

Mapping Scottish Identity in the *Roman de Fergus*

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Abstract

The thirteenth-century *Roman de Fergus* by Guillaume le Clerc uses its Scottish setting, described with a precision unusual for Arthurian romance, both to construct the identity of its hero, Fergus of Galloway, and to transform that identity, rendering Fergus less a son of Galloway in particular and more a representative of Scottish knighthood generally. But the romance's geographical verisimilitude is not constant, and when the territory grows uncertain so does the hero's sense of himself. Given his strong associations with native Scottish territory, customs, and peoples, Fergus emblematically stands as the prototypical Scottish knight among Arthur's company; thus it is all the more consequential when his identity is nearly undone in an adventure to places not fixable within the map of Scotland. When his identity is reestablished under Arthur's patronage, Fergus's recovery comes with the political price of firmer subjection to Arthur as his feudal overlord.

Keywords

Roman de Fergus, Scotland, identity, romance, Arthurian literature, geography, Guillaume le Clerc, Chrétien de Troyes

Scotland has occupied an equivocal place in the political geography of Arthurian literature at least since Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (ca. 1138), which describes Scotland as the site of some of Arthur's most brutal conquests in the early

establishment of his rule within Britain.¹ In Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* (ca. 1470), the fellowship of the Round Table breaks apart along factional lines that pit knights allied with Lancelot and his French affinity against knights allied with Gawain and his Scottish kin. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* (ca. 1425), one of several Middle English verse romances set along the Scottish borders, shows unease with the encroachment of Arthur's imperial ambitions, offering both a general warning about the human costs of Arthur's expansionist policies and a specific dispute over the lands of a Scottish knight, Sir Galeron of Galloway. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* concludes with the assimilation of Sir Galeron into the Round Table, an ending that Thomas Hahn reads as "the harmonious affirmation of Arthur's lordship at the head of a peaceable pan-Britannic community" in which "outlying Celtic territories are assimilated to a centralizing English perspective" (172). The distance between Arthur's savage hostility toward the Scots in Geoffrey of Monmouth and the "peaceable pan-Britannic community" in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* offers an indication of how varied a role Scotland and Scottish knights could play in Arthurian texts, depending not least on attitudes toward territorial expansionism and political assimilation.²

In the *Roman de Fergus*, a thirteenth-century verse romance in Old French, Guillaume le Clerc considers the consequences of Arthur's assimilationist expansionism with a more focused attention to cultural difference and personal identity, again centered on the experience of a knight from Galloway, the eponymous

¹ Geoffrey writes, as translated by Lewis Thorpe in *The History of the Kings of Britain*: "Once [Arthur] had conquered the Irish, he was at liberty once more to wipe out the Scots and Picts. He treated them with unparalleled severity" (219). "Treating with severity" may be too weak a phrase to render Geoffrey's Latin, which here reads "seuicie indulgens" in Wright's edition of the *Historia* (105). Given the violence of the context, one might better understand Arthur to be "yielding to savageness" in seeking the Scots' destruction.

² For a much fuller treatment of the ways that Scotland and the Scots appear in Arthurian literature (and of how Arthur has been viewed by Scottish audiences), consult the studies collected in Purdie and Royan, especially their "Introduction: Tartan Arthur?" (1-7).

Fergus. Hahn has argued that Middle English romances like *The Awntyrs off Arthure* show how "Arthur's kingship consists in his power to control and redistribute the lands—Scotland, Wales, Brittany, perhaps Ireland—that mark the borders of the body politic" (172). As Guillaume makes clear in the *Roman de Fergus*, however, to "mark the borders of the body politic" often entails a corollary effort to delimit the personal body, not least when the shifting of boundaries causes an adjustment in an individual person's sense of self. Guillaume's romance continues the give-and-take over Scotland's place in Arthurian literature by demonstrating both the attraction of Arthur's court for a Scottish outsider and the questionable value of Arthur's influence, as figured in the way the hero's identity shifts alongside the romance's deployment of Scottish geography.

As a francophone text with a wide-ranging setting within Scottish territory (though arguably without a medieval Scottish readership³), the *Roman de Fergus* offers a more complicated take on

³ Scholars differ on how much Guillaume le Clerc really knew about Scotland; whether his knowledge came from firsthand experience of the country or secondhand report; and whether he wrote for a Scottish patron or not. Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann's *Evolution of Arthurian Romance* presents ingenious arguments for the patronage of Devorguilla of Galloway and John de Balliol, who married around 1223 (251-267). Among the most strident champions of the thesis that Guillaume lived and worked in Scotland at the behest of a Scottish patron is D. D. R. Owen, whose 1991 translation of the *Fergus* presented the idea that one William of Malveisin wrote the work at the court of King William the Lion, who died in 1214 (162-169). Owen has continued to develop this thesis in his later works, and as recently as 2003, in his study *The Wandering Giant in Literature*, he claimed that "it is virtually certain that [Guillaume] lived in Scotland as a subject of King William the Lion, and composed his *Romance of Fergus* in the early 1200s" (87-88). By contrast, Tony Hunt notes that all the attempts thus far to tie the *Fergus* and its author to a specific time, place, and patronage are "speculative" and that "it might be said that if any of them were true, it would be puzzling that the author did not give clearer clues to his identity or political purpose." Hunt goes on to note that "[t]he Scottish connection need not [...] mean that the work was actually written in Scotland or composed by a writer resident there" (56), and he even argues that "it is difficult to envisage an audience in the

border relations than that to be found in the "centralizing English perspective" of the Middle English Gawain romances.⁴ Those Middle English romances take it as given that Arthur's home territory corresponds to England (even if it appears under the romance name of 'Logres'). Scotland therefore appears as a foreign country distinct from Arthur's homeland and readily associated with a monolithic Celtic alterity—hence Scotland's inclusion alongside "Wales, Brittany, [and] perhaps Ireland" in Hahn's list of the Arthurian borderlands. But *Fergus* offers a narrative whose points of reference are located almost entirely within Scotland, not England, and its protagonist is not Arthur or his nephew Sir Gawain but an unfamiliar outsider to the Arthurian mainstream. Furthermore, *Fergus* presents its hero's relation to Scottish territory in such a way that it resists the monolithic picture of a uniform Celtic otherness, showing how Fergus's home territory of Galloway stands apart from Scotland more broadly construed.

Nevertheless, the narrative proceeds to remake Fergus as both more Arthurian and more Scottish at the same time. It does so not just by assimilating him to the practices and values of Arthurian chivalry but by associating him with a redefined Scottishness, one oriented more to the easterly territory around Lothian, the patrimony of his eventual bride Galiene, rather than to the westerly hinterland of Galloway, his own native land. Since Lothian appears as a territory fully under Arthur's overlordship, one whose aristocratic culture of knights and ladies does not differ appreciably

British Isles with the detailed textual knowledge of the romances of Chrétien which [...] *Fergus* undoubtedly requires" (57).

⁴ This is not to deny, however, that Old French texts, and certainly Anglo-Norman texts, may have been written for English audiences, or at least audiences with English sympathies. Keith Busby and Jane H. M. Taylor point to such circumstances in their discussion of the work of other scholars of French Arthurian literature: "Taking up [Erich] Köhler's assertion that Chrétien [de Troyes]'s audience was at the Anglo-Angevin and Plantagenet courts, [Beate] Schmolke-Hasselmann argues that Arthurian verse romance is in many ways English literature in French, with a particular social and political function" (111).

from the culture of Arthur's court, the romance clearly participates in the familiar practices of Arthurian cultural imperialism, ever ready to absorb Scottish knights in order to claim Scottish territory. Nonetheless, the romance finesses the cultural and political consequences of such assimilation for Scottish identity generally, precisely through its more ostentatious demonstration of the erasure of Fergus's particular identity as a knight of Galloway. Moreover, since the specific cultural practices of Galloway are portrayed as backwards or uncouth, such that Fergus must shed his provincial ways to be accepted as Arthur's knight, the text ultimately presents Fergus's loss of Galwegian particularity as more of a gain, of a piece with his later acquisition of a wife and lands that are more properly Scottish. Still, a trace of Fergus's loss persists in his geographical and psychological dislocation at the center of the romance, a lengthy period of wandering where he seems unsure of both his location and his identity before he settles for the mainstream certainties of a more Arthur-centric Scotland. The *Roman de Fergus* thus bespeaks a cultural hybridity ready to employ fine distinctions of place, taste, and custom in order to demonstrate the personal costs of the kind of imperialism, cultural and otherwise, that must accompany Arthurian hegemony, however seemingly benign.

Guillaume's frequent mention of specific Scottish placenames emphasizes the role of geography in forming and maintaining Fergus's identity, and his careful deployment of the Scottish milieu—now westerly, now easterly; now precise, now vague—tracks the shifts in his construction of a peculiarly Arthurian Scottish identity for this new knight of Galloway. Indeed, the shifts in how that identity is defined account for the poem's ultimately greater attention to eastern Scotland than to Galloway in the west. To claim his noble holdings (by marriage) when his romance concludes, Fergus must effectively renounce the peasant homeland (by birth) where his adventures began. To be sure, the romance's opening in Galloway makes a distinctive contribution to this text and to Arthurian romance at large; Tony Hunt has even argued that "[t]he originality of the *Fergus* author is to have abandoned the more conventional Scottish toponymy for places, like Galloway, with a much less reassuring reputation, thereby extending Scotland's appearance in romance literature" (56). But

the gradual replacement of Fergus's Galwegian distinctiveness with a more familiar (and therefore more reassuring?) appearance, as an exemplary Arthurian knight who blends in as the new lord of Lothian, may also be read as a contraction of the work's seeming extension of Scotland.

In plotting Fergus's identity against the map of Scotland, the romance employs an unusually specific geography. D. D. R. Owen maintains that the poet "turns his back on idealism in the locations selected for the action of the romance. Fergus does not travel through the vague landscape typical of these Arthurian tales, in which a few names of Celtic origin or pure fantasy suffice to give an exotic flavour" (*Fergus* x). Even so, this verisimilitude, such as it is, is not constant. At a crucial moment in Fergus's story, the poem precisely does abandon what Owen calls "the greatest geographical precision of any Arthurian romance" (*Fergus* x) in order to stage an adventure that precipitates a crisis in the hero's sense of mission and sense of himself—a crisis provoked by the hero's effort to comport with the typical practices of Arthurian chivalry. Moreover, it is by no means the case that all of Fergus's wanderings are traced with pinpoint accuracy and a dutiful record of place-names, despite Owen's suggestion that "the places on Fergus' itinerary can still be visited in the course of a short tour of southern Scotland" (*Fergus* x). It appears, rather, that the variations in the clarity of the poem's imagined landscape are part of Guillaume's design in plotting Fergus's identity against the map of Scotland. In short, when the territory of Fergus's activity grows uncertain, so too does the hero's sense of himself.

While other Arthurian romances occasionally employ landscape as a crucible of identity formation, their geography is often unspecific, fanciful, or frankly more symbolic than realistic.⁵ This

⁵ Eric Auerbach pithily demonstrates the last case while discussing the scene in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain* where the knight errant Calogrenant "come[s] upon a road leading to the right, straight through a dense forest. Here we stop and wonder. To the right? That is a strange indication of locality when, as in this case, it is used absolutely. In terms of terrestrial topography it makes sense only when used relatively. Hence it must here have an ethical signification" (128-129).

unreality can open up a given text to interpretations freed from the historical claims of specific lands or peoples that could be attached to precise locations. For this reason, the presence of an identifiable locale within an Arthurian text has often suggested a real-world analogue in the contemporary politics of its author's time. Thus, for example, the battle sites of Arthur's continental campaigns in the *Historia regum Britanniae* have been read as allusions to the military careers of the early Norman kings of England,⁶ while Malory's statement that Lancelot's castle of Joyous Garde was at Alnwick or Bamborough has furthered speculation that the *Morte Darthur* encodes references to fifteenth-century conflicts.⁷ Considering *Fergus* alongside other romances that feature specific placenames, Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann has further argued that "[i]t would [...] seem that the nomenclature of the romances can be viewed as an indication of their sphere of influence and as a clue to their target audience" (243). If scholars knew as much about Guillaume le Clerc's biography or the composition of the *Fergus* as is known about Geoffrey of Monmouth or Sir Thomas Malory, chances are that the precise details of Scottish geography in the romance would have called forth some precise arguments about its

⁶ Among those scholars who have seen echoes of Norman campaigns in some of the specific battle sites of Arthur's itinerary, James Noble has observed that this "would seem to be indicative of a conscious attempt on Geoffrey's part not only to invite comparison with, but also to establish sound historical precedent for, the imperialistic practices and ambitions of William the Conqueror and his successors, William Rufus and Henry I" (161-162).

⁷ See, for example, Eugène Vinaver's note on this passage in his edition of Malory's *Works*: "The suggested identification of Joyous Gard with either Alnwick or Bamborough may well have some connexion with the author's own experiences. In 1462 Malory went to Northumberland with the forces of the Earl of Warwick. The purpose of the expedition was to raise the royal standard against the French and the Scots who, at the instigation of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou, were endangering the peace of the realm" (1660).

political meaning, as well.⁸ In the absence of such knowledge, one might well heed Tony Hunt's declaration that "[t]he importance of *Fergus* is literary"—especially as a skillful pastiche of the founding Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes—"rather than political. It is anything but a *roman à thèse* or a *roman à clef*" (57). Nevertheless, since the romance does describe shifts in sovereignty over Scottish territory, it necessarily has a political dimension, one that encourages a consideration of the general political import of its specific geographical citations. All told, over forty places are named in the poem, from Ireland in the west to Syria and Ethiopia in the east; more unusually, the action of the poem takes place in a Scotland that is described with some nineteen recognizable place-names identifying eighteen genuine locales.⁹ Plotted on a map, these places chart an extensive range of Scottish territory,¹⁰ some of it covered by Arthur and his knights at the start of the poem but most of it traversed by the hero, who moves from the western coast in Galloway as far north as Dunnottar Castle in Kincardineshire before settling down in Roxburghshire.

Opinions differ as to the reliability of Guillaume's versified cartography. In an appendix to his 1991 translation of the poem, D. D. R. Owen declared that *Fergus* presents "a basically sound knowledge of Scottish topography, especially of the region south of the Forth known as Lothian, the heartland of the romance being Melrose, Roxburgh, and Jedburgh" (162). On the other hand, Joan Greenberg had earlier claimed that "the author's topographical

⁸ Admittedly, the arguments of both Schmolke-Hasselmann and Owen, as adduced in note 3 above, do present some specific claims about the political implications of the geography in *Fergus*, though their claims depend heavily on speculation in the absence of other concrete evidence—which might help explain why they reach different conclusions.

⁹ Two separate terms are applied to Fergus's native Galloway: Pelande and Ingegal. Neither term seems to have referred to Galloway originally, but Guillaume's usage supports this identification; see the discussion by Wilson Frescoln in his textual notes on pages 250–251 of his edition of the poem.

¹⁰ Frescoln's dissertation does, in fact, plot these points on a map of Scotland; see page 142.

errors do not suggest residence in Galloway or indeed any other place in the general area" (qtd Frescoln 1983, 14). In the opinion of Wilson Frescoln, in his edition of the poem, "Guillaume's use of nineteen Scottish place names notwithstanding[,] his ignorance of the climate, terrain and distances could easily support the supposition that Guillaume was a Frenchman whose knowledge of Scotland came to him only indirectly" (28). Regardless of whether or not Guillaume knew Scotland personally, *Fergus* gives an impression of familiarity with the territory through its frequent mentions by name of identifiable locales across the length and breadth of Scotland.

What matters more to the romance than strict topographical accuracy, however, is the sense that the story of Fergus implicates the whole of Scotland in the unmaking of a Galwegian peasant and his remaking as an Arthurian knight. In a sense, Guillaume needed to send Fergus all over the rest of Scotland in order to overcome his Galwegian particularity. Sally Mapstone has noted how Scotland was viewed, for much of the Middle Ages, more as a diversity of regions than a unified country; indeed, she states that "'Scotland' as a term describing the whole of the country is not in regular use until the thirteenth century" (307), the period when Guillaume composed *Fergus*. Moreover, medieval Galloway and the Galwegians bore a special distinctiveness from not just their English neighbors but also their would-be Scottish compatriots. Describing Galloway in particular as "a land apart," Andrew McCulloch writes that "[i]n former times Galloway was an autonomous region which was virtually independent of the rest of Scotland, and its inhabitants were regarded as a separate people with their own special identity." The medieval rulers of Galloway "were also intimately involved in the traditional rivalries between the Scots and English kings, and to emphasise their status as independent princes they maintained a semi-regal style and all the trappings of power associated with it" (1).¹¹

¹¹ One of the potential historical namesakes of the hero of *Fergus* was a twelfth-century lord of Galloway whose "assertion of his independence of the royal authority was the keynote of his policy throughout his lordship, and this is evident from the contrast in titles accorded him in

The initial romance trajectory of Fergus's identity will thus take him from a position as a highly marked and localized figure of borderland difference, a figure outside the Arthurian mainstream, to a more conventional representative of knightly accomplishment and chivalric values as pursued under Arthur's aegis. Fergus enters the poem as a kind of northern reflex of Chrétien de Troyes's Perceval of Wales.¹² Like the Welsh in Chrétien's *Perceval*, the Galwegians of Guillaume's *Fergus* are described as "foolish and bestial" (line 199).¹³ Fittingly, the first of Arthur's knights to arrive in Galloway at the start of the romance, hot in pursuit of a stag, is Perceval himself, who was similarly scorned in Chrétien's romance for his rustic difference from Arthurian courtliness before emerging as a paramount knight in his own right. Arthur and the rest of his hunting party follow Perceval to Galloway in due course, and they set an example of knightly refinement at odds with the oafish picture of Fergus, the hinterland hick who does not know what to make of Arthur's knights when he first sees them but who nevertheless feels sure, like Perceval before him, that he wants to be a knight himself. The uncouth youth tags along after them to the king's court at "Carduel en Gales" (line 715), or Carlisle, a traditional Arthurian seat. (Fergus's seat, by contrast, is a castle built of earth, the stronghold of his father Soumillet—a peasant, though a wealthy one who has wedded a noblewoman and exercises some power in Galloway.¹⁴) When Fergus arrives at

surviving documents. Whereas English and Scottish charters describe him as Fergus de Galweia or *princeps*, he styled himself 'rex Galwitensium', thus effectively declaring that his authority was derived from the nobility and people he ruled over, and not from the king" (McCulloch 80).

¹² For fuller discussion of how Guillaume le Clerc invokes or parodies various works of Chrétien de Troyes, see the introduction to Wilson Frescoln's 1961 study of the poem and the essay by D. D. R. Owen on "The Craft of Guillaume le Clerc's *Fergus*."

¹³ In the Old French: "niches et bestiaus." I cite Guillaume's Old French text from Frescoln's 1983 edition; translations are my own.

¹⁴ For discussion of peasant-noble unions in Old French texts, including *Fergus*, see Kathryn Gravdal, *Vilain and Courtois*. Schmolke-Hasselmann argues that the hero Fergus represents not the twelfth-century lord of Galloway but the sixth-century "Fergus Mor, founder of

Arthur's court, he still wields the rustic weapons of javelin and ax while wearing his father's rusty armor,¹⁵ and dangling from his saddle are the decapitated heads of two robbers whom he slew on the way. In his homeland, his dwelling, his clothing, his arms, and his manner, Fergus defies the cultivated norms of Arthurian society.¹⁶ As such, he exemplifies a Galwegian otherness that seems quite foreign to the community he seeks to join.

Arthur himself, head of that community, draws attention to the question of geographical origins in his first words to Fergus: "Welcome, friend! Of what land are you native? And what's your name in your country?" (lines 731-734).¹⁷ Arthur's second question is particularly telling, as it seems to imply that Fergus's name—and therefore his identity—might well be different in

the line of the Scottish kings" who "may well have been seen in the thirteenth century as indeed the son of a *vilain* because he had not yet been integrated into the feudal system and could not be described as *noble* in the Norman sense" (258). As for Soumillet's earthen stronghold, it may perhaps be one of the mottes of Galloway, which "twelfth-century landowners were responsible for building [...] and] which are still a feature of the region. These consist of large earthen mounds topped with a timber donjon [...] Similar structures went up in other parts of Scotland, though more were built in Galloway than anywhere else" (McCulloch 109).

¹⁵ A peasant with armor sounds incongruous. McCulloch notes, however, that the "free peasantry" of Galloway included "small-time farmers who occupied their holdings in return for providing their landlord with a specified amount of labour service and—when occasion demanded—military service" (140). Soumillet's armor may therefore be more than just a plot contrivance to send Fergus to Arthur with some knightly equipment.

¹⁶ Sarah Gordon makes similar observations in the course of a discussion on the role of food, table manners, and eating habits in shaping knightly identity, noting that "Fergus's origins and national identity remain central to his characterization. His appearance, clothing and unmannered consumption are associated with his Scottish identity by the narrator" (87).

¹⁷ "Bien viengniés vos, amis! / De quel terre estes vos naïs? / Et comment estes apielés / En vo païs?"

another country. Like Perceval before him, Fergus throws off his upbringing to throw in his lot with Arthur, telling the king: "On account of your good fame I have abandoned my country and come here to serve you" (lines 741-743).¹⁸ Accordingly, Fergus must also abandon the trappings of his origin as he accepts the duties of serving Arthur, who duly retains him in his household ("[...]ensi l'a retenu / Li rois Artus de sa mainnie," lines 886-887). On the advice of the king's chamberlain, Fergus adopts the fashions of the court in clothing and armor. While Fergus is reportedly "very sad" to lose the equipment he had brought with him from home (lines 1169-1171),¹⁹ he soon enough returns to the court wearing finer clothing. Now, however, he proves unrecognizable to Arthur, who asks him yet again where he has come from and what he is called (1309-1310).²⁰ This time, however, the question of origin is less obviously a matter of foreign territory, for Arthur simply asks whence this knight has come, not explicitly curious about what land he was born in; similarly, Arthur just asks his name, saying nothing about how this knight is addressed in his own country. For the time being, the points of reference for understanding Fergus are apparently to be sought in Arthur's court, and, in a pregnant phrase, Fergus asks the king: "Did you not recognize me?" (line 1311).²¹ Already, the Arthurian civilizing project has begun to unmake Fergus as identifiably Galwegian. The process goes further as Arthur himself provides Fergus with better armor to replace his peasant father's rusty harness. Thus arrayed, Fergus now looks no longer like a Scottish bumpkin but like a proper Arthurian knight.

Soon thereafter, Fergus prepares not just to look like an Arthurian knight but to act like one in pursuit of a sort of initiatory challenge proffered by Sir Kay: to seek a horn and wimple guarded by the Black Knight on the Black Mountain, a place also known as

¹⁸ "Por vostre bonne renomee / Ai je guerpie ma contree, / Si vos sui ça venus servir"

¹⁹ "Atant est Fergus molt dolens / Qu'il doit perdre ses garnimens / Que de sa terre ot aportés"

²⁰ "Mais dites moi dont vos venés / Et comment estes apielés"

²¹ "Avés me vos desconneü?"

Nouquetran.²² Unlike almost twenty other identifiable Scottish locales in the romance, the object of Fergus's inaugural quest lies in a vaguely-defined place not fixable on the map of Scotland.²³ Sir Kay introduces the name with a cryptic gloss, referring to "the Nouquetran, where Merlin dwelt many years" (lines 775-776).²⁴ According to Frescoln, "No other Arthurian romance mentions Merlin in association with Nouquetren or any place name resembling it" (253).²⁵ Both its association with the enchanter and the sheer unfamiliarity of its name give Nouquetran a degree of romance unreality most unlike the carefully-named Scottish places mentioned prior to this adventure, when Fergus's origins and identity were first established.

As it happens, the vague terrain of unnamed forests and unmapped mountains on the way to this knight-making adventure represents—and perhaps results in—a corollary challenge to Fergus's identity, which similarly threatens to lose its distinctiveness. En route to Nouquetran, Fergus passes a night at

²² This unfamiliar place name is variously spelled in the manuscripts: Nouquetren, Noquetran(t), Nouquestran.

²³ In his 1961 dissertation, Frescoln raised a possible association with the site of the vaguely similar-sounding "Naked Tom," a hill in Perthshire, but noted that its location lies "well outside the area of action of the romance as well as outside of that part of Scotland with which Guillaume seems to be best acquainted" (159-160). Accordingly, Naked Tom appears on Frescoln's map of place-names in *Fergus* labeled as such, without including "Nouquetran" as its Old French equivalent (142). Frescoln omits this suggestion in his 1983 edition of the poem, though he cites two different conjectural locations previously offered by M. Dominica Legge (252-253).

²⁴ "la Nouquetren / U Merlins sejourna maint an"

²⁵ But cf. the ingenious arguments of Nikolai Tolstoy in *The Quest for Merlin*, identifying the Nouquetran with Hart Fell (60-66). However much Tolstoy may seek to find a real-world reference for the Nouquetran, his arguments do nothing to erase the fantastical elements in the depiction of the Black Mountain within *Fergus*. Even if it were possible to place Nouquetran confidently on the map of Scotland at the site of Hart Fell, its topography fails to match that of the realistic Scotland on view elsewhere in the romance.

the castle of Liddel, whose chatelain warns him that Nouquetran is "a place whence none can return, where all must die" (lines 1752-4).²⁶ In a literal sense, the chatelain's warning proves false: Fergus will survive his sojourn at Nouquetran. But in a metaphorical sense it will prove true, in that Fergus's adventure there will precipitate a crisis where his identity is endangered precisely when his location is made uncertain, unmappable. The crisis arises in part because Fergus's embrace of the adventuresome imperatives of Arthurian chivalry lead him to reject an opportunity to adopt a new kind of grounded Scottish identity while still at Liddel, though he does not recognize the opportunity as such when he rejects it. Before he leaves the castle of Liddel, Fergus wins the heart of the lady Galiene, niece of the chatelain and—unknown to Fergus—the heiress of Lothian. But Fergus single-mindedly spurns Galiene's offer of love as a distraction from his knightly goal, leading her to abandon Liddel in secret while he departs in pursuit of adventure. Fergus thus misses out on an early opportunity to remake and reaffirm his identity as a Scottish knight through an advantageous love match with a scion of important Scottish territory. Admittedly, the easterly, Anglo-Norman-inflected Scottishness of Lothian hardly recapitulates or replaces Fergus's more markedly provincial origins in westerly, more pronouncedly Celtic Galloway.²⁷ But, as Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann has noted, "Lothian is a *pars pro toto* for the kingdom of Scotland" (261),²⁸ and as such it offers the promise of new meaning for all the named Scottish places through which Fergus passes. Still, having already shed the visible tokens of his native territory, Fergus must pay a

²⁶ "tel liu [...] / Dont nus ne s'en puet revenir. / Trestous les i couvient morir"

²⁷ McCulloch describes the "background" of Scotland's King David as "wholly Norman," but while David actively sought to encourage Anglo-Normans and their dependants to settle in Scotland, his twelfth-century contemporary Fergus, the historical lord of Galloway, "saw the Anglo-Normans as a potential threat to his independence, so he consistently refused to allow them to settle in his domains" (81-82).

²⁸ She adds that "[i]n the romance the term *Escoce* represents only the territory north of the Firth of Forth, the *alta Scotia*" (261).

price for this (temporary) rejection of a second chance at asserting his identity as a Scottish knight among Arthur's company. Accordingly, he finds himself at something of a loss for a readily-affirmed identity when he follows his quest to the Nouquetran, the least localizable site in the poem.

The Black Mountain of Nouquetran itself satisfies the generic expectations of unreal romance extravagance, reaching to the sky at such a perilous incline that no horse can mount it, and the only path to the top was carved by a giant. But Fergus conquers the mountain, and at first his adventure there seems to confirm him in his identity as a typical Arthurian champion. Having arrived as an emissary of Arthur's court, he succeeds in blowing the horn and seizing the wimple, thereby provoking the arrival back on the plain below of the Black Knight who guards these items. Not recognizing him as one of Arthur's familiar champions, the knight scorns him as one of Arthur's hirelings from other countries, "d'autres païs," and mocks Arthur as too cowardly to send a representative of his proper retinue such as Gawain, Lancelot, Erec, Yvain, Sagremor, or Perceval (lines 2312-2318). The text does not indicate what, if anything, leads the Black Knight to assume Fergus to be from another country distinct from those knights, though the Black Knight also draws a distinction between "this land" (within Scotland) where he stands and "that place and that country" where Arthur holds his court.²⁹ The Black Knight's presumption of Fergus's foreignness is especially notable in light of Arthur's own failure to recognize Fergus as the outlandish youth from Galloway after he had adopted familiar courtly attire; the Black Knight reminds the reader that Arthur himself might appear outlandish to someone not from his country. Still, the Black Knight's comments about knights from "other countries" imply a hierarchy in which Arthur's chief knights are not to be considered among the group of foreign knights, even if some of these notable knights may themselves have origins outside of Arthur's home territory.³⁰ In any case, Fergus has indeed been retained by Arthur,

²⁹ "ceste terre," line 2309; "En cel liu ne en cel païs," line 2488.

³⁰ Many Arthurian texts, including those contemporary with *Fergus*, present Lancelot as a continental outsider to Arthur's kingdom of Logres

as we have seen already, and he proves his fitness for Arthur's company in his triumph over the Black Knight.

According to the usual romance practice, it is appropriate that this confrontation with a mysterious and hostile figure should unfold in an unearthly location. So, too, it is appropriate that the Black Knight's challenge should strike not just at Fergus's body but at his sense of his own identity. Absent the reassuring context of more familiar places, Fergus's identity should indeed be subject to question when he is in unmapped territory, much as his identity before Arthur at Carlisle became indeterminate when he abandoned his rustic equipment, the tell-tale signs of his origins. The role played by romance space itself in the narrative of knightly identity may be illustrated by a suggestive passage of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, which discusses the situation whereby an unknown or unrecognized knight who has been bested in single combat must reveal his identity to avoid being slain by his foe. The newly-identified knight thereby reinserts himself into the social class of his opponent, and whatever "evil" he represented by appearing to be Other is displaced into the exterior "world" of romance itself, a world that allows for such mysterious encounters and hidden causes, here figured by the knight's concealed identity (118-119). This combative space of the romance encounter is, as it were, the space of the unknown, and Nouquetran operates as a variant of that archetypal site of romance where knights battle an unknown other in order to discover their own unknown selves, newly revealed as accomplished knights in the Arthurian mold—and, in Fergus's case, more than a match for disdainful challengers

in Britain, but in the romance by Chrétien de Troyes that introduces him he appears to be another native of Logres. In Chrétien's final romance, Perceval's Welsh background routinely invites ridicule from the knights who first meet him. Note that four of the six knights mentioned by the Black Knight in *Fergus* are the eponymous heroes of Chrétien's five romances; the unmentioned hero of the fifth romance, Cligés, is the one unambiguously foreign figure among these knights, a Greek-born prince who presumably stays in Greece at the conclusion of his poem and therefore cannot remain a member of Arthur's household. Despite the failure to name Cligés the knight, the text does echo *Cligés* the romance on occasion; see Hunt (62).

like the Black Knight, who assume that Arthurian knights must be more uniform than they really are.

At least, this self-knowledge is the ideal outcome of such contests, though the knowledge sometimes comes at a great price. For Fergus, the knowledge that he has what it takes to be an Arthurian knight comes at the temporary cost of his identity as a rooted Scottish knight. Fergus has already sacrificed one kind of localized Scottish identity in casting off the distinctive trappings of Galloway, but he faces another loss of Scottish particularity when he returns to the castle of Liddel after his adventures at Nouquetran, for Galiene is nowhere to be found. Alienated from the woman who holds the promise of land and title for the son of a peasant, Fergus is so dejected that he loses much of his prowess from the previous day's fighting (lines 2741-2743).³¹ He consequently resolves to abandon ties to any one place as he seeks to find Galiene wherever she may be, even refusing hospitality until his self-imposed, amorous quest is fulfilled.

When Fergus leaves Liddel behind, he leaves the last identifiable spot on his itinerary for a long time. For months he wanders without direction and without any precise indication in the text of his whereabouts, which forgoes the by-now familiar litany of Scottish place names in favor of an indistinct and repetitive mention of "this country," "this region," and other vague locations, wherever they might be found in the course of his wandering for a full year.³² For over 1100 lines—a not inconsiderable portion of a text that numbers 7012 lines all told—the only place-names mentioned lie outside Scotland or even beyond Britain, reflections of the hero's displacement from his geographic roots. In preferring the generic toys of Arthurian adventure to Galiene, the female embodiment of a specific Scottish territory, Fergus has, in a

³¹ "Sa grant proëche et sa valor / Qu'il avoit ier matin au jor / A li bien pres tote perdue"

³² An inventory: cest país (2612); u quel part (2613); en que[] contree (2653); en nule terre (2709); en aucun país (2729); en quel país (2790); en cest país (2900); en quel país (2996); ici [...] el país (3136-7); en cestui país (3220); de mon país (3345); en nul liu (3634); en son chemin (3654).

sense, fallen off the map, doomed for a while to travel aimlessly in a land as unspecific as the vague terrain of Nouquetran. Unsure how to achieve his goal and lacking evident ties to any particular land (as was already clear in the Black Knight's vagueness with respect to Fergus's seeming foreignness), Fergus now possesses an uncertain identity. His clothes grow shabby and his body grows feebler as he enters a period in the literal wilderness. His directionless straying recalls the experiences of such literary forebears as Chrétien's Yvain, who went mad in the woods after losing his lady, and Perceval, who pursued aimless errantry for the five years or so in which he forgot God.

In the course of his wanderings, Fergus survives a series of adventures and reversals, events that may typify the practice of Arthurian chivalry but that do nothing, in themselves, to restore him to a sense of place or bring him nearer to his goal. At last, however, he chances upon a magical spring, a drink from which brings him back to himself and his love for Galiene. At the same time, a dwarf who guards the spring perspicaciously addresses him as "The son of the peasant of Galloway!" (line 3739).³³ Newly aware of his own identity, and newly recognized by another person as a figure with a particular history grounded in a specific location, Fergus regains the wherewithal to pursue a chivalric quest with a more intentional effort to create and maintain his own identity. The dwarf who identifies Fergus knows that he seeks Galiene, whom the dwarf names, and also gives Fergus a new precise

³³ "Li fiuz au vilain de Pelande!" With respect to Fergus's parentage, compare Andrew McCulloch's observation that the historical Fergus, "the earliest known lord of Galloway, [...] seems more likely to have inherited the lordship rather than usurping it," though he also observes that Fergus's "origins have been the subject of much scholarly debate, the mystery being compounded by his lack of a known patronymic" (79)—hence, perhaps, the dwarf's failure to refer to Fergus's father Soumillet by name. Considering whether the *Roman de Fergus* could shed any light on the historical mystery, McCulloch suggests that the depiction of Fergus's father "as a boorish peasant, elevated by marriage to a position of wealth and high social status, [...] might point to a union between one of [the historical] Fergus's immediate forebears and a native heiress. However, this is mere speculation" (79–80).

destination, Dunnottar in the Grampian region, where he must win a magical shining shield if he is to win his beloved. With its magical restorative properties and its prophetic dwarf guardian who dispatches Fergus on a quest for yet another apparently magical object, the spring functions as another typically fantastic romance landscape that is not fully localizable.³⁴ Unlike Nouquetran, however, this site serves not to provoke but to resolve a crisis of identity, not to erase specific geography but to replace it on the itinerary that will guide Fergus for the remainder of his romance. With the new destination of Dunnottar before him, and with a renewed assurance that the lady of Lothian awaits him, Fergus pursues the quest to arm himself with the *biel escu*, the splendid shield that will confer on him yet another new identity in his byname—albeit one still unattached to a particular locale—as the Knight of the Splendid Shield, “[li] chevalier[s] au biel escu” (line 7008).

Following the dwarf’s revelations, Scottish place-names return in force to the narrative as Fergus returns to himself, newly affirmed as both an Arthurian knight, conqueror of the Black Knight of the Nouquetran, and as a son of Galloway, in pursuit of the woman who will be the inheritor of Lothian. Fergus’s hard-won shield helps him in his quest for Galiene, not least by drawing attention to his new identity as its bearer, but also by preserving him in combat against a troop of knights besieging her at Roxburgh. Subsequently, the shield helps to identify him as the paramount knight in the climactic tournament at Jedburgh,

³⁴ For all that this scene bears the hallmarks of an unreal fantasy landscape, Frescoln argues in his dissertation that many of the supernatural elements in *Fergus* are merely apparently so, reflections of the perceptions of characters within the fiction. For Frescoln, even the dwarf’s prophetic powers are doubtfully supernatural, since it is Fergus who regards the dwarf as an enchanted thing and “Guillaume speaks of the enchanted only as a figure of speech to depict extreme impressions on the part of his characters” (108-109). Frescoln rightly highlights the subjective element in such scenes, but I think he may overstate the case here, given that the narrator, not Fergus, declares that the dwarf proclaims true prophecies. And even Frescoln agrees that the magic spring is among the few “purely supernatural features” in *Fergus* (107).

contrived by Arthur precisely in order to lure out Fergus, whose whereabouts have been unknown to his court for some time. Tellingly, when Galiene comes to the tournament to ask the king to bestow her on the knight who had rescued her from her besiegers, Arthur at first professes utter ignorance of that knight's identity by declaring that he does not in any way know what he is, nor does he know his current location or place of birth (lines 6704-6706).³⁵ Arthur's mention of the knight's unknown identity in terms of what he is and where he is from makes for the third occasion where the king wonders about Fergus in ignorance of his name and place of origin, underlining the extent to which this late scene invites a new and final formula for Fergus's identity. In a sense, Fergus's loss of place and of himself after the episode at Nouquetran, losses precipitated by Galiene's disappearance, have forced him to remake himself yet again. But where initially Fergus shed his Galwegian trappings at the instigation of Arthur, to the point where Arthur himself no longer recognized him, now Fergus himself effects the change that renders him unrecognizable yet again—though still identifiable as an exemplary knight. Once apprised of Fergus's identity, however, Arthur is in a position to confirm his Scottishness politically by conferring Galiene on him, thereby investing Fergus with her lands of Lothian.³⁶ Henceforth Fergus, now revealed by name to all, will be planted firmly as a crowned king in the central Scottish soil of Lothian, quite a remove—both geographically and politically—from his initial position as the unwed son of a peasant in Galloway.

In setting things up this way, *Fergus* offers a variation on the Perceval theme established by the master Chrétien de Troyes in *Le Conte du Graal*, and we can see Guillaume's wit in substituting one Celtic corner of Britain for another, such that Perceval of Wales

³⁵ "Je ne sai en nule maniere / Que cil est que vos demandés / Ne u il est ne u fu nés"

³⁶ Schmolke-Hasselmann observes that "Lothian was completely feudalized" (261) by the time *Fergus* was composed, in keeping with the Anglo-Norman practices introduced by King David in the twelfth century. Feudal tenure of land took root more slowly in Galloway.

(Old French 'Gales') is replaced by Fergus of Galloway.³⁷ Yet the geographic detail of *Fergus* goes beyond a merely parodic recapitulation where one Celtic hinterland is as good as another.³⁸ The landscape of *Le Conte du Graal* lacks the specificity of *Fergus* in the names of sites that span nearly the length and breadth of Scottish territory. As with Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of Arthur's Continental campaigns or Malory's proposed locations of Joyous Garde, these precise geographic indications invite historical readings. Lacking more certain knowledge of the date or place of composition of *Fergus*, however, any such interpretive claims are bound to lack the specificity of the hero's itinerary.

There is nonetheless an apparently polemical value in making Fergus traipse all over a recognizable Scotland, and that value lies in the political appropriation of a locally-powerful outsider figure to serve the interests of a ruling class with expansive geographic appetites. To some extent, as well, the romance extends Fergus's potential function as a representative Scottish knight by deploying him in as wide a range of Scottish territory as possible, thereby associating him with areas well beyond his native Galloway or his adoptive Lothian. Extending the range of Fergus's exploits therefore not only increases his personal fame, but it also serves as

³⁷ Tony Hunt suggests that "[t]he Scottish location of the whole work and the density of place-names are probably a humorous attempt at demystifying the ideal landscape of Chrétien's romances, an attempt inspired perhaps by references to Scotland in the *Perceval*, thus, once more, varying a trait drawn from the source. The Welsh knight Perceval becomes the Scottish knight Fergus" (58). Note that while Galloway often appears in Old French as 'Galvoie,' which would provide a close echo of 'Gales,' Guillaume reserves 'Galvoie' for Galway in Ireland, preferring to refer to Galloway by the terms *Pelande* or *Ingegal*; see note 7, above.

³⁸ Within Chrétien's and Guillaume's romances, Wales and Galloway appear as geographical hinterlands when viewed from a perspective that privileges Logres as the center of Arthur's realm. Outside the fictions, in the world of their audiences, Wales and Galloway appear as cultural hinterlands when viewed from a perspective that privileges the customs and values of the ruling-class francophone audiences, whether Continental French or Insular Anglo-Normans.

a kind of political extension, such that the knight of Galloway becomes the foremost knight in all of Scotland. The geographical specificity of the text also shows a clearer picture of a recognizable Scotland than that found in many other Arthurian romances set along the Scottish marches, though one of the strengths of the Scottish specificity of *Fergus* is that it troubles the notion that a single, unitary Scotland could be found that would embrace both Galloway and Lothian.

At least, that notion would be troublesome were it not for Fergus's transformation over the course of the romance. Other romances might pit Arthur or Gawain against Scottish knights who are hostile to designs on their territory but otherwise very familiar in their performance of knightly culture. *Fergus*, by contrast, actually shows a knight with distinct cultural specificity before he is changed by his encounter with Arthur's court. If at the end Fergus looks as seemingly indistinguishable as any other of Arthur's knights, then that contrast with his initial outsiderhood renders his transformation into a political argument about cultural assimilation as a concomitant of territorial acquisition. Nevertheless, the personal transformation of the hero also functions as a kind of misdirection from the broader political assimilations at work in the text. The submersion of Fergus's Galwegian identity into a less differentiated Scottish identity seems drastic enough to distract attention from the culturally less marked but politically more consequential assimilation of Scotland at large into the Arthurian imperium as yet another of the king's feudal holdings. Fergus's wide sphere of activity thus operates as a would-be metonymic incorporation of Galloway into the rest of Scotland proper, the better to extend Arthur's reach still further. Fergus's journey becomes a kind of beating of the bounds that establishes the extent of Scotland even as it revises the extent of Fergus's Scottishness.

Returning, then, to Arthur's failure to recognize Fergus at the tournament, we might alternatively read the scene as a less flattering response to Fergus's development. Yes, Fergus is stronger, more accomplished, as he is more fully socialized into the mainstream of Arthurian chivalry. But so too is he less distinctive, frankly less interesting at the romance's end than at its beginning—just another successful hero who concludes his adventures with a tournament and a wedding. True, both Fergus and Arthur have

benefited in some ways from their political union—and their chief benefits are, in fact, political, as the peasant's son becomes lord of Lothian while Arthur gains a powerful ally and vassal. But these political benefits have come at a cost to the more independent identity of Fergus as an exemplar of local customs in dress, fighting, and manners. It is a cost that Fergus is apparently content to pay, but it is a cost all the same.

Does Guillaume le Clerc intend us to celebrate this flattening of difference, this incorporation of Fergus (and Scotland) into the Arthurian empire? Is the naming of Scottish places an aggressive act of annexation, defining not just the extent of Scotland but the reach of Arthurian overlordship? If so, with whose real-world interests is Arthur to be identified by the audience of the romance? It makes some sense to adopt the view of *Fergus* as a text to flatter Scottish patrons, in its attention to local detail and its seeming promotion of a great Scottish champion (though he may appear ridiculous on occasion); but few contemporary Scottish readers of the romance, if there were any, are likely to have welcomed the suggestion that their land would be subject to the dominance of a king to the south.³⁹ If the text revises Fergus's Galwegian identity into a more generic Scottishness, it must be noted that the Scottishness in question proves conveniently tractable to Arthurian political interests.

The romance refuses to relate the consequences of this co-option of its hero. The action of the poem ends with Fergus and Galiene crowned and at home in Roxburgh, the final specific locale named by the poem; and Guillaume concludes with a final flourish of territorial imagery, saying that since he could find no one in any

³⁹ See Karl-Heinz Goller's essay on "King Arthur in the Scottish Chronicles" for a survey of Scottish opinions on Arthur as found in Scottish historical texts from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. While these works obviously post-date *Fergus*, many view Arthur "as the embodiment of the threat from the South [...]. To Scottish nationalists Arthur was the embodiment of every English ruler who had hoped to conquer Scotland; to the minority with British sympathies, however, he was a symbol of the reconciliation and union of all races of the island" (173). For further discussion, see Purdie and Royan.

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land—"nule terre" (line 7006)—who could add to his story of Fergus, he therefore sets a limit and a boundary-marker at the end of the romance (lines 7010-11).⁴⁰ This final gesture of closing off the territory of the narrative prevents Fergus from pursuing any further adventures, fixing him at last in an intact identity that is sealed off like the borders of its Scottish staging-ground.

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⁴⁰ "Ici met la bonne et l'estace; / Ici est la fins del roumans"

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