The Vagrant Knight: Loving the Stranger in *Amis and Amiloun*

The fourteenth-century romance *Amis and Amiloun* is notorious for its interrogations of the limits of friendship and morality. The porosity of the boundary between the two eponymous protagonists, indistinguishable in almost every way, poses a threat to the spiritual perfection of their friendship. While the loyalty between the two is steadfast, their friendship initially serves immoral purposes and is far removed from what Aelred of Rievaulx terms a "spiritual friendship", based on selflessness and charity, or *caritas*.[1] The romance, which is unambiguously Christian in outlook, requires us to ask: how can the friendship between Amis and Amiloun be exalted in a Christian context? I argue that the reimposition of the boundary between Amis and Amiloun is instrumental to their salvation. This differentiation is established during Amiloun's period of vagrancy, as he transgresses a series of boundaries – spatial, physical, and social – moving his identity further away from that of his friend. Through this alienating process, their friendship transforms from self-love into the Christian virtue of *caritas*, the cornerstone of spiritual friendship.[2] The implications of this reach outside the text, as the extended descriptions of Amiloun's experiences invite audiences to reflect on the spiritual and social importance of charity.

The text operates as a literary thought experiment: it takes two identical men who have sworn a pledge of "*trouth*"[3] (Foster, 2007: 20) to one another, and tests their bond by pushing it to – and over – the bounds of morality. Their doubling is the driving force of much of the narrative, which treats Amis and Amiloun in turn as each resolves the other's predicaments in increasingly ethically questionable ways. Amiloun impersonates Amis during a trial by combat, killing the steward who has – legitimately – accused Amis of sleeping with the duke's daughter. This deception leads to Amiloun being struck with leprosy and cast out of his home by his wife. Accompanied by his nephew, Amoraunt/Owaines, he wanders for three and a half years and arrives at Amis's court, where he is eventually recognised. Following the advice of an oneiric angel, Amis cures Amiloun by bathing him in the heart-blood of his children, a disturbing episode that highlights the text's moral quandaries. The children are miraculously revived, and the two men are buried in the same grave after dying on the same day.

The text throws up significant ethical questions, not least because the choices made by its characters jostle uncomfortably against the text's Christian components. As Jill Mann proposes, "we need […] to ask *why* a romance whose ethics seem so obviously 'bizarre' should obtrude elements of Christian belief and practice so insistently into its narrative" (Mann, 2008: 144). Indeed, the earliest Middle English version of the romance is found in the Auchinleck manuscript (c. 1330) between two homiletic texts, the *Speculum Gy de Warewike* and *Marie Maudelayne*. This text is so morally problematic, and its textual tradition so meandering, that Mann's question cannot be answered satisfactorily. Nicholas Perkins has suggested that this is part of its appeal: "it is likely that one reason for the popularity of the Amis and Amiloun story was […] the opportunity for its audience to debate or challenge the

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[1] Spiritual friendship is "begotten among the righteous by likeness of life, habits, and interests, that is, *by agreement in things human and divine, with good will and charity*" (Aelred of Rievaulx, 2010: i.45-46). Italics in the original, indicating that the words are derived from Cicero.

[2] Ken Eckert has noted that the text signals a problem with the secular idea of sworn brotherhood, and the text moves towards "Christian fraternity informed by *caritas*" (Eckert, 2013: 286). The mechanisms through which this transformation takes place, and its narrative significance, have hitherto been unexplored.

[3] This can be translated as "truth" or "loyalty". All translations of the Middle English *Amis* are my own unless otherwise stated.

paths taken, the ways in which the story almost literally doubles and confuses its protagonists, allowing for other storylines to shadow the narrative, and for sceptical commentary to be provoked from within the story itself" (Perkins, 2021: 83). As a kind of philosophical problem, it prompts more questions than it does provide answers.

The text's explicit incorporation of Christian elements –a feature not always shared with its analogues– adds another twist to the experimental nature of the text.[4] While the romance does not work in a straightforwardly allegorical manner, both men inhabit a nexus of Biblical identities that suggest that it is trying to work out the role of chivalric friendship within a Christian framework (Mann, 2008). In sacrificing himself for his beloved friend, Amiloun becomes Christ-like, his disease and poverty an echo of the beggar Lazarus, his trials an imitation of Job. Amis, in raising his friend from a social death, is also Christ-like, but his sacrifice of his children becomes a post-figuration of Abraham and even of God the Father. These echoes are neither stable nor do they map on to the text directly, but are a "sequence of mental pictures" (Mann, 2008: 145) that suggest that the text is interested in the role of friendship – the central preoccupation of the text – within Christianity.[5] Aelred of Rievaulx argues that spiritual friendship is selfless; it exists for no worldly profit, and its "fruit and reward is nothing but itself" (Aelred of Rievaulx, 2010: i.45). The text reflects this idea. Previously invested in a self-reflective love, Amis's love for Amiloun following his vagrancy demonstrates how friendship can only be truly perfect if it has the capacity to include those who are different, even the down-trodden and abject. As Amis's love for Amiloun shifts from a selfish to selfless love, it comes to resemble *caritas* and God's love for humankind, which is both made in his image and alienated from him.[6]

The text's premise reflects an idea first issued by Aristotle and then reiterated by Cicero: a true friend is like another self, ("*est enim is qui est tamquam alter idem*", Cicero, 1923: 188-89).[7] Much is made of Amis and Amiloun's uncanny resemblance in the early parts of the text: they not only share a conception night and a birthday, but look so alike that, in three of the four manuscripts of the text, even their parents cannot tell them apart "*but by the coloure of her cloth*" (Foster, 2007: 93-96).[8] Their remarkable similarities, however, throw the perfection of their friendship into question in a Christian context; it is, after all, easier to follow Christ's exhortation to "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:30-31) if that neighbour is, for all intents and purposes, a second self. Self-love was a low virtue, opposed to the high virtue of *caritas*, the love of God expressed through the selfless love of others, rooted in Matthew 25:35-36: "For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger, and you took me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me".[9] *Caritas* relies on the distinction between self and other, and for Amis's

[4] See Dannenbaum (1983). The first extant version of the story, a summary in a Latin letter by Rodolphus Tortarius, is wholly secular.
[5] Jill Mann has noted that in this poem "we see the knight as Christ," which is not to read the poem allegorically, but to "enhance the mystique of knighthood". "Amis and Amiloun could be said to participate in the Christic experience and thus to take on a sacral role" (Mann, 2008: 149).
[6] Eckert has suggested that Amoraunt represents *caritas* guiding Amiloun to his friend (Eckert, 2013: 291). I lack the space here to fully address Amoraunt's role.
[7] See also Saunders, 2013: 131. Cicero suggests that as an extension of self-love, the love of one's friend exists for its own sake rather than because it serves a purpose. This idea is reworked by Aelred of Rievaulx.
[8] "By the colour of their clothes." There have also been studies demonstrating that Amis and Amiloun are very different, such as Ford (2002). Le Saux (1993) has also noted this, remarking that Amylion appears to be higher born than Amys and receives more "positive epithets" (5).
[9] See also Rosenwein, 2006: 45.

ultimate sacrifice to be read as an expression of Christian love, the two men must become distinct from one another.

The text achieves this through Amiloun's leprosy and vagrancy. Although the period of vagrancy is frequently overlooked in scholarship, its mechanics are central to the operation of the romance.[10] The detail, depth, and space the Middle English poet devotes to Amiloun's vagrancy allows for the layering of Biblical, chivalric, and Classical images that together point to the episode's spiritual and social significance. By dwelling on Amiloun's vagrancy and slowly dismantling his identity, the text opens the door for the friendship between the two men to be transformed into an expression of *caritas*. As Corinne Saunders notes, the disease destroys the likeness that they once shared and "Amiloun becomes unrecognizable" (Saunders, 2013: 132). This is true for almost all versions of the story, which exists in several languages and within distinct traditions (with the 'romance' strands traditionally distinguished from the 'hagiographic'). However, the Middle English version's treatment of Amiloun's disease and the consequent period of vagrancy causes Amiloun to lose much more than his physical resemblance to his friend: he loses his sense of place, his social status, and even his narrative subjectivity as he undergoes years of wandering and begging. In distancing Amiloun from these aspects of his former self, he becomes not only unrecognisable in appearance, but so abject that Amis attacks him when he presents the token of their friendship, the golden cup, thinking that the beggar has killed his friend. Without carefully and gradually rendering Amiloun absolutely alien to Amis, the test of their bond would lose meaning, and the selfless grace Amis eventually displays to Amiloun would lack energy. Although Amis claims that he sacrifices his children because of the blood Amiloun shed for him on the battlefield, this horrific act only makes narrative sense in the context of Amiloun's extreme self-erasure for his friend's sake. Children, Aristotle claims, represent "other selves" for their parents (Aristotle, 1986: 1161b27-28), and as such, the symbolic negation of the self Amiloun endures is balanced by Amis's sacrifice of his "other selves". These acts of self-sacrifice, and the friends' love for one another despite Amiloun's complete transformation, demonstrate how their friendship ultimately – though not unproblematically – transcends the love of the self. As their friendship moves from a self-reflective to self-sacrificing love, it surpasses self-interest and mirrors divine love. While the friends remain devoted to one another, their eventual founding and endowment of an abbey gestures towards the charitability that characterised medieval *caritas*.

The Importance of Vagrancy in the Middle English Text

The Middle English version of the text is notable for the space it devotes to Amiloun and Amoraunt's wanderings, despite the lack of action during this period. Katheryn Hume summarises the plot: "when the disease appears, [Amiloun's wife] drives him from bed and board to a hut, then to mendicancy in a near-by town, and finally to the ultimate helplessness of a beggar's existence in a famine-pressed land. When the friends meet again the contrast between them is appalling" (Hume, 1973: 32). The Anglo-Norman version of the romance (early thirteenth century), a close relative of the extant Middle English version, spends

[10] Critics have largely focussed on the *reason* for Amiloun's vagrancy and disease. It has often been read as a test of "*trouth*," a kind of penance for his illegitimate substitution for Amis, a form of divine punishment, a test like that of Job, or a path towards sanctity as he suffers in *imitatio Christi* (Baldwin, 1980: 360; Eckert, 2013: 291; Delany, 2004: 65). While the Latin *Vita Sanctorum Amici et Amelii carissimorum* indicates that leprosy is a sign of God's favour, quoting Hebrews 12:6, this idea is conspicuously absent from the Middle English, suggesting it was read as a moral disease. Although lepers were sometimes understood to live out "purgatorial punishment on earth," this does not apply to Amiloun because he is not contained within a leprosaria (Welch and Brown, 2016: 53).

around 100 lines on this episode and primarily focusses on the events immediately following Amilun's exile from his court. There is little space given to the experience of wandering and begging, of feeling hunger and of enduring specific challenges, as the text summarises "*[p]ar la tere tant alerent / Faim e meseisses encontrerent*" (Fukui, 1990: 923-24).[11] The Middle English version, on the other hand, stretches the time between Amiloun's dismissal from his chamber to his arrival at Amis's court to almost 300 lines.[12] The recognition process occupies a further 282 lines. While this may reflect the overall expansion of the romance, it signals that the episode is important to the romance's programme. The Middle English version provides a level of detail and an affective quality not found in other versions, with a focus on Amiloun's trials, emotions, and laments. The episode casts him as a social pariah, and comments on the plight of outcasts and the wandering poor. The descriptions of his experiences are thick and prolonged, documenting the weather, the famine, the state of the roads, and the responses he meets to his condition, inviting audience empathy and implicitly commenting on the importance of charity as Amiloun and Amoraunt struggle to find food and succour.[13]

The amplification of this section not only builds tension by postponing the reunion of friends, but also presents a case for the importance of charity and almsgiving. Amiloun and Amoraunt's inability to find "*ac mete no drink*" (Foster, 2007: 1742) is contrasted with Amiloun's wife, who "*[w]oned ther in that cuntray / Nought thennes miles five, / And lived in joie bothe night and day, / Whiles [Amiloun] in sorwe and care lay*" (Foster, 2007: 1748-51).[14] This inequality is noted again in Amis's court, as Amis is served "*with riche coupes of gold*" while "*he that brought him to that state / Stode bischet withouten the gate, / Wel sore ofhungred and cold*" (Foster, 2007: 1905, 1906-8), among the other beggars.[15] While the text emphasises the injustice of Amiloun's position given his previous actions, these moments of contrast also highlight the importance of care for the sick, hungry, and cold. Almsgiving was often performed for the expiation of sins, benefitting the wealthy (Geremek, 1994: 20), but these moments give voice to the existential need for charity among the poor, and the ethical obligations the wealthy had towards others.

In addition to detailing their experiences of hunger and vagrancy, the narrator draws attention to Amiloun and Amoraunt's "*mode*," their feelings, which are, unsurprisingly, "*dreri*" in times of trouble and "*blithe*" when things are going well (Foster, 2007: 1644, 1715).[16] The tag "*sorwe and care*," often used to complete a rhyme, highlights the affective aspects of their plight, drawing the audience into their emotional states (Foster, 2007: 1265, 1541, 1751, 1763, 1814, 2168, 2178).[17] Audiences get insight into how the men feel when they are in private, "*togider alon*" (Foster, 2007: 1744).[18] In privileging the vagrants' experiences, the

[11] "They had so many travels though the land that they met hunger and hardship" (Weiss, 2009: 184).
[12] All manuscripts amplify the episode of vagrancy beyond that which is necessary to serve the plot or adhere to the source material, but Auchinleck contains additional, unique stanzas (Le Saux, 1993: 18).
[13] The Auchinleck manuscript was copied not long after one of Northern Europe's most dire food crises: The Great Famine of 1315-17. Food shortages continued until 1322. William Chester Jordan notes that while almsgiving did not cease during the Famine, it tapered off: "by reporting the great and growing hordes of roving beggars in [1316] and during 1317, chronicler after chronicler unmasks the failure of local charity and credit to contain the misery" (Jordan, 1996: 111).
[14] "Neither food nor drink"; "lived there in that country, not five miles from thence, and lived in joy both night and day while Amiloun lay in sorrow and care".
[15] "with rich cups of gold"; "the one who brought him into that state stood, shut out, outside the gate".
[16] "dreary"; "happy".
[17] "sorrow and care".
[18] "together alone".

text again captures the varied consequences of homelessness. This narrative perspective changes, however, once they enter Amis's court, as discussed below.

These broader social realities are magnified through Amiloun's individual experience, as his identity is dismantled and all he once shared with Amis is lost. In addition to his change of appearance, his social status is erased, his knightliness is degraded, and he loses his sense of place. The section that follows will demonstrate how his identity is broken down, and he is rendered increasingly abject from his former self.

Social and Spatial Placelessness

Throughout, Amiloun's sense of place is tied to his social status. Before the trial by combat, an angel informs him of the consequences of his intended actions:

So foule a wreche þou schalt be
Wiþ sorwe & care and pouerte
Nas neuer non wers bigon.
Ouer al þis world, fer & hende,
Þo þat be þine best frende
Schal be þi most fon,
& thi wiif & alle þi kinne
Schul fle the stede þatow art inne,
& forsake þe ichon (Foster, 2007: 1264-72).[19]

Gina Marie Hurley has argued that the primary consequence of Amiloun's sinful act of devotion to his friend is his social isolation (Hurley, 2020: 78). Indeed, his friends not only forsake him, but they remove themselves from the "*stede*" he occupies; his social desertion is mirrored spatially. When the angel's warning comes to fruition, the narrator draws a connection between his social condition and his place: "*When him was fallen that hard case, / A frendleser man than he was / men nist nowhar non*" (Foster, 2007: 1558-60).[20] By forging the connection between Amiloun's loss of social status and a negation of place, the text signals that the dismantling of one yields the erasure of the other. Where previously Amiloun had been lord of his ancestral land that he "*sesed […] in to his hond*" (Foster, 2007: 332), he is rendered increasingly placeless as the episode progresses.[21] The hold on his land is erased as his body degrades. This loss of land and loss of place stands in direct contrast to Amis, who remains in one place for almost the whole narrative, and who is lord of a "*cité toun*" (Foster, 2007: 1864).[22] Amiloun's social status is mirrored geographically when he is cast out by his wife for his leprosy. He tells her: "*do me where it is thi wille, / Ther noman may me se*" (Foster, 2007: 1604-05).[23] He resigns himself to social invisibility, a removal from a social context, a removal from a defined place. Amiloun is an outcast, both in the sense of being a social pariah and in the sense of being forced from his home and placed in a hovel half a mile outside the city gates, "*biside the way*" (Foster, 2007: 1614).[24]

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[19] "You shall be so foul a wretch, with sorrow and care and poverty; no one has ever been beset by a worse state. Over this whole world, near and far, those that were your best friends shall become your worst enemies, and your wife and all your kin shall flee from the place that you are in and forsake you, each one of them."
[20] "When he fell into that hardship, no one knew a more friendless man than he, anywhere."
[21] "seized into his hand".
[22] "walled city".
[23] "Put me wherever you want, where no one might see me".
[24] "Beside the road". His objectification – and abjectification – is introduced when she calls him "*so foule a thing*" ("so foul a thing") (Foster, 2007: 1593), and is reinforced when it is repeated in Amis's city on line 1968.

Over the course of this period, Amiloun's location is described in ever vaguer terms. First, his position is measured by the distance from his court – half a mile, then five miles – and then, relative to an unnamed market town, the "*tounes ende*" (Foster, 2007: 1720).[25] After receiving the ass from his wife, Amiloun declares "*out of lond we wil fare / To begge our mete with sorwe and care, / Ne lenger we nil abide*" (1762-64).[26] Rather than declaring where they will go, or being positioned within geographic proximity of a town, they highlight their impending absence from a fixed place.[27] This focus on departure is reiterated when Amoraunt tells Amiloun's wife "*out of lond we schulen yfere, / No schal we never come eft here*" (1774-75), a phrase she repeats on 1786-87.[28] This negation of place signals Amiloun's withdrawal into social isolation and his status as outcast. His place becomes unimportant; the crucial detail becomes that he is not where he has been, or where he is supposed to be. There is a complete absence of fixed location; Amiloun and Amoraunt's condition is to be physically and socially "out".

As the episode progresses, Amiloun's vagabondage is drawn out, reinforced by pairings of "*up an doun*," "*from dore to dore*," and "*fram toun to toun*" (Foster, 2007: 1699, 1798, 1862; 1702; 1799); there is a sense of repetitive aimlessness as they move through the countryside and the town, resisting fixity.[29] While the phrase "roaming up and down" in the *Knight's Tale* has been variously interpreted as expressing freedom, or the "idling" of the upper classes (Radulescu, 2021: 48), Amiloun's roving "*up an doun*" suggests constant movement but a lack of destination. It is an expression of desperate mobility, as he attempts to find food and assistance. Stasis would entail starvation. He has no sense of direction, "*He no wist whider he might wende*" (Foster, 2007: 1550), and unlike some of his analogues, he does not think to approach Amis for help, even after several years pass.[30]

The Unknightly Knight

It is notable that throughout this episode, regardless of Amiloun's poverty, social position, or physical incapacity, the narrator insists on calling him a knight. Between the point when Amiloun is stricken with leprosy (1540) and his arrival at Amis's court (1880), the Amiloun is called a "knight" eight times. Three of these are preceded with "*gentil*" (Foster, 2007: 1573, 1681, 1694) and the word is collocated with "*hend*" or "*hendi*" twice (Foster, 2007: 1754, 1795).[31] In doing so, the text stages a tension between the expectations of a romance hero and Amiloun's current position. In romances, a knight's value to society is largely derived from his body. What happens to a knight's identity, then, when he is incapacitated? When he is ill, rendered so weak that he cannot walk five miles without becoming footsore? When he cannot perform knighthood? While the verbal reiteration of Amiloun's knightliness suggests that his identity is revivable, it nevertheless spotlights the gulf between his past and present conditions.

With his vagrancy comes the need to be mobile, but his attempts to remain on the move merely accentuate his lack of knightliness. Notably, he lacks the knightly accoutrements of

[25] "town's end".
[26] "We will leave this land to beg for food with sorrow and care. No longer shall we stay".
[27] This stands in contrast with other versions of the story, which either skim over this episode or, in the case of the Latin *Vita* and Old French *Ami et Amile*, detail the places Amicus/Ami goes, rather than his experiences of wandering.
[28] "We shall leave this land, we will never come here again".
[29] "up and down"; "from door to door"; "from town to town".
[30] "he did not know where he might go".
[31] "Gentle"; "noble". "Hende" can also be translated as "beautiful" or "valiant".

arms and armour and – crucially – a horse. Susan Crane posits that a knight is a composite unit of man and horse, and so to be a knight without a horse is to be physically and socially incomplete (Crane, 2013: 138-39). The knight's horse carries "symbolic weight", imbuing him with "authority and high standing" (Crane, 2013: 140-41). To be without a horse – and worse, to on foot – suggests that Amiloun's knightly identity is physically compromised and something has gone awry in the world of the romance.

Throughout this episode, the text both highlights Amiloun's need to move to search for food, and his inability to do so effectively because his body is so weakened that "*he no might no forther fare*" (Foster, 2007: 1718).[32] Instead of asking for a horse, Amiloun instructs Amoraunt to go to his wife and

Bid her, for Him that died on Rode,
Sende me so michel of al mi gode,
An asse, on to ride,
And out of lond we wil fare (Foster, 2007: 1759-62).[33]

The image of a knight riding on an ass might be read as parodic if Amiloun's circumstances weren't so dire. It does, however, indicate a further departure from his knightliness: later, in the fifteenth century Gutierre Diaz de Gámez would write that "Knights have not been chosen to ride an ass or a mule" as this would indicate temerity, weakness, or cowardice (quoted in Crane, 2013: 143). It is difficult not to see the irony, or perhaps the pathos, in the line "*Opon the asse he sett that knight so hende*" (Foster, 2007: 1795), at once highlighting Amiloun's knightliness and this unchivalric mode of transport.[34] If Gawain is mocked for riding the wrong kind of horse, a rouncy, in Chrétien's *Perceval*, riding an ass is much less befitting of a knight who was once the paragon of prowess.[35]

However, the ass is saddled with a symbolic significance that other equines do not possess: The image of Amiloun riding "*out of the cité*" (Foster, 2007: 1796) on a humble ass is a mirror of Christ riding into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.[36] Indeed, as Kathryn Smithies has noted,

the ass featured at seminal points in Christ's life: it carried a pregnant Mary to Jerusalem; alongside the ox, it adored the infant Christ in the stable […]; it carried the Holy Family in their flight to Egypt, to escape Herod's massacre of the innocents; and on Palm Sunday, the adult Christ made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding an ass. That the ass participated at key moments in the life of Christ points to its symbolic and ceremonial role as the bearer of salvation (Smithies, 2020: 42).

Amiloun's choice of this humble, steadfast mount demonstrates a shift in his identity as he moves away from the violence and bloodshed of his previous life and into a period of penance, towards grace and healing – and also towards a death from which he will be restored. Through the association with Christ, Amiloun becomes a figure of willing self-sacrifice for the salvation, not of mankind, but his friend.

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[32] "He could not go any further".
[33] "Bid her, for the sake of He who died on the cross, to send me, of all my goods, an ass upon which to ride, and we will leave this land".
[34] "Upon the ass he set that knight so noble".
[35] In the Old French *chanson de geste*, Ami is given a much more dignified and expensive Arabian mule.
[36] "out of the city".

The sale of the ass for five shillings, a price repeated twice (Foster, 2007: 1821, 1826), signals another shift in the text: as the ass moves from a creature of Biblical significance to a commodity, Amiloun's condition moves from the symbolic and spiritual realm to one of economic deprivation and life-threatening hunger. The world of romance, if only briefly, touches the real world. Amiloun, unable to move on his own, must rely on Amoraunt to carry him on his back; it is an image reminiscent of Aeneas as he carries his father out of Troy (Foster, 2007: 1832-33). Amiloun is now placed in the position, not of the hero, but of the elderly and incapacitated dependent, and Amoraunt becomes a figure of *pietàs*, selfless duty and loyalty. We are brought back into the world of the romance, however, when Amoraunt, exhausted, uses the last of their funds to buy a pushcart, or "*croudewain*," to transport Amiloun (Foster, 2007: 1858). The cart, again, carries symbolic weight, reminding us of Lancelot's cart in Chrétien de Troyes's *Knight of the Cart*, which is associated with "disgrace or reproach" (De Troyes, 1991: 212). Historically, wheelbarrows were used to carry those unable to walk, but there is evidence that riding in a pushcart was considered "demeaning" or a form of punishment (Jones, 1990: 73). With each mode of transport, Amiloun is increasingly distanced from his former knighthood, exchanging chivalric honour and prowess for humility and frailty.

"Gret diol it was to se":[37] Amiloun's Re-entry into Society

As he comes to Amis's city, Amiloun re-enters a defined place and is plunged back into the social sphere. With this spatial change comes a shift in narrative perspective and recognition of the changes he has undergone: he changes from the subject of the narrative to an object of charity and pity. Having been previously placed out of sight, he is once again *seen* by others. This is made explicit when a scene from their wanderings is reprised within the city gates. In the first of these, present only in the Auchinleck MS, Amoraunt trudges through the wintery landscape with Amiloun on his back. It is cold and wet, and Amoraunt is so laden with his burden that he slips in the muck:

So depe was that cuntray;
The way was so depe and slider,
Oft times bothe togider
Thai fel doun in the clay (Foster, 2007: 1842-45).[38]

This scene is reminiscent of the later *Sir Launfal* when, poor and abandoned by his men, Launfal

rood wyth lytyll pryde;
Hys hors slod, and fel yn the fen,
Wherefore hym scornede many men
Abowte hym fer and wyde (Chestre, 1995: 213-216).[39]

While Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury remark that this is a potentially comic moment as the image of Launfal inverts the expectation of the dashing knight errant setting off on his courser (Chestre, 1995: note to line 214), this moment literalises the fall in fortune that

[37] "It was very distressing to see."
[38] "That country was so deep (in mud); the road was so muddy and slippery, that often they both, together, fell down into the mire."
[39] "rode with little pride; his horse slid and fell in the fen, so that he was scorned by many men around him, far and wide" (my translation).

Launfal suffers as he ventures away from Arthur's court.[40] D. Vance Smith draws attention to the element of spectacle that is embedded in this scene; it is the attention to the publicness of the fall that provides a commentary on how the knight's economic body is poorly regarded, in a literal as well as figurative sense (Smith, 2003: 172). Amiloun and Amoraunt's tumble does not have the same comedic and satirical potential; the narrator is so insistent on their goodness that this fall merely adds gravity to their situation. Unlike Launfal, there is no one to watch – for now. However, when the scene is replayed some 40 lines later, after the entry into the city, it comes with a narrative change. Instead of taking on the perspective of Amiloun and Amoraunt as they wend their way through the landscape, the narrator joins the onlookers:

To court he went in his way,
As ye may listen at me,
And bifore al other pover men
He crud his wain in to the fen;
Gret diol it was to se (Foster, 2007: 1880-84).[41]

It is in this last line of the stanza that Amiloun's condition becomes a spectacle. Rather than merely facing the landscape, Amiloun must face the social reception of his situation. He suddenly has an audience, and the narrator, who had previously expressed Amiloun's emotions, adopts the perspective of the spectators: "*gret diol it was to se*". While line 1845 sees Amiloun falling in the "*clay*," in this second scene he, like Launfal, spills into the "*fen*". In a definition confirmed by the Middle English Dictionary, Smith points out that "fen"

not only connotes dirt but even more specifically excrement, the detritus of the self. […] The fall in the "fen" is the most direct confrontation with the materiality of a world that cannot be shed easily, that is both repellent and fascinating, something to flee and something to watch (Smith, 2003: 172).

While the "*clay*" has the same overall meaning as "*fen*," the connotations of excrement and human waste literalise Amiloun's status as social pariah. That he falls into "*clay*" when he is unwatched (and with Amoraunt) and falls into the "*fen*" when he is alone and "*bifore al other pover men*" reinforces the shift in perspective; Amiloun's "*clay*" becomes the onlooker's "*fen*," mud becomes excrement, and a "*gentil*" knight becomes society's refuse. It is a jarring transition, one that distances the narrator, and consequently the audience, from Amiloun. In a new place and a new social context, Amiloun turns from a suffering, unfortunate knight to a leprous, vagrant object of pity and disgust.

In the city, his designation as a "*knight*" disappears (except in line 2109, when Amoraunt is speaking); instead, he is called a "*lazer*", or leper, defined by his bodily infirmity rather than ability. Amiloun has asked Amoraunt to hide his identity, but this obfuscation is represented narratively as the perspective shifts to how others perceive him. "*Lazer*" is used nine times within the next 200 lines. At first this is done to reflect speech: "*The gode man asked him anon, / Yif he wald fro that lazer gon*" (Foster, 2007: 1933-34).[42] Eventually, however, the narrator adopts this vocabulary, as on lines 2020, 2023, 2071 and 2095. While the poet used the synonym "*messel*" earlier in the text, the exclusive use of "*lazer*" in this section evokes

[40] This scene is not present in Marie de France's *Lanval* or *Sir Landevale.*
[41] "He went on his way to court, as you can hear from me, and in front of all the other poor men, he drove his barrow into the fen; it was very distressing to see."
[42] "The good man soon asked him if he would leave that leper".

both the Lazarus of Christ's parable in Luke 16:19-31 and Lazarus of Bethany, raised from the dead by Christ in John 11. The first of these is strikingly similar to Amiloun's situation, as Lazarus begs outside the gates for crumbs from a rich man (later known as Dives) who "feasted sumptuously every day". When both die, Lazarus finds comfort at the bosom of Abraham, while Dives thirsts in Hell. The association with this Lazarus both underscores the nature of Amiloun's poverty and also directs our attention to the other figure in the story, Dives, represented by Amis.[43] This scriptural echo becomes a warning for Amis (and the poem's audience): he must be charitable for his soul's salvation. The parallel suggests that Amiloun's poverty is not only his to endure, but Amis's to relieve.[44] As Bronislaw Geremek points out, wealth was often justified on ideological grounds, so that the poor might be helped (Geremek, 1994: 20). The connection to Lazarus reinforces this ethical obligation.[45]

The text is also clearly drawing on the other Biblical Lazarus, who is also ill, suggesting that Amis will raise him from a social death.[46] Indeed, in Auchinleck, Amiloun verbally acknowledges how the person he has become has replaced the person he once was. Unrecognised by Amis, he responds to Amis's question about where he obtained the golden cup:

"*Ya certes, sir," he gan to say,*
"It was in his [Amiloun's] cuntray,
[…]
Bot certes, now that icham here,
The coupe is mine, y bought it dere,
With right y com there to" (Foster, 2007: 2083-88).[47]

Amiloun distinguishes between his former self and his current "fallen" state by moving between third and first person; he has bought the cup with his own identity, sacrificing himself for his friend's sake. Amiloun's designation as a "*lazer*" suggests that his former self is revivable. He can be brought back from a living death. Rather than only obviating his damnation, Amis has the opportunity to become Christ-like by resurrecting his friend, and even becomes God-like through the act of sacrificing his children for the sake of one who has "fallen" so far from his previous self, with whom he once shared an image.[48] Amis learns that

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[43] In the fourteenth century, poverty was only seen as a virtue when wealth and status were renounced voluntarily (Geremek, 1994: 19).

[44] While the Old French text sees Amile provide bread and wine to Ami as soon as he hears the leper's rattle, the Middle English version's linguistic and imagistic references to Lazarus suggest Amis's soul is in jeopardy for his lack of ready charitability.

[45] The twelfth century German theologian and social theorist Gerhoch von Reichersberg distinguishes between the *pauperes cum Petro* (poor with Peter) and the *pauperes cum Lazaro* (poor with Lazarus). While the former category included the clergy and Church officials, whose renunciation of wealth was a distinguishing feature of their religious lives, the poor with Lazarus were the truly poor, those who "are not treated as active subjects but rather as objects of help," and whose survival rested on alms and charity (Geremek, 1994: 24-25). The shift from Amiloun's designation from "*knight*" to "*lazer*" marks this distinction between subject and object as well: while he sees himself as a knight, others see him as a mere object of charity, as he waits at the castle gate with the other mendicants.

[46] The identities of the two Lazaruses became conflated in the Middle Ages (Marcombe, 2003: 5-6).

[47] "'Yes, certainly, sir', he began to say, 'it was in [Amiloun's] country […] but certainly, now that I am here, the cup is mine and I bought it dearly. I came to it rightly'."

[48] Mann has also noted these parallels: Amis "follows the pattern of the divine when he slays his children (on Christmas Eve) so that Amiloun can be healed with their blood, as God slew *His* son so that humankind could be healed by the blood of Christ. And as with Christ, so with Amis's children, the self-sacrificial shedding of blood is miraculously followed by resurrection" (Mann, 2008: 149-150).

loving his friend means acknowledging his transformation, caring for him despite his abjection, sacrificing his own children, "other selves," to save his first love. In passing the test set out by Amiloun's designation as a "*lazer*," Amis not only saves his own soul, but also becomes a figure for God's love.[49]

Regardless of whether it is read as a period of penitence or divine punishment, Amiloun's period of vagrancy is not merely a consequence of what has come before; it must also be read in terms of what comes after it and the possibilities it produces. By unravelling the initial rationale for the pair's bond, and distancing Amiloun from all he once was, Amis is invited to transform his self-reflective, quasi-narcissistic love, exhibited through the exclusivity of "*trouth*," into a selfless love of the other, *caritas*. As Amiloun transgresses the boundaries of his former self by undergoing debilitating disease, social exile, dispossession of all his lands, and being rendered a placeless "*foule […] thing*," he dons new identities that are not only distinct from his friend, but wholly abject. While Amiloun's vagrancy and disease provide Amis with the opportunity to prove his devotion to his friend through extreme sacrifice, it also creates the space, and the rationale, for Amis's love to be extended outward, to a stranger in need, and to avoid the fate of Dives. The Middle English text, in dwelling on this period of vagrancy, not only prompts audiences to ask what happens to friendship when all material circumstances change, and invites the extension of compassion towards those in need, but also provides a window into the mechanism by which love of the self, love of one's neighbour, and the love of – and for – God are intertwined. Amiloun, at once a figure of the self and of the other, challenges Amis to love a stranger as himself.

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[49] Both Amis and Amiloun enjoy the "*the blisse of hevyn"* ("bliss of heaven") when they die, "*for her trewth and her godhede*" ("for their loyalty and godliness") (Foster, 2007: 2506-7).

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