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Friendly Knights and Knightly Friends:

Sworn Brotherhood as *Amicitia Perfecta* in Medieval English Romances

“On a day the childer war and wight
 Trewethes togider thai gun olight,
 While thai might live and stond,
 That bothe bi day and bi night,
 In wele and wo, in wrong and right,
 That thai schuld frely fond
 To hold togider at everi nede,
 In word, in werk, in wille, in dede,
 Where that thai were in lond”
 (*Amis and Amiloun*, 145–53)

In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues that friendship depends on community, and states that “the particular kinds friendship will correspond to the particular kinds of community” (Aristotle, trans. Ross, 8.9).¹ This idea can be easily comprehended if we consider the different literary reflections of medieval English societies. In early literature, for example, the main type of friendship presented is that between fellow-soldiers, which suits the warrior society of Anglo-Saxon England. The comradeship depicted in Old English texts is based upon loyalty to one’s leader (or protector) and to the members of the war band or *comitatus* (Ackerman 1996: 13). The lord and thane relationship is one of the bonds within this community, the basic principles of which not only determine standards for the actions of the parties but also turns the relationship of services into an association of friendship. However, in spite of the fact that on the surface literature depicts the loyalty and love of thanes towards their lords as a mere altruistic feature, viewing it objectively, we must be aware of the fact that it is by no means devoid of interest. On the contrary; applying Aristotle’s classification of friendly associations (which he calls *philia*),² I would call it a relationship based on mutual utility, for the parties aim

¹ This statement can be found on Bekker page 1160a.25 (in this edition the Bekker numbers are not indicated, though). The original Greek reads as follows: ἀκολουθήσουσι δὴ αἱ τοιαῦται φιλία ταῖς τοιαύταις κοινωνίαις.

² The Greek philosopher differentiates between three types, according to the grounds they are based on: *philia* according to 1. utility, 2. pleasure, and 3. virtue (perfect friendship), in the last of which the parties are friends without any interest but for their own sake. For Aristotle’s theory on friendship, see books 8 and 9 of *Nicomachean Ethics* and parts of *Eudemian Ethics*. Note that in spite of the fact that the common practice is to translate Aristotle’s φιλία universally as “friendship,” there is evidence that he used this noun in a broader general sense, including all those relationships that are not enmities (e.g. kinship, fellow-citizenship, etc.), without regarding the parties of it “friends,” for whom he uses the term φίλοι. Thus, the relationship between *philois* is one of the types of *philia* but not all *philia* involves *philois*, that is friends; cf. KONSTAN 1996.

The Middle English sworn brotherhood is not to be confused with the association presented in Old English

at what they lack and give something else in return: with their war band, the thanes defend the king, his country and his people, and they are granted with material gifts, land and high social status in reward. The relationship between fellow-soldiers is similar to that of lord and retainer; although they are equal in rank, the loyalty towards each other is a basic necessity in their lives because they aim at the same goal (to win the battles and defend their lord, home and people, and, naturally, to get rewards for their services) and in order to reach it, they have to rely on one another. Moreover, one supports and defends the other in a battle since he knows that he might need the other's aid next time.

Between the times when the deeds of the comrades in arms of the Anglo-Saxon period were sung and the first mention of the latest romance (1492) I am going to discuss in this paper, significant social, cultural and literary changes occurred in England – these changes are obviously and naturally interrelated and create an incredibly complex fabric, the unweaving of which would lead far astray from our original topic. What is important for the present study from these changes is that with the emergence of “courtliness” and the genre of chivalric romances, a new, more refined type of friendly association seems to have found its way into English literature. This type of friendship is commonly known as sworn brotherhood or – after *Athelston* – wedded brotherhood.³ Thus, Middle English romances describe a relationship, which – similarly to the comradeship in Old English poems – associates warriors, or in this case, knights. Analogously to the Anglo-Saxon times, the knights who serve the same lord are tied to one another by a special bond of loyalty and friendship, the parties of which were called “cumpainz” (Burnley 1998: 7).⁴ However, despite the similarities in the social background between Old English comradeship and its later counterpart, we find that these associations were formed on different bases: while the former was established in support of a community purpose, in the case of Middle English sworn brotherhood it is always the friendship which is formed first and then its benefits are eventually used for a given purpose – which is always individual. Thus, Middle English romances emphasise that these friendships evolve not for the sake of utility but due to a pure, disinterested motivation of mutual love, which urge the parties to swear an oath of brotherhood to each other.

In the present paper I wish to demonstrate that sworn brotherhood in English romances is depicted as an association of knights which meets almost all the requirements of a “true” or “perfect” friendship described by the ever-popular Roman philosopher Cicero in his work *De Amicitia* and his Greek predecessor, the afore-mentioned Aristotle in his books 8 and 9 of *Nicomachean Ethics*. These two works were the primary canons for medieval literates who wished to engage themselves in the study of friendship (Hyatte 1994: 26)³ – only they added a little taste of “courtliness” and Christianity to them. Thus, in my paper I follow suit and found my analysis on the two above-named philosophers in order to point out the main characteristics of sworn brotherhood, the medieval *amicitia perfecta*, which seems to have been regarded the supreme kind of association – just like its classical antecedent. All the more so, since in *De Amicitia* Laelius, Cicero's speaker, expresses explicitly in how high esteem he holds

literature – although ACKERMAN (1996, 13.) writes of “blood brotherhood” within the Anglo-Saxon comitatus (mentioning the fragmentary heroic tale *Waldere* as an example), I do not think that it is fortunate to call the relationship of comrades any kind of brotherhood, not even if they swear an oath of loyalty to each other. Moreover, I could not find the traces of such oaths in Anglo-Saxon literary works. For a concise and clear description of how knighthood emerged and of the social networks a knight belongs to, see the whole prologue to the same book and also Chapter 1 (The Knight) in BARBER 1984.

³ Note that until the thirteenth century, the *Ethics* could be read only in Latin translation. For thirteenth-century didactic works and commentaries on both treatises and also on translations of the *Ethics*, see HYATTE 1994, 203–8.

friendship when he urges his interlocutors (Fannius and Scaevola) “to put friendship before all things human; for nothing is so conformable to nature and nothing so adaptable to our fortunes whether they be favourable or adverse,”⁴ and what we find in our romances is that this amity – tested in the times of adversity – is indeed prized above all: it is regarded as superior to any other relationships and is worth more than one’s life. Moreover, the principles of sworn brotherhood seemingly supersede even the moral rules acknowledged by humans, including the knight’s code of conduct and even virtue.

In the following subchapters I will analyse three romances from the 14–15th centuries (*Amis and Amiloun*, *Eger and Grime* and *Athelston*), in which the protagonists are sworn brothers and the main plot is based on the various challenges through which their friendship is tested. I also investigate a fourth one, *Sadius and Galo*, which is an odd one out for it is in prose, written in Latin, and the knights do not in fact pledge friendship; what is more, it was written in the 12th century, at the peak of courtliness, while the others at the decline of it. Still, I believe that regardless of their distance in time all the four romances agree in the principles of the friendship they depict and in the standards of the parties’ actions. In order that my arguments can be more easily followed I will give a summary of the plots first and then turn to the analysis.

The Romances

The 14th-century story of the English romance of *Amis and Amiloun*⁵ describes a deep, self-sacrificing affinity between two young knights, who swear “trouth plight” to each other. Their relationship is an idealised friendship and is probably the best example to show the characteristic features of sworn brotherhood.

Amis and Amiloun, the two young boys are born on the same day, and although they are not kins, they look so alike that they are distinguishable only by their clothes. When they are twelve, the duke of that country accepts them into his service because of their outstanding qualities, and from that time on they are nurtured together in his court, where they distinguish themselves so much in the various courtly activities that Amis is appointed chief butler and Amiloun chief steward in hall. They swear brotherhood, but then they have to part. Amiloun receives a message reporting his parents’ death so he goes home, while Amis stays with the duke, the daughter of whom blackmails him with her love and seduces him. The young knight cannot withstand the temptation long and their love is fulfilled but an evil steward (against whom Amiloun warned his friend earlier knowing that he was envious of them) betrays them to the duke as revenge for Amis’s rejection of him as a friend. To prove the accusation wrong, Amis is required to fight a judicial duel with the steward, who is such a good warrior that

⁴ Ego vos hortari tantum possum, ut amicitiam omnibus rebus humanis antepotatis; nihil est enim tam naturae aptum, tam vonveniens ad res vel secundas vel adversas. CICERO, De Amicitia, in De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione, pp. 126–7. Unless otherwise indicated, all parenthesised references are to this edition of De Amicitia. Throughout my paper I refer preferentially to the Loeb editions of the classical texts as is customary with medievalists since they provide standard English translations.

⁵ FOSTER 2007. This edition is based on the Auchinleck Manuscript (National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1, c. 1330) and is amended from the Egerton MS (British Library MS BM Egerton 2862, c. 1400) in cases when the text of the former was lost or damaged. The two other manuscripts in which the poem was more or less preserved are MS Harley (British Library MS BM Harley 2386, c. 1500) and MS Bodley (Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 21900 (Douce 326), c. 1500). For more on the manuscripts and a detailed critical edition, see the one in the Early English Text Society series: LEACH 1937. The story was popular throughout the continent, and interestingly enough, it also had a Hungarian version: Sándor és Lajos (or Alexander and Ludovicus) cf. “Alexander és Ludovicus, Amicus és Amelius” in Magyar néprajzi lexikon. For more on the different variants of the story, see the introduction in FELLOWS 1993.

Amis has to stay in custody until the day of the combat. His lover, Belisaunt, however, and her mother offer themselves as surety in place of Amis, who then leaves the court to seek out his friend and ask for his help. Amiloun, in the meantime, has a dream in which he learns that his sworn brother is in great peril, so he also sets off for the duke's and finds Amis halfway, who relates him the story how he is forced to fight to prove his innocence. Since he is guilty, Amiloun offers to change places with him. While Amiloun is in the court and defends his friend's honour in spite of the fact that a voice from heaven warns him that for this deed he will be punished with leprosy, Amis is at his home, pretending to be the other, without anybody recognizing the switch. He even sleeps with Amiloun's wife in one bed but places his sword between the two of them. After the fight they re-change personalities and Amis marries Belisaunt and when his patron dies he becomes duke. Amiloun, on the other hand, receives the foretold punishment: he becomes a leper and his wife – still being angry with her husband for his killing the steward unjustly – chases him away. His only companion is his nephew, Owain (named Amoraunt at the age of twelve), with whom he lives the life of beggars, and who carries him on his back from town to town rejecting the offer of a knight to join him and leave the leprous Amiloun behind. When they are begging in the court of Amis, from the golden cup they exchanged in their youth Amiloun is recognised by his friend, who takes care of him. Some time later Amis is told by an angel that his friend can be healed from leprosy with the blood of his children, so – although he knows that it is a deadly sin – he kills them and Amiloun recovers. As a reward for Amis's love towards his friend, his two sons are also brought back to life. The two knights then take vengeance on Amiloun's wife and retake his home but are reluctant to separate again, so Amiloun gives all his properties to Amoraunt and goes to live in Amis's castle until their death. They die on the same day and are buried together.

Though the most obvious and ultimate example for a friendship romance is, without doubt, *Amis and Amiloun*, we cannot overlook another – less known – one, which was explicitly intended to depict an exemplary and proverbial friendship (cf. “*remotis erant et proximis exemplar et prouerbium*” *Sadius* p.105.2–3), recorded in ornate Latin by Walter Map (1140 – c. 1208), the Welsh-born cleric, courtier of Henry II.⁶ The story is about two young men, Sadius and Galo, who serve in the court of the king of the Asiatics. Sadius is in the monarch's favour (being his nephew), while his friend suffers the queen's undesired benevolence and love. Galo is so much tormented by the woman that his woe finally arises Sadius's attention, who, learning of the trouble the other got into, makes up a witty story to the queen about Galo's impotence. The queen, however, is not easily deceivable by the accusation regarding such a manly man, so she sends one of her maids to test the knight's virility. The result of the test proves to the queen that she was befooled, so she decides to avenge herself. An excellent opportunity to do so is the feast held on the occasion of the birthday of the king, at which the queen forces Galo to tell publicly his inmost thoughts.

Despite the objection of all present at the feast, the queen is adamant, so the knight has to recount a shameful story that happened a year ago. The account involves a lady the knight tried to abuse, a giant warrior – the defender of the woman – with whom Galo agreed to combat

⁶ The friendship of Sadius and Galo is the first story in the third division of Map's *De Nugis Curialium*, which can be found in the Bodleian Library in MS Bodley 851. Thus far two editions of the Latin text have been published: 1) Gualteri Mapes *De nugis curialium distinctiones quinque*, ed. Thomas WRIGHT (London: Camden Society, 1850) 2) Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Medieval and modern series no. 6*, ed. M. R. James (Oxford, 1914). The two translations are the following: 1) Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*, *Cymmrodorion Record Series no. 9*, trans. M. R. James (London, 1923). 2) Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. M. R. JAMES, C. N. L. BROOKE, and R. A. B. MYNORS (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) (Latin text and facing-page English translation). In my analysis I used the 1914 Latin edition and the 1923 English translation.

in a year's time, and another lady, who prevented the knight to be slain on the spot and gave herself as a hostage for those twelve months. This story in itself is inglorious enough; what is more, Galo admits – this, however is not true – that he is afraid of the giant and does not wish to fight with him. Though Sadius does not believe that his friend could be such a coward, he offers to change places with him. This Galo refuses but lets everybody think the opposite: dressed in Sadius's armour, he defeats the giant in a more than fair duel (the giant in fact has an invincible magic sword) and though the audience at first thinks Sadius to be the victorious hero, from a wound on his face Galo's true identity is revealed in the end, which rehabilitates the persistent knight and ridicules the lusty queen.

The romance of *Eger and Grime* is possibly the latest one among those I chose to analyse (the first mention of the poem is from 1492; it is most probable, however, that its origin goes back to earlier times),⁷ still it shares notable similarities with *Amis* and *Sadius*.⁸ According to the story, in the land of Beame in the court of Earl Bragas live two sworn brothers, Grime, Lord of Garwick, and Eger, the “poor bachlour.” One day Eger starts out to win honour and to seek out an invincible knight he heard of. Thus, he goes to the Forbidden Country and meets the knight, who kills his horse and defeats him in a duel, and as a sign of his victory, cuts off a little finger of Eger. Fortunately, Eger finds a saddled horse near him (the mount of a dead knight who also lacked a little finger), so he can ride safe to a castle. Loosepine, the lady of the place takes care of the knight and tries to nurture him back to health; Eger, however, is so homesick that – in spite of the lady's warning – he rides home. Before he arrives his wounds open and he falls out of his saddle and his steed flees, so he has to walk to the court sore and wounded. This the ashamed knight recounts to his friend, Grime, who recommends concealing this affair from Winglayne, the daughter of Bragas, with whom Eger is in love. This plan, however, fails for the lady overhears their conversation – although

Grime realises this, he conceals it from Eger in order to spare him from more distress. The earl, on the other hand, is ignorant of the humiliation of Eger thanks to Grime's cunning ploy of making up a story of fifteen thieves who attacked his friend after he defeated the knight of the Forbidden Country. Winglayne, however, cannot be deceived and in her anger she is planning to marry another knight for she thinks Eger is not worthy of her. When Grime learns this he persuades Eger to change places with him: Eger, pretending to be Grime, has to stay at home and say that he is sick, while Grime departs from the court in Eger's armour and tries to defeat Grey Steel (for this is the name of the knight collecting little fingers) and thus defend his friend's honour and win lady Winglayne for him. Into this plan they involve Grime's brother, Palyas, who suggests that Grime should have the invincible sword of their uncle. Thus, Eger goes and borrows the sword from his uncle's secret lover and according to Eger's instructions seeks out Loosepine. He tries to deceive the lady, too, but she discovers immediately that this knight and the one she looked after earlier are not identical. She gets angry but hearing the truth she relents and decides to help the knight to overcome Grey Steel, especially as he was the one who killed her husband and also her brother. So, armed by the words of Loosepine on how he can win the battle, he rides to the land of Grey Steel, whom he successfully defeats and takes his golden gear, his steed and harness, and also a whole arm. He goes back to Loosepine, who

⁷ See van DUZEE 1963, 132–43.

⁸ The earliest extant text of the romance can be found in Percy Folio MS, which was first printed in 1867. The two earliest extant printed editions date back to 1687 and 1711, referred to as Huntington and Laing texts respectively. These two are very similar, so it is common among scholars to differentiate only between Percy and Huntington-Laing versions, the former of which is usually considered better and closer to the original. Therefore, in my paper I also rely on P: Eger and Grime. For a parallel text edition of P and HL, see CALDWELL 1933.

tells the good news to her father. The lord orders a banquet and learning that Grime is single, he decides to marry her daughter to him – they were in love anyway. Then Grime leaves for home and when he arrives, he gives Eger the better one of the two robes the earl gave him as a leaving present. When he reaches the court he changes place with Eger, who – riding into the palace – is welcome warmly by everybody, even by Winglayne. The knight, however, pretends to be still hurt by the inconstancy of the lady, who during the time she thought Eger was away could hear laudatory stories about him thanks to the faithful Palyas. The earl arranges a feast and the lovers reconcile, in which Grime played no little part. At the end of the story all the knights win their sweetheart and acquire rank: Eger and Grime marry Winglayne and Loosepine and become earls, while Palyas is chosen by the daughter of Greysteel to become her husband and a baron at the same time.

The mainspring of the fourth romance in question, *Athelston*,⁹ is similar to the aforementioned poems: four messengers (Atheslton, Alyrke, Egeland and Wymound) meet by chance in a forest on the road by a cross under a linden tree and “for love of here metyng thare” swear an oath of brotherhood and truth to each other. One of them, Athelston, succeeds to the throne when his cousin, the king dies. Athelston then makes two of his sworn brothers earls (Egeland Earl of Stone, who also marries Athelston’s sister, Edyff, and Wymound Earl of Dover) and the third, Alyrke, Archbishop of Canterbury. One of the earls, Wymound betrays the other earl, Egeland, and accuses him of high treason. Thus, the king summons Egeland and his family (his pregnant wife and two sons) with a false excuse and imprisons them with the intention of killing them. The queen (also pregnant) tries to make her husband listen to reason and even offers to stand surety for her beloved friends but Athelston would not yield to her and even kicks Edyff, who is kneeling at his feet crying and begging him. As a result of this cruel act, the woman swoons and after taken to her chamber gives birth to a dead child. Despite her own woe the queen sends a message to the fourth friend, Alyrke, who hurries to London and meets the king who is praying to God to reveal if Egeland is innocent. The Archbishop tries everything in his might to save his friend’s life: first he pleads for Egeland and then threatens to excommunicate the king (as an answer to Athelston’s threats of exile and death). After this heated argument, however, the king sends a messenger to Alyrke – who, in the meantime, has been surrounded by a group of lords who declare to take the bishop’s side against the king – and prays for forgiveness and promises to spare the life of Egeland and his family. Alyrke forgives Athelston and gives him his blessings and decides that an ordeal by fire should prove if the accuses were right. The whole family survives the trial miraculously, and soon after she exits the flames Edyff delivers a boy. He is Christened Edmund and Athelston gives him half of his kingdom and his treasures and names him as his heir. Then the Archbishop forces the king to reveal the name of the traitor (though he swore to Wymound that he would never betray the words they exchanged), who is summoned to the king and is subjected to a similar trial than the earlier one. He is proved to be guilty but is saved from the flames by the two sons of Egeland only to answer their question as to why he slandered their family. It turns out that the motive was jealousy – he envied Egeland the king’s love. At the end of the story, the traitor is executed in a very disgraceful manner: he is tied to horses and drawn through the streets of London and is hanged afterwards.

Sworn brotherhood vs. *amicitia perfecta*

In my view, the sworn brotherhood depicted in *Amis*, *Sadius*, and *Eger* shares numerous characteristics with the Aristotelian-Ciceronian perfect friendship. I would even go further and say – which is probably not a gross exaggeration – that the portrayal of this association is,

⁹ HERZMAN – DRAKE – SALISBURY 1999. The poem survived in a single fifteenth-century manuscript: Gonville and Caius MS 175. Fols. 120r–31r (Caius College Library, Cambridge).

in fact, based in no little extent on the theories of the two classics. It has to be added, though, that similar theories were popular among other authors – Classic and Christian – as well; still, Aristotle and Cicero’s were the most familiar sources in the Middle Ages (and possibly the most elaborated, or even chiselled), which could be adapted to the Christian worldview fundamentally characterising the way of thinking and the literature of the time.

According to Cicero’s definition, friendship “is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection” (*De Amicitia*, 6.20, pp. 130–1).¹⁰ Similarly, Aristotle claims that “concord ... seems akin to friendship”¹³ and he also emphasises mutual goodwill in his establishment of the tokens and requirements of friendship: “to be friends men must 1) feel goodwill for each other, that is, wish each other’s good, and 2) be aware of each other’s goodwill, and 3) the cause of their goodwill must be one of the loveable qualities mentioned above” (*Ethics*, 8.2.4 (1156a.1), pp. 456–7).¹¹ Finally, Aristotle, too, considers love a prerequisite for friendship inasmuch as he states that “... friendship consists more especially in bestowing affection, and as we praise men for loving their friends, affection seems to be the mark of a good friend” (*Ethics*, 8.8.4. (1159a.34–6), p. 483).¹² These three characteristics of friendship are without doubt present in the association of the three pairs of friends of the romances mentioned above.

There is no instance of quarrel or nonconformity in any issue between the knights, and we never hear them even question the other’s acts or thoughts. It is also obvious that all of them want the other’s good, for the replacement is all about defending the other friend’s honour and even his life – by any means, even if it requires self-sacrifice. Amiloun and Grime undertake the fight in place of their friends knowing that they might easily be killed by their opponents, and, although he did not have to duel in the end, Sadius also would have done it, as we can learn it from his offer. Furthermore, when Amiloun is told by the voice from heaven that he will be struck with leprosy if he fights the steward, he persists and still concerns himself about Amis:

He thought, “Yif y beknowe mi name,
Than schal mi brother go to schame,
With sorwe thai schul him spille.” (*Amis*, 1279–81)

Goodwill is also exhibited when Grime keeps from Eger that Winglayne overheard the recount of his inglorious story. On the other hand, he and Palyas tell Winglayne heroic stories about Eger in order to reanimate the affection of the lady towards their friend. Moreover, Grime also makes up a story so as to conceal the shameful defeat of Eger from the court. Similarly, Sadius also lies to the lustful queen about Galo’s impotency to liberate him from her undesired love. All these the friends do because they wish good to the other.

¹⁰ Est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio. ¹³ ἡ γὰρ ὁμόνοια ὁμοίον τι τῆς φιλίας ἔοικεν εἶναι. ARISTOTLE, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, eds. CAPP, E. – PAGE, T. E. – ROUSE, W. H. D., trans. H. Rackham, *The Loeb Classical Library 73* (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1962) 8.1.4. (1155a.20), p. 453. Unless otherwise indicated I use this translation of the text.

¹¹ εὖνοι μὴν οὖν οὗτοι ψαίνονται ἀλλήλοις: φίλους δὲ πῶς ἂν τις εἴποι λανθάνοντας ὡς ἔχουσιν ἑαυτοῖς; δεῖ ἄρα εὖνοεῖν ἀλλήλοις καὶ βούλεσθαι τὰγαθὰ μὴ λανθάνοντας. The lovable qualities are goodness, pleasantness and usefulness, cf. *Ethics*, 8.2.1 (1156b.17–20), pp. 454–5.

¹² μᾶλλον δὲ τῆς φιλίας οὐσης ἐν τῷ φιλεῖν, καὶ τῶν φιλοφίλων ἐπαινουμένων, φίλων ἀρετῇ τὸ φιλεῖν ἔοικεν.

In all of the three romances affection is also made explicit. Sadius and Galo are said to have “... loved each other with warm and honourable affection” (*Sadius*, p. 131, 7–8),¹³ Eger and Grime are reported to love each other as nobody else (“better loue Loved there never none” *Eger*, 48), and similar is said about Amis and Amiloun (whom we can consider not only examples but also personifications of perfect friendship for both their names originate from the Latin word for friend *amicus* and ultimately from the word for love *amor*):¹⁴

So wele tho children loved hem tho,
 Nas never children loved hem so,
 Noither in word no in dede;
 Bituix hem tuai, of blod and bon,
 Trewer love nas never non. (*Amis*, 139–43)

Love is also revealed in the self-sacrifice mentioned above. The three knights are willing to give their lives for their friends, and Amiloun in fact does it, for becoming a leper undoubtedly equals a death penalty. A similar case is mentioned and approved by Cicero, who remembers what applause it evoked from the audience when in the play of Marcus Pacuvius, Pylades and Orestes competed in sacrificing their lives for the other (*De Amicitia*, 7.24). Self-sacrifice can be, however, primarily associated with Christianity. The famous sentence of Jesus at the Last Supper unmistakably permeates all the three romances: “Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, Amis – if possible – outstrips even this: Amiloun gave his life for him, so – after a short hesitation –, in return, he gives his children’s life for his friend, which might be even more difficult and sorrowful and suggests an even more self-subordinating love. For who volunteers to kill his own children? Nobody does it even for himself, not to mention somebody else. Or, if we take Aristotle, we might also say that he, too, sacrificed himself because “parents love their children as part of themselves” and “parents then love their children as themselves” (*Ethics*, 8.12.2, 3 (1161b.15, 25), p. 499).¹⁶ Thus, when he sacrificed his children, he also sacrificed himself. Moreover, he even risks salvation, realizing that killing his children is a deadly sin:

Than thought the douk, withouten lesing,
 For to slen his childer so ying,
 It were a dedli sinne;
 And than thought he, bi heven king,
 His brother out of sorwe bring,
 For that nold he nought blinne. (*Amis*, 2245–50)

The next two most important features of perfect friendship for both Aristotle and Cicero seem to be equality and likeness. At one point Aristotle quotes the proverb “friendship is

¹³ Paribus alterutrum se diligebant et honestis amoribus (*Sadius*, p. 104, 23 – p. 105, 1).

¹⁴ The Middle English romance derives from a French chanson de geste (*Amis et Amiles*) and among others it also has a hagiographic variant (*Vita sanctorum Amici et Amelii*); the names, however, in all versions go back to *amor* and *amicus* (cf. Cicero’s explanation of the origin of the words, *De Amicitia*, 8.26. p. 139).

¹⁵ John 15.13 (Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible).

¹⁶ οἱ γονεῖς μὲν γὰρ στέργουσι τὰ τέκνα ὡς ἑαυτῶν τι ὄντα and γονεῖς μὲν οὖν τέκνα φιλοῦσιν ὡς ἑαυτούς.

equality” (*Ethics*, 8.5.5. (1157b.35), p. 471)¹⁷ and later he amends this with likeness, as in “lovability consists in equality and similarity” (*Ethics*, 8.8.5. (1159b.1), p. 483).²¹ Cicero, too, views equality as important and says that “it is of the utmost importance of friendship that superior and inferior should stand on equality” (*De Amicitia*, 19.69, p. 179),¹⁸ which means that even if one of the parties is superior in any way, he should raise the other and thus eliminate the difference. Equality, too, holds for sworn brothers. Amis and Amiloun, for example, are so equal that the narrator describes them at the beginning of the romance exclusively by using the pronoun “they” when he recounts their lineage, their looks and their moral qualities. Similar is the description of Sadius and Galo, with the exception that they are explicitly said to be “equal in character, youth, and comeliness, well learned in the science of arms, and of a long and noble lineage” (*Sadius*, p. 131, 5–7).¹⁹ Although Eger and Grime were unequal as for their financial circumstances (the former was a “poore bachlour,” for his elder brother inherited their father’s land), at the end of the story both of them become earls and thus the difference is equalised. Though – as mentioned above – at the beginning of the story Amis and Amiloun were equals, due to his leprosy, a significant change in Amiloun status occurred, and it is Amis who raises him and re-establishes all his earthly possessions, including his health. Thus, they are of equal standing in the end.

Besides equality, likeness is the other essential element in the formation of friendships. Cicero reminds us that we should “choose for a friend ... one, who is likely to be influenced by the same motives as yourself” (*De Amicitia*, 18.65, p. 175).²⁰ And if we form a true friendship with someone, he becomes “another self” (*De Amicitia*, 21.80, p. 189)²¹ since “the effect of friendship is to make, as it were, one soul out of many” (*De Amicitia*, 25.92, p. 199).²² Friends become, then, second selves of one another, and this is best recognisable in Amis, in which the knights are similar in every respect: they were born on the same day (and even conceived at the same night), both of them come from a noble family, they have similar qualities and, although they are not related, their looks is the same. The friends in the other two romances are less idealised; nevertheless, in all the three romances, the plot culminates in the motif of replacement, and, although Eger and Grime can achieve this only by changing their outfit, since they can deceive the surrounding people, they become alter egos – similarly to Patrochlos, who becomes Achilles in the eyes of the Myrmidons (and all the Greeks and Trojans) when he dons the other’s panoply. This is how the following statement of Cicero can be true:

“He, who looks upon a true friend, looks, as it were, upon a sort of image of himself. Wherefore friends, though absent, are at hand; though in need, yet abound; though weak, are strong.” (*De Amicitia*, 7.23, p. 133)²³

If we look at the same statement in W. Welmoth’s more explanatory and less verbatim translation, the striking analogue to the romances becomes even more evident:

¹⁷ φιλότις [ή] ισότης. ²¹ ή δ’ ισότης και όμοιότης φιλότις. W. D. Ross’s translation reads as “equality and likeness are friendship.”

¹⁸ Maximum est in amicitia superiorem parem esse inferi.

¹⁹ Moribus, etate, forma pares et armorum eruditi sciencia, priscique generis nobilitate praeclari (*Sadius*, p. 104, 22–3).

²⁰ Qui rebus isdem moveatur, elegi par est.

²¹ Est enim is qui est tamquam alter idem.

²² Nam cum amicitiae vis sit in eo ut unus quasi animus fiat ex pluribus.

²³ Verum etiam amicum qui intuetur, tamquam exemplar aliquod intuetur sui. Quocirca et absentes adsunt et egentes abundant et imbecilli valent.

“They are so intimately one that no advantage can attend either which does not equally communicate itself to both; they are strong in the strength, rich in the opulence, and powerful in the power of each other. They can scarcely, indeed, be considered in any respect as separate individuals, and wherever the one appears the other is virtually present.”²⁴

To translate the above passage into the language of our romances, we can say that Amis and Eger are present at the duels (and indeed are since they are *seen* to be present) and they are strong in the strength of Amiloun and Grime for the latter two fight in the place of the two former. The same holds for Sadius and Galo, too, since, although the change did not in fact take place (only that of armours and not of the friends), the people watching the duel think it did.

Not only Cicero, but also Aristotle acknowledges that friends might be the *alter egos* of each other. When the Greek philosopher speaks about friendship between brothers, he claims that it resembles the one between members of a comradeship and that since brothers have a common source they “are in a manner the same being, though embodied in separate persons” (*Ethics*, 8.12.3–4. (1161b.30), pp. 499–501).²⁵ It makes no difference, then, if we take sworn brothers in Aristotle’s terminology as comrades or brothers, since in essence they are the same. Moreover, it might be important to note that all the friendly knights use the word “brothers” most of the time when they refer to themselves. Amis and Amiloun, for example, address one another almost exclusively as “brother,” and they do similarly when they speak about the other to a third person. Furthermore, they are shown even to think of each other as “mi brother.” In addition, it is not only them who use this term: the other characters and the narrator also refer to them as brothers on several occasions. Consequently, this word is of utmost importance: it shows that they are associated by not only a common bond of friendship but by one which is equally close as (or even closer than) that of two brothers. Even the narrator states that “Bituix hem tuai, of blod and bon, | Trewer love nas never non” (*Amis*, 142–3).

Aristotle adds that “friendship between brothers is fostered by common upbringing and similarity of age” (*Ethics*, 8.12.4. (1161b.30), p. 501).²⁶ About this latter Cicero also admits that friendship “is stronger between men of the same age” (*De Amicitia*, 27.101, p. 207);²⁷ he is suspicious, however, with boyhood friendships, for

“the most ardent attachments of boyhood are often laid aside with the boyish dress; but if continued to the time of manhood, they are broken off, sometimes by rivalry in courtship or sometimes by a contest for some advantage, in which both of the parties to the friendship cannot be successful at the same time. But should friendship continue for a longer time, yet it is often overthrown when a struggle for office happens to arise; for while, with the generality of men, the greatest bane of friendship is the lust for money, with the most worthy men it is the strife for preferment and glory, and from this source frequently have sprung the deadliest enmities between the dearest friends.” (*De Amicitia*, 10.33–4, p. 145–6)²⁸

²⁴ CICERO, Laelius or An Essay on Friendship.

²⁵ ἀδελφοὶ (...) εἰσὶ δὴ ταῦτό πως καὶ ἐν διηρημένοις.

²⁶ μέγα δὲ πρὸς φιλίαν καὶ τὸ σύντροφον καὶ τὸ καθ’ ἡλικίαν.

²⁷ Haec etiam magis elucet inter aequalis.

²⁸ Summi puerorum amores saepe una cum preatexta toga deponerentur; sin autem ad adulescentiam perduxissent, dirimi tamen interdum contentione vel uxoriae condicionis vel commodi alicuius, quod idem adipisci uterque non posset. Quod si qui longius in amicitia proveci essent, tamen saepe labefactari, si in

However conclusive Laelius is – since he is Cicero’s speaker, who now quotes his friend Scipio’s opinion in this passage – concerning these early relationships (and in some cases he proves to be right – and not only in the cases of boyhood friendships; take, for instance, the rivalry of Palamon and Arcite in Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*, or the three fellows of *The Pardoner’s Tale*, or – to name a romance that is later dealt with in this paper – Wymound in *Athelston*), he cannot help but admit that their common upbringing, physical closeness, and engagement in the same activities throughout their lives contributed to their friendship to a great extent:

“There was one home for both of us; we had the same fare and shared it in common, and we were together not only in our military campaigns, but also in our foreign tours and our vacations in the country.” (*De Amicitia*, 27.103–4, p. 211)²⁹

If we look at the pairs of friends in our romances, it is clear again that these requirements are also fulfilled by them: they are of the same age (so much so that Amis and Amiloun were born on the same day) and are brought up and/or live in the same court (Eger and Grime are even said to share one chamber: “they kept a chamber together at home” *Eger*, line 47).

As for the statement of Laelius saying that with Scipio they “had the same fair and shared it in common,” we will see that it is not only a commonplace but indeed another characteristic of perfect friends. Aristotle refers to the old proverb saying “friends’ goods are common property” and maintains that “brothers have all things in common, and so do of the members of a comradeship” (*Ethics*, 8.9.1–2. (1159b.30), pp. 485–7).³⁰ This is also true for our sworn brothers. They share their home (at the beginning of each romance they serve in the same court, and at the end of Amis and Amiloun, the latter of the friends goes with the other to live with him) and their armour (it is necessary for the replacement), and any material resources they have (Grime, for example, gives Eger one of the robes he receives from the father of Loosepine, and of course, he gives his friend the “better” one). If we state that friends have all things in common, it cannot mean only earthly possessions. Cicero argues that one of the sweetest things in friendship is that you can “discuss anything as if you were communing with yourself” (*De Amicitia*, 6.22, p.131),³¹ or the same idea in Melmoth’s translation: “Can there be a more real complacency, indeed, than to lay open to another the most secret thoughts of one’s heart with the same confidence and security as if they were still concealed in his own?” Although the latter translation might seem a little too “decorated” and explanatory, which is also shown by the fact that Melmoth’s version is a great deal longer than the original Latin sentence, still, I think he captured the essence, meaning that *omnia* refers to one’s secrets, which are normally not shared with anyone. Such secrets are Amis’s affair with Belisaunt, Eger’s failure against Grey Steel, and Galo’s plan to humble the queen – all of which they share with their friends.

Another thing that is typical to be shared between friends – and this is connected with the sharing of secrets – is misery, and besides it, joys. This is acknowledged by Cicero, who claims that “friendship adds brighter radiance to prosperity and lessens the burden of adversity

honoris contentionem incidissent; pestem enim nullam maiorem esse amicitias quam in plerisque pecuniae cupiditatem, in optimis quibusque honoris certamen et gloriae, ex quo inimicitias maximas saepe inter amicissimos exstitisse.

²⁹ Una domus erat, idem victus isque communis, neque solum militia, sed etiam peregrinationes rusticationesque communes.

³⁰ ἔστι δ’ ἀδελφοῖς μὲν καὶ ἑταίροις πάντα κοινά, τοῖς δ’ ἄλλοις ἀφωρισμένα.

³¹ Quid dulcius quam habere quicum omnia audeas sic loqui ut tecum?

by dividing and sharing it” (*De Amicitia*, 6.22, p. 133),³² and also by Aristotle, who asks, “how could prosperity be safeguarded and preserved without friends?” and states that “in poverty and in any other misfortune, men think friends are their only resource” (*Ethics*, 8.1.1–2. (1155a.10), p. 451).³³ This, however, is not a possibility but rather a duty of friends: to remain loyal even in the times of adversity. Here, Cicero quotes Ennius’s proverbial saying: “When Fortune’s fickle the faithful friend is found” (*De Amicitia*, 17.64, p. 175).³⁴ Similarly, the narrators of the romances also make it clear how important they consider for the friends to adhere in both good and bad times. As early as in the introductory part of *Amis and Amiloun* we are informed that the story is about “how they were in wele and woo” (*Amis*, 11) and “in weele and woo how they gan wynd” (*Amis*, 13). Furthermore, in their “troth plights” all the friends declare the same.³⁵ Likewise, we learn at the beginning of *Sadius* that “they stood proved amid adversity” (*Sadius*, p.131, 9).⁴⁰ It is needless to linger over describing how Amiloun stands by his friend when he undertakes the battle against the steward, and how Amis’s true loyalty reveals itself when he and his wife provide home for the leper Amiloun, nurse him and sacrifice their own children for his sake. Similarly, it has already been told how Grime hurries to help Eger in his need and not only conceals the shame of his friend but also volunteers for the job of defeating Grey Steel. Sadius, too, has been mentioned, who, learning of the trouble Galo got into with the queen struck by love-madness, tries everything in his might to dissuade her from the knight and also offers to fight with the giant in place of his friend. The reactions of the friends, however, to the misery of their companions have not been noted yet. The bond of Amis and Amiloun, for example, is so close that Amiloun dreams of his friend’s misery and immediately hurries to find Amis and help him (*Amis*, 1009–56), while Amis, seeing Amiloun as a leper, starts to cry and says that his “joie is lorn” (*Amis*, 2125–48). Grime, too, is deeply distressed when he meets Eger who is in a miserable state:

... alas,

for thee, Egar, my hart is woe that euer I were soe farr thee froe! for when wee parted att yonder yate thou was a mightye man, & milde of state;

...

& now thou art both pale and greene (*Eger*, 62–9)

Sadius and Galo are even explicitly reported to share their miseries: “Thou, Sadius, feltest at length thy comrade’s carking care, and on being told of it by him, thou madest it thine own” (*Sadius*, p. 132, 19–21).³⁶ This characteristic of Sadius (i.e. his solidarity) mentioned by the narrator in advance is revealed when he beseeks Galo, who runs away from the city after being forced to recount his shameful story, and full of tears he ensures his friend that they are friends in any circumstances and almost forces him to accept his help:

I know that the whole world is aflame with deep passion for thy soldierly prowess, and that thou hast a place in the love of kings and princes; but no one will deny that thou

³² Nam et secundas res splendiores facit amicitia, et adversas, partiens communicansque, leviores.

³³ ἢ πῶς ἂν τηρηθεῖη καὶ σώζοιτ’ ἄνευ φίλων; (1155a.5) ἐν πενίᾳ τε καὶ ταῖς λοιπαῖς δυστυχίαις μόνην οἴονται καταφυγὴν εἶναι τοὺς φίλους.

³⁴ Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur.

³⁵ For more on the vows of sworn brothers, see SIMONKAY 2011, 17–24. ⁴⁰ Unde satis inter aduersa probati (*Sadius*, p. 105, 1–2).

³⁶ Sentsis, o Sadi, tandem socii sollicitudinem, et edoctus ab ipso propriam facis (*Sadius*, p. 105, 30–1).

owest all to me, whose soul thou holdest in thy heart as handmaid of thy soul; therefore the check-rein of no power can restrain me from performing any prayer of thine, no spurs can prick thee on to avoid my presence or to escape from my comradeship. (*Sadius*, p. 147, 11–20)³⁷

Now, if a friend identifies with the anguish of his comrade, it is a question how he can help the other. Cicero maintains that first, friends must counsel one another: “it is characteristic of true friendship both to give and to receive advice” (*De Amicitia*, 25.91, p. 199).⁴³ This idea is present explicitly or implicitly in almost every theory on friendship and it seems that it especially fits into the frame within which medieval feudal societies operate. This can be easily perceived if we think of the two kinds of services a vassal owed to his lord: *auxilium* (help) and *consilium* (counsel) (Burnley 1998: 4–5). Thus, in keeping with the oath of fealty, in addition to monetary and physical aid, the lord required the knight to be available for consultation whenever needed; therefore, the idea of giving advice to a superior as a duty is not alien to medieval thinking. It is no wonder, then, that sworn brothers extended these obligations to those with whom they were equal and to whom they were bound by a similar oath, the trothplight of friends. Likewise, if we consider the three romances, we will see that Amiloun, Sadius and Grime stood by their friends in their woe and it was upon their advice that the replacement took place.

Regarding “the limits” of friendship, i.e. what friends ought to do for each other, or – in continuation of the previous train of thought – the *auxilium* the friends have to provide, Cicero states that there are “many things we do for our friends that we never would do for ourselves” (*De Amicitia*, 16.57, p.167)³⁸ and we should do these things, with the exception of deeds that are conflicting with virtue, since “it is no justification whatever of your sin to have sinned on behalf of friend” (*De Amicitia*, 11.37, p. 149).³⁹ Nevertheless, later on he adds that “in matters which involve his life or reputation, we should turn aside from the straight path, provided, however, utter disgrace does not follow” (*De Amicitia*, 17.61, p. 171).⁴⁰ It seems that the romances here again agree with Cicero except as regards virtue. Amis, for example, kills his children for Amiloun’s sake, which – as we stated above – no man would normally do for himself. From this follow two other things: first, that sworn brotherhood is even more important than family bonds, and this is true not only for one’s children, but also for one’s wife, since the knights in the tales always subordinate their marital relationships to the obligations they think they owe to their brothers. Amiloun, for example, lets Amis delude his wife and sleep with her. Moreover, in *Athelston*, when the queen entrusts the letter (in which she asks the bishop of Canterbury to come and help Egeland) to the messenger, she claims that “He wole doo more for hym, I wene, | Thanne for me, though I be quene” (*Athelston*, 306–7), which means that “the king will do more for Alryke (i.e. grants his request or listens to him) than for me, though I am his wife.” Thus, it is made explicit that the role and influence of the wife is inferior to that of the sworn brother. This is, however, not unexpected, if we recall

³⁷ Scio totum orben tue concupiscencia milicie ueneranter ardere, teque manentem in regum desideriiis et principum; sed te mihi cuncta debere nemo negabit, cuius animam in corde tuo tenes ancillam tue; sicut ergo me frena nullius potencie tenere possunt ne tibi quelibet vota perficiam, nulla te calcaria moueant meam uitare presenciam uel effugere societatem (*Sadius*, p. 116, 28–30 – p. 117, 1–3). ⁴³ Ut igitur et monere et moneri proprium est verae amicitiae.

³⁸ Multa enim, quae nostra causa numquam faceremus, facimus causa amicorum.

³⁹ Nulla est igitur excusatio peccati, si amici causa peccaveris.

⁴⁰ Si qua fortuna acciderit ut minus iustae amicorum voluntates adiuuandae sint, in quibus eorum aut caput agatur aut fama, declinandum de via sit, modo ne summa turpitudine sequatur.

Cicero's advice as to "put friendship before all things human," and if we consider another of his observations, namely, that "friendship excels relationship" (*De Amicitia*, 5.19–20, p. 129).⁴¹

Let us go back to Amis's sacrifice of his children. The first thing that comes from this act is that family ties are inferior to brotherhood. On the other hand, murder is a deadly sin, and so is a great deal of the deeds the friends do for each other – and it is always the other's life or fame which is at stake. They lie, kill, and deceive others, which obviously are not virtuous acts. Of the seeming contradiction between the classics and medieval sworn brotherhood concerning virtue, however, I will write a little later.

Having seen the most important characteristics of perfect friendship and sworn brotherhood, one might ask the question whether it is possible to find such a friend at all. Both Cicero and Aristotle admit that such friends are rare (*De Amicitia*, 17.64, p. 175, and

Ethics, 8.3.8. (1156b.25), p. 463) and such friendship ideally involves only two and cannot be established between many: "friendship has been so narrowed that the bonds of affection always unite two persons, only, or, at most, a few" (*De Amicitia*, 5.20, p. 129).⁴² That is why both philosophers argue that a true friend must be held in high esteem, and an old friend should not be replaced by a new one. In Cicero's words, "as in the case of wines that improve with age, the oldest friendships ought to be the most delightful" (*De Amicitia*, 19.67, p. 177).⁴⁹ This is all the more true since an old friendship is a proved one. As for new friends, both classics refer the same proverb: "Men must eat many a peck of salt together before the claims of friendship are fulfilled" (*De Amicitia*, 19.67, pp.177–9, and *Ethics*, 8.3.8. (1156b.25), p. 463).⁴³ No wonder, then, that in all three romances, we can read mostly about two friends. It must be noted, however, that Amoraunt in *Amis* and Palyas in *Eger* are also some kind of friends (Palyas is in fact Grime's brother) of the knights; they are not sworn brothers, though, and do not fulfil many of the requirements of this kind of association. Concerning the question of preference between old friends and new ones, the story of *Amis* is straightforward. Amiloun refuses to make friends with the steward and declares that "Y no schal never bi night no day | Chaunge him for no newe" (*Amis*, 383–4).

It has been made clear that the amity of Amis and Amiloun, Sadius and Galo, and Eger and Grime conforms to the rules of the Aristotelian-Ciceronian perfect friendship. One last thing, however, remained unexplained. Knowing that for both philosophers the base of friendship must be virtue (which they constantly repeat throughout their works), how can these knights be true friends if they break every kind of code of conduct and commit grave sins? The solution to this paradox might lie in the understanding of the difference in the interpretation of virtue in a classical and in a courtly context. Aristotle constantly speaks about "good men" and associates them with the word "virtue": "The perfect form of friendship is that between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue" (*Ethics*, 8.3.6. (1156b.5), p. 461).⁴⁴ He uses the word *areté* (excellence), for what is commonly translated as "virtue," and this very *areté* might be the source of Cicero's *virtus*, which Cicero, too, attributes to "good" men (cf. *De Amicitia*, 6.6.21, p.131), who are "those, who so act and so live as to give proof of loyalty and

⁴¹ Praestat amicitia propinquitati. From the context one might induce that the word propinquitatis refers to "neighbours," "fellow-citizens" and "relatives" at the same time.

⁴² Ita contracta res est [i.e. amicitia] et adducta in angustum, ut omnis caritas aut inter duos aut inter paucos iungeretur. ⁴⁹

Veterrima quaeque, ut ea vina quae vetustatem ferunt, esse debent suavissima.

⁴³ CICERO: Multos modios salis simul edendos esse, ut amicitiae munus expletum sit. ARISTOTLE: κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν εἰδῆσαι ἀλλήλους πρὶν τοὺς λεγομένους ἄλας συναναλώσαι.

⁴⁴ τελεία δ' ἔστιν ἢ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φιλία καὶ κατ' ἀρετὴν ὁμοίων.

uprightness, of fairness and generosity; who are free from all passion, caprice, and insolence, and have great strength of character” (*De Amicitia*, 5.19, p.129).⁴⁵ Although this description holds for the knights, it is hardly believable that either of two classics would approve of lying, cheating, slander, and even murder as acts befitting a virtuous man – even if Cicero allows some deviation from the right path. In my opinion, our knights are indeed virtuous, and if probably not in the classical Greek and Roman sense then in the context of a courtly society, in which the weight of different qualities that make up virtue have changed and, in addition, new qualities have gained importance. In his description of the estate of knighthood and in general the feudal society and the milieu of a court, David Burnley names loyalty as being the element that defines a knight’s relationships, thus his whole life above all: the knight owed loyalty to his lord, to his kindred, and what is most important in our understanding the above contradiction, to his *cumpainz*, which – according to Burnley – meant not only fellow-vassals (those, who share bread), but in an extended sense also sworn brothers (Burnley 1998: 7). In my view, this might be the reason why the traditional, earthly, moral code of conducts are subordinate to the rules of sworn brotherhood depicted in the romances: in the feudal society of Medieval Europe loyalty became the most important characteristic of a man generally regarded as good and virtuous. Thus, if someone commits even a deadly sin for the sake of his friend, it does not mean that he completely destroys his reputation as being virtuous; on the contrary, he is praised because he sins out of loyalty towards his friend. Evidently, however, as Christianity pervades almost everything written in the Middle Ages, a deadly sin must be followed by penitence: the knights in our romances have to suffer godly punishment. This is made the most clear in the story of Amis and Amiloun, the latter of whom is struck with leprosy, forsaken by his wife and banished from home, while Amis has to pass a test which is even more cruel than that of Abraham, since he, in fact, had to kill his two children, whereas the knife in the hand of the other was stopped by God. After carrying out the penance, however, for they were so loyal to each other, they are forgiven and their lives are restored to the state of the earlier happy times, when they did not have to part at all. Although Eger and Grime also commit sins with their change of places, it is curious why they are not punished similarly to the other two knights. At least in the Percy Folio manuscript, they are not. In the Laing version of the story, however, Eger’s bride, Winglayne, discovers the deception and leaves the knight, which might as well be considered as a punishment for his sins. Why cannot we find a similar episode in the Percy MS? This question obviously cannot be answered from such a distance of time – nevertheless, a plausible explanation may be the following: P (which, as described above, is generally regarded as the best version of the tale and the closest to the original one), being a story that in itself stands ground, we can assume that its contemporaries did not miss punishment at all, considering the fact that those sins were committed in the name of friendship and loyalty and are thus forgiven without any consequences. In later times, however, the penitence of Eger in L may have been added to the original story by someone, who knew *Amis*, for example, or simply felt that in accordance with the Christian logic and in order that the plot be complete the knight has to suffer punishment.

It seems that in the case of *Eger*, the views on the issue of what deed is acceptable in the name of friendship were not entirely uniform and this remains an undecided matter – similarly to Cicero, who did not decide either. The case is made even more complicated by *Sadius*, written much earlier than the other romances, since Galo commits unvirtuous acts not only for the sake of his friend: his inglorious treatment of the lady in the city has nothing to do with

⁴⁵ Qui ita se gerunt, ita vivunt, ut eorum probetur fides integritas aequitas liberalitas, nec sit in eis ulla cupiditas libido audacia, sintque magna constantia, ut ei fuerunt, modo quos nominavi, hos viros bonos.

Sadius's life or fame. Still, he is not punished, in spite of the fact that the narrative makes it clear that this deed was unvirtuous: he is ashamed telling the story of it and also his audience regard it as humiliating. This might lead to the assumption that in the world-view of this twelfth-century romance, loyalty superscribes everything – if someone is faithful to his friend *all* his sins are forgotten and forgiven.

In the above analysis I hardly ever mentioned *Athelston*. My intention with the seeming negligence of this romance was that I can analyse it separately since, similarly to *Sadius*, it also stands out from the array of the romances analysed above. Its deviation, however, consists of not such a nuance as difference in language and date of composition but something much more fundamental: the friendship depicted in this poem fails. What is more, I assume that from the very beginning it was determined to fail for the fraternal bond represented in *Athelston* was not even a friendship – at least not in the sense of Cicero's *vera amicitia*. An evidence for this claim can be found in the introduction of the poem, from which we learn that the story is about four messengers from different countries, who meet by chance on the highway and for love of their meeting, they swear brotherhood to each other. This beginning of the tale at first shows nothing extraordinary; on the contrary, reading this description we are indeed under the impression that we have encountered a tale of an outstanding friendship between four men. The poem even strengthens this feeling with deploying various tools in order to emphasise that this is indeed a friendship: the oath is taken under a cross – this way God is involved not only in words but he is also present, which sanctifies the vow, and the bond itself, to an even greater degree. The cross, on the other hand, is under a linden tree, a symbol of conjugal love (a possible additional emphasis to the term “wedded brothers,” by which the friends are referred to through the whole poem), fidelity and friendship. However, if we examine the circumstances more thoroughly, it turns out that there is no base on which this friendship is established, and therefore, without a ground it cannot last. First of all, the parties come from different countries, they are strangers and meet for the first time, so we can be sure that they did not have common upbringing and never lived together, and it is also evident that they “have not eaten enough salt together” to form such a deep, intimate relationship. They had neither time nor familiarity, as Aristotle would require of perfect friends. It cannot be moral similarity or that in their looks either, which allows them to be attracted to each other, since if they were similar, it would have been mentioned – as in *Amis* (the only similarity one can find in them is that they are all messengers; this is little, though). The only allusion as to why they decide to swear an oath of brotherhood is that they are happy to have met there, which does not seem sufficient grounds for an association like this. As it seems, this oath was taken hastily, against which, incidentally, Cicero warns (*De Amicitia*, 21.78–9, p. 187).⁴⁶

Furthermore, although at the beginning of the poem the four fellows are all messengers, *Athelston* then ascends to kingship, which breaks equality, which would be essential for sworn brotherhood. As a good friend, the king tries to balance this inequality and gives his friends high ranks; this, however, does not prevent envy from arising among the friends, which makes Wymound to slander Egeland. Another hindrance in this friendship is that there are two many parties: there are four friends in *Athelston* in contrast with the ideal two.

In the surface, however, the story is composed in a manner that seems to be intended to make us believe that it is still a genuine friendship. Alryke, the bishop of Canterbury, for example, is of the four brothers one, who is very similar to a true friend. This can be proved by his reactions to the misery of Egeland: he is moved deeply by the story of the suffering of his friend and his family and cannot withhold his tears. Afterwards, he hurries to the king to beg

⁴⁶ Ne nimis cito diligere incipiant.

for their life and, similarly to the knights of the above romances, tries everything in his might to help them. This act proves him to be a good friend, who stands for his brother in calamity. An additional example for the seeming intimacy among the four friends is that they address each other “brothir” or “weddyd brother” and likewise, the other characters and the narrator tends to use this term, too.

Besides Alyrke, however, we do not find any characters showing clearly the qualities of a true friend. The reason for this in the case of Egeland and Wymound is that the former has only a passive role, being imprisoned almost through the whole romance, while the wickedness of the latter is made clear from the beginning and, therefore, it is evident that he cannot be a genuine friend.

In the case of Athelston, however, we cannot speak of true friendship either, if we adhere to Cicero’s theory, for he says, “a friend must neither take pleasure in bringing charges against you nor believe them when made by others” (*De Amicitia*, 18.65, p. 177).⁴⁷ The king evidently breaks this principle when he readily believes the slanderous words of Wymound concerning Egeland. Furthermore, his selfish, violent and even brutal deeds towards his friends and even towards his own wife are against every kind of virtue, be it understood in the classical, the Christian or in the courtly sense.

Thus, it seems that not only the true friendships depicted in Medieval English romances agree with the theory of Aristotle and Cicero but the false one too, in that it does not meet the requirements of the perfect friendship delineated by the two philosophers and, therefore, it fails. One last thing is to be noted: the basis of the friendship of Amis and Amiloun, Eger and Grime, and Sadius and Galo is love. And what is the cause of the failure of the friendship of Athelston, Egeland, Alyrke, and Wymound? Love! As Wymound said: “He lovyd him to mekyl and me to lyte” – the traitor wanted to be loved more and that is why he committed his crime against his friends. This final twist reveals the cunning of the author of *Atheslton* in its entirety and at the same times proves old Aristotle to be right again: “friendship depends more on loving, and it is those who love their friends that are praised, loving seems to be the characteristic virtue of friends, so that it is only those in whom this is found in due measure that are lasting friends, and only their friendship that endures”⁴⁸ (*Ethics*, trans. Ross 8.8, 1159a.30). Note that the philosopher said “loving,” and not “being loved.”

⁴⁷ Ne criminibus aut inferendis delectetur aut credat oblatiis.

⁴⁸ μᾶλλον δὲ τῆς φιλίας οὐσης ἐν τῷ φιλεῖν, καὶ τῶν φιλοφίλων ἐπαινουμένων, φίλων ἀρετὴ τὸ φιλεῖν ἔοικεν, ὥστ’ ἐν οἷς τοῦτο γίνεται κατ’ ἀξίαν, οὗτοι μόνιμοι φίλοι καὶ ἡ τούτων φιλία.

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