

The Paternal Function in *Sir Gowther*

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Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him by flesh and blood'; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death; and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgment, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it. (Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*)

In the Middle English Breton lai *Sir Gowther*, the unlikely hero holds a sword to his mother's heart and makes the following demand: "Dame, tell me in hye, / Who was my fadur, withowt lye, / Or this schall thoro the glyde" (220-22).¹ The violence of this moment illustrates Gowther's desperate desire for the "truth" of his paternity, and the aggressive urgency of his demand signals his readiness to accept the most startling account of his parentage his mother can produce. Yet ultimately, his mother has no definitive truth to offer him. Far from being able to tell her son who his father was, she can only describe the scene of Gowther's conception (she was seduced by a man who looked like her husband) and assert that she believes Gowther's father to be a "fend." Her narrative, however, resonates so powerfully with Gowther that he sets off for Rome to "lerne anodur lare" (237).

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The story of Gowther has changed considerably from its probable source, the Old French *Robert the Devil*, the story of a man whose violence is caused by his mother's pledging him to the devil at his birth.² The *Sir Gowther* version, extant in two fifteenth-century manuscripts (British Library Royal MS 17.B.43 and National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1), alters the terms of the story so that rather than pledging her son to the devil, Gowther's mother rashly wishes for a child by whatever means possible and is visited by a fiend disguised as her husband. With much of the blame for Gowther's paternity removed from the mother, the poem is able to concentrate more fully on Gowther, on the process of his redemption and the means by which he relinquishes the Fiend for God. Yet accompanying these spiritual concerns is a firm grounding in earthly matters: inheritance, distribution of lands, right rule, the practical details of who should marry whom. Critics have long been attuned to these dual facets of the poem, the secular and the spiritual, and have sought to understand where such a poem, one that calls itself a lai but bears close affinities to a saint's legend, fits into the larger body of romance.

Scholars such as Dieter Mehl, one of the first to attempt a study of English romance as its own tradition rather than an inferior imitation of the French, finds in *Sir Gowther* an uneasy and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to meld saint's legend and secular romance, perhaps by a poet who didn't quite know what he or she was doing.³ Maldwyn Mills, in editing the poem, is also conscious of, if not disturbed by, this melding, commenting that in reading the poem we "penetrate further and further into the no-man's-land that lies between edifying romance and the saint's life."⁴ More recently, Lee C. Ramsey has concluded that the poem is "really a bit of pro-church propaganda," and while he is not explicitly critical of the poem, he does see its didactic emphasis as evidence that, by the end of the fourteenth century, the romance tradition was in decline, no longer capable of sustaining a set of shared, and therefore barely noticeable, assumptions with its audience and instead often becoming a vehicle for didacticism.⁵ Such responses to *Sir Gowther*, while not, perhaps, enhancing the poem's reputation, have kept it alive in the conversation about romance and have

helped prepare the way for more extensive studies of the poem, most notably that of Andrea Hopkins. Objecting to the sidelining of deeply religious romance, Hopkins finds the severity of penance in such poems as *Sir Gowther*, *Sir Ysumbras*, *Robert of Cisyle*, and *Guy of Warwick* a severity at odds with fourteenth-century penitential practices, as produced precisely by the genre of romance; they represent an ideal of contrition and union with God at the same time as they enable the heroes to live successfully in the world.⁶ Hopkins's analysis of the poem, like an earlier study by Shirley Marchalonis, seeks to demonstrate in part that the concerns of what we describe as romance need not preclude, and in fact may invite, the predominance of religious concerns.⁷

While my purpose is not to attempt a definition of romance or to situate

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Sir Gowther within it, I would like to suggest that the history of this debate as it relates to *Sir Gowther* opens the way for a closer study of how the secular and the spiritual speak to one another in this poem. While most critics quite rightly identify the poem's theme as the power of God to work miracles, forgive the direst of sins, and triumph over the devil, I want to look more closely at the poem's domestic investments, as I believe it is these that make possible the poem's larger religious focus. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury point out in the introduction to their edition of the poem that its place in Royal 17.B.43, accompanied by a treatise on table manners, suggests that at least one audience did not find it out of place among tracts on domestic issues.⁸ Even more to the point, they draw attention to Gowther's paternity as the fundamental dilemma in the poem, and his replacing this paternity as the crux of the narrative. It is to this question of paternity that I would like to turn, in order to ask what Gowther's ability to cast off one father for another suggests, not just about the state of his soul but about paternity itself.

The poem is certainly invested in religious motifs, particularly as it moves into its second phase where Gowther repents and is forgiven. But the events of the narrative also address domestic issues.⁹ Gowther inherits his father's estate, marries, inherits an empire which he must govern, and ensures loyal, responsible governance of his father's estate. The anxiety initiating the narrative and preceding these other practical matters is the Duke and Duchess's concern that they have no heir. The domestic concerns I've remarked here all address a system of patrilineal social structure in which male heirs are relied upon to maintain, distribute where appropriate, and pass down to the next generation the family's holdings. But even as the poem is about the heir, so too is it about the patriarch. Through the crisis produced by Gowther's own uncertain paternity, the poem examines paternity itself, finding it a fragile and bifurcated structure that only investment in a new father, God, can amend.

The poem's interest in the structure of fatherhood is developed early in the narrative through the Duke's relationship with Gowther. Though the audience knows all along that Gowther is a fiend's offspring, Gowther himself does not, nor does the Duke, his supposed father. So when their relationship goes terribly wrong and the Duke cannot control Gowther's wicked behavior, he is unable to understand why and, in the Advocates version, dies in despair.¹⁰ At one level, the Duke's failure is produced by an external force driving Gowther, a force outside the Duke's realm of authority because Gowther is not his own child. Gowther's distinguishing characteristics, a remarkable early strength and penchant for violence, identify him to the community (as represented by the old earl) as a fiend's offspring, but they leave the Duke curiously in ignorance. We find, then, that as the poem traces Gowther's development and the increasing horror of his behavior, it exposes a parallel ineffectiveness in the Duke.

A crucial dimension to Gowther's disregard of his father's authority is foreshadowed by the Duke himself through his inability to beget an heir. The first

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time we hear his voice in the poem he is condemning his wife, saying " Y tro thu be sum baryn, / Hit is gud that we

twyn; / Y do bot wast my tyme on the, / Eirles mon owre londys bee" (56-9). In keeping with divorce practices of the late fourteenth century, the Duke displaces blame for their childlessness onto his wife so that he may leave her, but in doing so he calls attention to his own impotence, a failure that is the more pronounced when the Duchess does become pregnant with the fiend's child. We need not even understand his impotence literally to see the Duke's metaphorical inadequacy. His kingdom is vulnerable because he has not been able to produce an heir, and the medium through which that vulnerability is realized is, as in so many romances, his own wife. The Duke cannot keep the family circle closed and unwittingly becomes the ultimate duped spouse, taking in a bastard child he believes to be his own. As the narrative explores the consequences of the Duke's condition, it produces an estate holder's worst nightmare. The bastard child ignores his "father's" attempts at restraining him, wreaks egregious violence on the estate and causes his father to die of sorrow while the son, potential cause of the duchy's destruction, is its sole inheritor.

This poem does explore Gowther's wild destructiveness as a manifestation of evil, yet it leads us to see his wickedness as a symptom of a fundamental tension in fatherhood itself, a tension encapsulated in the roles of Fiend and Duke as dual fathers to Gowther. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a way to begin thinking about the paternal functions and failures in the poem, as it insists we leave behind notions of paternity as primarily a biological phenomenon and perceive it foremost as a symbolic function. Lacan calls this symbolic function the "Name-of-the-Father." "It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law. This conception enables us to distinguish clearly, in the analysis of a case, the unconscious effects of this function from the narcissistic relations, or even from the real relations that the subject sustains with the image and action of the person who embodies it."¹¹ This distinction between the symbolic and biological father opens a space for something other than what we commonly understand as the father to represent the law, to prohibit the child's access to its desires.¹² A crucial component of the name-of-the-father is that it is an empty signifier; far from *being* a coherent, transcendent locus of meaning, it gives the appearance of functioning as such.

Feminist critics of medieval literature, while often providing a rich intersection of psychoanalysis and literature, have tended to be skeptical of Lacan for the apparent phallogentrism of this and other ideas, a skepticism born in part from an anxiety over Lacan's apparent privileging of the masculine.¹³ I do not mean to position myself here as an apologist for Lacan. But Lacanian analysis offers a useful vocabulary for interrogating the disturbing father/son relationship depicted so vividly in *Sir Gowther*. This vocabulary is not a rigid

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designator of gender but instead describes functions fulfillable without regard to gender. The fact that biological gender categories and psychoanalytic designations ("name-of-the-father," "Mother's desire," for example) often line up testifies to the capacity of Lacanian analysis to describe social relations rather than to reinscribe them. The sense of Lacan's privileging of the masculine is born in part out of his emphasis on the name-of-the-father as the master signifier crucial to the subject's orientation as a subject. Yet this paternal function, because it is distinct from the biological father, need not be represented by a man, nor even by a human being.¹⁴ It is important, however, that Lacan's emphasis on the father does resonate with a similar focus in medieval romance, a focus that frequently locates the child's identity in discovering, or ensuring that the community recognizes, who his or her father is. Romances such as *Havelok*, *King Horn*, and *Sir Degare*, for example, end only when the child's paternity is established. Most interesting about the poem at hand is its investment in examining how paternity functions, how it produces its appearance of power, an important Lacanian concern.

In *Sir Gowther*, the relationship between the Duke and Gowther is terribly out of joint; the Duke, while in all outward respects occupying the position of father, has no power to govern his son's behavior. The import of this failed relationship is not simply the Duke's inability to fulfill the paternal function, to be the law, but its pointing up of the always potential disjunction between the father and his authority as a symbolic figure.

On the one hand, the circuit between father and son initially seems to work successfully. As François Regnault points out, the Lacanian expression "Name-of-the-Father" offers a deliberate ambiguity, as it simultaneously indicates the name the child gives the father and the name the father gives the child.¹⁵ The Duke does successfully exercise the power to name his son, choosing the name "Gowther" for the infant and having him christened: "Tho duke hym gard to kyrke beyre, / Crystond hym and cald hym Gwother" (106-8). Yet while the Duke bestows a name on the child, identifying him as heir to the duchy even before Gowther is born, and Gowther understands the Duke to be his father, no constituent power accompanies the Duke's position as father. The Duke "hym myght not chastyse" (149) and even his final attempt at controlling his son by knighting him fails. Gowther remains driven to destructiveness, raping and murdering, acknowledging no restraints on his behavior. The Duke's sheer inability to restrain Gowther, to prohibit, asserts that the convergence of biological father and symbolic paternal function is not natural or essential. The Duke's knighting of Gowther marks his awareness of this bifurcation as he seems to hope knighthood will serve the prohibitive role he is unable to fulfill. Yet again the symbolic register fails as Gowther ignores the strictures that knighthood places on him, in particular its demand that he serve the church, and continues to terrorize the community. As Gowther's continued violence demonstrates, the symbolic dimension of paternity the Duke tries to employ

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remains impotent. The Duke is quite literally his father in name only, an empty placeholder.

The Duke's fragility is produced precisely by Gowther's "other" father, the elusive, invisible fiend whose presence is known only through his effects. Apart from a brief appearance at the beginning of the poem, he never appears again, yet he looms over the narrative, ordering its events, all of which occur in response to him. His having been present is enough to ensure that the poem is organized around his trace, through Gowther's diabolical behavior and subsequent rejection of him in repentance. The Fiend's hold over Gowther is complete; as the narrator succinctly proclaims "Erly and late, lowde and styl, / [Gowther] wold wyrke is fadur wyll / Wher he stod or sete" (175-77). Here we find an inversion of the Duke's paternal function: where the Duke embodies the position of father but exposes that role as purely symbolic, the Fiend is bodiless yet exerts paternal authority governing Gowther's behavior. Duke and Fiend, each the inverse of the other, are bound together in a complementary representation of paternity's split condition.

Here the work of Slavoj Žižek offers a useful way to think about the Fiend and the Duke as the two components of a split paternity. In a reading of the Lacanian Name-of-the-Father, Žižek makes the following observation, one that is not found in Lacan's work:

What emerges under the guise of the phantom-like "living dead" [the symbolic father] ... is ... the reverse of the Name of the Father, namely the "anal father" who definitely *does* enjoy; the obscene little man who is the clearest embodiment of the phenomenon of the "uncanny" (*Unheimliche*). He is the subject's double who accompanies him like a shadow and gives body to a certain surplus, to what is "in the subject more than the subject himself"; this surplus represents what the subject must renounce, sacrifice even, the part in himself that the subject must murder in order to start living as a "normal" member of the community.¹⁶

Žižek outlines here a conception of paternity that complicates our general understanding of the father as pure prohibition. In his larger project, which is to explore our participation in the ideological structures that dominate us, Žižek posits a division in the paternal function and examines its effects on the subject. This "certain surplus" that he identifies as the father who enjoys is present in Gowther in his inexplicable drive to rape, murder and destroy. While the "uncanny" surplus survives in Gowther, the symbolic father is powerless, his prohibition means nothing, and his very powerlessness literally kills him. What Žižek implies, *Sir Gowther* makes explicit; this second father, an integral part of the first, demands transgression from the subject.

Sir Gowther's innovation in its examination of fatherhood is to make visible this split in paternity by literalizing it.

When, on the one hand, the Duke

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attempts to restrict Gowther's behavior, to provide him a name under which he will obey social laws, the Fiend demands that he break precisely these laws. Fiend and Duke work in apparent opposition to each other, fighting for exclusive rights to the son, manifesting the bifurcation in the paternal function itself. The poem takes precise steps to make these two functions palpable, as becomes clear if we turn for a moment to the poem's early scenes in which we encounter the Fiend (and fiendishness) for the first time. As the narrator introduces the tale and describes how incubi behave, he emphasizes their ability to shift forms, to appropriate the form of any human being, a necessity, in fact, because they have no form of their own; when they impregnate women, they take "Tho kynde of men ... / for of hom selfe had thei nan" (16-17). Such a shape-shifting capacity is familiar from Chaucer's *Friar's Tale* where the summoner says to the devil,

"I wende ye were a yeman trewely.
Ye han a mannes shap as wel as I;
Han ye a figure thanne determinat
In helle, ther ye been in youre estat?"
"Nay, certainly," quod he, "ther have we noon;
But whan us liketh we kan take us oon,
Or elles make yow seme we been shape;
Somtyme lyk a man, or lyk an ape,
Or lyk an angel kan I ryde or go." (1457-65)[17](#)

A fiend, then, is a temporary embodiment, occupying a human form but never a palpable entity in and of itself. In fact, this peculiar characteristic of incubi led Aquinas to speculate about how impregnation could occur. He concludes that these spirits must use the semen of the body they inhabit as, being themselves bodiless, they would have none of their own. Aquinas goes so far as to argue that "the child so begotten would not have the devil for its father, but the man whose semen had been used," an argument that emphasizes the abstract nature of these beings.[18](#) Yet when in *Sir Gowther* the fiend sleeps with Gowther's mother in the guise of her husband, he violates the parameters of fiendish possibility by afterward standing before her as a "felturd fende" prophesying that "'Y have geyton a chylde on the / That in is yothe full wylde schall bee, / And weppons wyghtly weld'" (76-78). While, as both Aquinas and Chaucer's "summoner" make clear, a fiend can take on any form it chooses, the emphasis in *Sir Gowther* that the fiend has adopted a form representing what he "really" is (a "felturd fend") enables him to claim paternity and demarcate his own contribution to the child. Gowther's very wickedness is his father's gift. I want to suggest that the Fiend's appearance as a fiend insists that we recognize a paternal demand for transgression as corporeal, as a real component of the subject. At the same time, however, the Fiend's appearance cannot obviate the guise in which he approached the Duchess; he did so in the form of the Duke so that, eerily, both Duke and Fiend are present at the child's

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conception. Both are Gowther's "real" father; both create his paternal inheritance.

In exploring paternity in these terms, the poem asks us to rethink our understanding of power, prohibition and their relation to transgression. Both Zizek and *Sir Gowther* posit the idea that prohibition contains within itself a demand for transgression and that this demand, rather than prohibition alone, is a traumatic, crippling locus of power. The pivotal moment in the poem, when Gowther is faced with the Earl's account of his parentage, is climactic precisely because Gowther is confronted with the fact that his very lawlessness is scripted for him. If he was able to expose the powerlessness of the Duke's symbolic role and the inadequacy of his attempts at prohibition, he is unable to do the same to the sordid underside of paternity, in whose service he was working all along.

Gowther's horror at this moment is exacerbated by his sudden awareness of the fiend as a part of him. What Gowther seems to recognize through his encounter with the Earl and then with his mother is that his subjection to his father's demand is manifested in him as a stain, as something sordid others see in him. When the Earl speaks, he does so as a spokesperson for the community, saying "We howpe thu come never of Crysten stryn, / Bot art sum fendys son, we weyn, / Thus dose never gud, bot ay tho ylle-- / We hope thu be full syb tho deyll" (208-12). In a remarkable show of restraint from a man who thinks nothing of violence, Gowther defers his assault on the Earl and so obliquely acknowledges that this man may be able to see in him something that Gowther cannot see in himself: "Sir, *and* thu ly on mee, / Hongud and drawon schall thu bee" (214-15; my emphasis). This glimmer of self-recognition that he is marked by the agency that governs him reaches the status of truth when Gowther confronts his mother. Gowther's threat against his mother, that he will kill her if she lies about who his father is, proves utterly empty:

He seyde, "Dame, tell me in hye,
Who was my fadur, withowt lye,
Or this schall thoro the glyde";
He sette his fachon to hur hart:
"Have done, yf thu lufe thi qwart!"
Ho onswarde hym that tyde--
"My lord," scho seyde, "that dyed last."
"Y hope," he seyde, "thou lyus full fast";
Tho teyrus he lett don glyde. (220-28)

Even when he knows she is lying, far from murdering her, he can only sob. Gowther's breakdown, noteworthy in a poem that shows little of the inner lives of its characters, marks the critical moment when Gowther confronts and rebels against his father's demand. At the moment he fully realizes that his wildest transgressions are dictated, he accepts that his only moment of freedom will be in his choosing the law that governs him and so he determines to
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leave for Rome to "lerne anodur lare" (237).

The profundity of the poem, I believe, lies in its absolute reinvestment in the symbolic father, encapsulated in the Pope's pronouncement that Gowther is finally and truly God's child. The poem arrives at its celebration of God's power through reconciling in one father the split function of paternity represented by the Fiend and the Duke, ultimately recognizing that the symbolic father and the obscene transgressive father are essential components of one another. The resolution depends not on Gowther obliterating all traces of his connection to the Fiend, not on his murdering him as Žizek argues the anal father must be murdered, but upon his being inextricably associated with him. The sword that Gowther fashions in his wild youth and refuses to relinquish even at the Pope's bidding marks the conjunction of his symbolic and obscene fathers; a weapon once used to murder at the Fiend's direction becomes the weapon with which he defends the emperor in God's name. The sword is but one means by which the poem ensures we do not forget the Fiend, the narrative voice also insisting on his presence by reasserting toward the end of the poem that Gowther was "geyton with a felteryd feynd" (748). It is this association that makes the story worth telling, that a fiend's spawn could become God's child. Yet it is also through this association that the Fiend is shown to be incorporated in, rather than annihilated by, the new father.

It is precisely Gowther's horrified recognition of the destiny scripted for him by the Fiend that leads him to accept God as father; his sins themselves become salvific, for they offer the possibility of repentance and so a visible manifestation of Gowther's devotion to God. One of the most touching facets of the poem is Gowther's difficulty in reconciling himself to the atrocities he committed and his attempts to repair the irreparable damage he did; he builds abbeys, helps rich and poor, and even after his death helps heal the wounded. This continuing struggle to make

reparations through serving the Church recognizes that transgression, because essential for Gowther in reaching God, is no longer simply the Fiend's provenance, but also God's. If, as Hopkins argues, the primary assertion of the poem is that "God's grace is sufficient to forgive even the gravest sins,"¹⁹ the poem also, if sadly, acknowledges that these grave sins make possible God's gracious forgiveness. In the poem's reconciliation of the troubled paternity it explores, we might find also an answer to the concerns of the poem's early critics, those who felt disturbed by the uneasy joining of the secular and the spiritual. We might argue that the poem too is uneasy about the relationship, and takes as its very subject matter, in the form of the obscene and the symbolic, the task of understanding their relation.

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Notes

1. All quotations from *Sir Gowther* are cited parenthetically by line number and are taken from Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, 1995).
2. For comparisons of the two works, see Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 150-158 and Shirley Marchalonis, "Sir Gowther: The Process of a Romance," *Chaucer Review* 6 (1971/2), 14-29.
3. Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London, 1968), pp. 125-128.
4. Maldwyn Mills, ed., *Six Middle English Romances* (London, 1973), p. xviii.
5. Lee C. Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington, 1983), p. 219.
6. Hopkins, *Sinful Knights*, pp. 144-178.
7. Marchalonis, "Process of a Romance." Marchalonis argues that the "chivalric ethic provides the major emphasis for *Sir Gowther* in its final form" (14).
8. Laskaya and Salisbury, eds., *Middle English Breton Lays*, pp. 263-64. Seeing Royal 17.B.43 as largely concerned with the domestic relies in part upon reading *Sir Ysumbras*, as Laskaya and Salisbury do, as a tale about the hero's loss of and subsequent reunion with his family. Like *Sir Gowther*, *Sir Ysumbras* is the subject of a debate about its status as romance, as it also is deeply concerned with contrition and repentance.
9. To summarize *Sir Gowther's* plot, the childless Duke and Duchess of Austria are on the point of separating when the Duchess prays for a child. She is confronted in an orchard by a man who appears to be her husband but is actually a fiend, and she becomes pregnant by him. The child, christened Gowther, becomes progressively more wicked, raping women, burning churches and murdering churchmen. Finally Gowther is confronted by an elderly earl who insists Gowther must be a fiend's son. Gowther receives confirmation of this from his mother and sets off for Rome to "learn another teaching." Gowther then begins the long process of repentance, taking a vow of silence and eating food only from the mouths of dogs. On the fourth day of wandering he arrives at a castle where an emperor is threatened by a sultan who wants to marry the emperor's daughter. The daughter takes care of Gowther, rinsing the mouths of her greyhounds with wine and placing meat and bread in them for Gowther to eat. Gowther prays that he be equipped to defend the emperor and his daughter, and a black horse and armor appear the first day, red the second, and white the third. Thanks to Gowther, the sultan is ultimately defeated, but on the third day the emperor's daughter falls out of a tower at the sight of Gowther being wounded in battle, and for two days lies as if dead. As the emperor prepares for her funeral, she rises, tells Gowther that God has forgiven him his sins, and reveals to her father that Gowther is the mysterious knight

- who helped him in battle. The Pope pronounces Gowther God's child, and Gowther marries the maiden. Gowther then returns to Austria, gives the old earl his duchy, and marries him to the Duchess. He builds an abbey and a monastery and then returns to Germany where he marries the emperor's daughter and inherits his kingdom. He reigns well, heals the sick, and when he dies, is buried at the abbey he founded. This summary follows the Advocates version of the poem, as it includes details of Gowther's violent behavior that the Royal version, generally considered later and gentler, excludes. For facing page versions of the two texts see Cornelius Novelli, *Sir Gowther*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1963.
10. In the Royal version, the Duke simply dies, so that Gowther's fatherlessness is just another unfortunate circumstance that enables Gowther to be wicked. But in the Advocates version, Gowther actually causes his father's death. This difference is an example of what I see as the Advocates version's closer attention to the struggles in the father/son relationship.
 11. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), p. 67.
 12. The fundamental "no" of the symbolic father is its prohibition of the child's incestuous desire for its mother.

13. Suspicion of Lacan's gendered terminology has sometimes left his work sidelined where it might be most useful. Sarah Stanbury, for example, turns to models provided by such theorists as Jane Flax and Kaja Silverman to circumvent what she sees as Lacan's privileging of the masculine in the formation of sexual difference. See Sarah Stanbury, "Feminist Masterplots: The Gaze on the Body of *Pearl's* Dead Girl," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 106. Or similarly, Louise Fradenburg argues that Lacanian theory "tends to absolutize and universalize what is in fact a production of a particular configuration of gender, loss, and language" (200). See her "'Voice Memorial': Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990), 169-202. But at the same time, H. Marshall Leicester's intriguing analysis of three of the *Canterbury Tales* in his *The Disenchanted Self* (Berkeley, 1990) makes clear how fruitfully Lacanian analysis can be employed to explore medieval representations of subjectivity. And Gayle Margherita, in her recent work, *The Romance of Origins* (Philadelphia, 1994), uses Lacan, among other theorists, to examine what she sees as the correlation between sexual difference and our alienation from the past.

14. In the case of Little Hans, for example, "horse" comes to serve the paternal function. For further explanation of this idea see Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, 1995), p. 56.

15. François Regnault, "The Name-of-the-Father" in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein et al.

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(Albany, 1995), pp. 65-74.

16. Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York, 1992), p. 125.

17. Text is from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1987).

18. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.51.3.6.

19. Hopkins, *Sinful Knights*, p. 146.