uncertainty in his readers' minds. Many of his characters are

straightforward stereotypes: the potential rapists Meleagant and Mordred would fit in comfortably as villains in the one-dimensional worlds of *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*; Galahad outshines even Horn and Havelok as an ideal model of Christian piety. The most memorable characters, however, are those who combine traits from the four stock sorts to create complex, multidimensional beings. Malory's Gawain has many of the villain's usual traits: impiety, hotheadedness, and murderousness, to name a few. But Gawain is much more than that. He is also his uncle's loyal supporter and giver of sage advice. Bors is a Grail knight but is also seemingly capable of advising his uncle on matters of strictly earthly honour. And Launcelot most of all is torn by the conflicting demands of his roles in the work. Nearly every heroic action he takes as an earthly knight is undercut by some aspect of villainy to it: he is Guenevere's servant in courtly love, but the affair is tainted by adultery and leads to catastrophe; he is the knightly mentor of Gareth, but also the unarmed Gareth's murderer; he is Arthur's best and bravest knight, but instrumental in the destruction of his friend and all that he loved best. Only when he ceases to be an earthly knight and becomes a monk does Launcelot become, at the very end of the work, the one-dimensional figure common to lesser romances.

In sum, what distinguishes the better romances from the lesser ones is partly the care taken with the characterization of the lesser male associates of the hero and the development of the male bonds between them. Less sophisticated romances like *King Horn* concentrate on the development of the hero and use the minor male figures and their relationships with the hero to that end. One well-rounded figure is the result at best. More sophisticated romances give depth to minor associates as well—greater depth to the whole work, of course, being the result.

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Notes

1. Fikenhild, like Horn, also has a very phallic name, if “fiken” is taken to be cognate with the German *ficken* (modern English ‘fuck’). See Carl Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1949) 4.67; Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1862) “ficken” 1617-1618. “Fiken,” of course, just as easily suggests the very appropriate qualities of guile and deceit. See *MED* “fiken” 554.

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