

The Fusion of Many Genres with Textual Parallels and Metaphorical Expressions in *Havelok the Dane*

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Abstract

In this paper the background, types, textual recurrences, and meanings of Havelok the Dane are discussed, and it is concluded that the writer of this well-structured work handled the many genres and parallel occurrences in the poem in a very subtle way so as to bring out the style of the work in the most striking way. However, combing the bibliography on this work reveals that it is a long-neglected poem.

in this research, the origins, genres, textual symmetries, and the metaphorical expressions in *Havelok the Dane*, by an anonymous writer, will be analysed. *Havelok the Dane*, which relates the tale of the exiled Danish Prince Havelok, who finds himself in a menial situation, portrays the matrimony of Havelok and Goldborough, the heiress to the English throne, deprived of her monarchic rights as is Havelok, but, eventually, Havelok and Goldborough become King and Queen of Denmark, and of England afterwards.

The work, which comprises 30001 lines, has a controversial dating. As it was used by Rauf de Boun, a Medieval scholar who wrote by 1310, it must, therefore, have been composed some time before this date, and Skeat¹, who edited *Havelok the Dane*, places the work at about 1280 and points out that the work cannot be later than the end of the 13th Century. Hupe dates the manuscript round about 1380 on palaeographical grounds² and observes no later minstrel additions. it appears that the palaeographical traits of the work are the prototypes of their future consuetudinary type.

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¹ Anonymous Author, *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, Eds. W.W. Skeat and K.Sisam, Oxford University Press, Oxford, (1902), *Introduction*, p.VII. Hereafter, all the references to *Havelok the Dane* will be given in the text.

² A.H. Billings, *A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances*, Russell and Russell, New York, (1967), p.23.

There is concrete information on the origins of *Havelok the Dane* which derives from Anglo-French and Anglo-Saxon manuscripts largely through *Estoire des Angleis (History of English People)*, dated 1150, an Anglo-French book by Geoffrey Gaimar, and the work and its French lay may have their origins in history: Havelok may be the Viking King Anlaf Curran, son of Sihtric, King of Northumbria in the 10th Century, for Havelok, as a scullery boy, used the name Cuaran, and it appears that Havelok is the Celtic version of Anlaf³. Thus, the word *Havelok* may be a variety of the Celtic-originated name *Ablock*, *Abelock* or *Abloec* which is an adaptation of the Old Norse word *Olaf*, and Old English *Anlaf*, and Anglo-Norman *Aveloc* transforms into *Havelok* or *Habloc*⁴. From the number of chronicles, for the most part Anglo-French or Anglo-Saxon of the 14th Century, in which Havelok is portrayed⁵, it can be seen that Havelok was then considered to be a historical personality whose biography sprang up in England during the Danish conquests. Havelok is also mentioned as Anlaf Cwiran in 949 in *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Anlaf's disastrous defeat is touched upon in *The Battle of Brunanburh*, dated 937, which appears in *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*⁶. The marriage of Havelok the Dane and Goldborough, the English princess in *Havelok the Dane*, stands for the future union of Denmark and England in history: Danes, including the Vikings, began to come to England from countries in the north of Europe, round the mouth of the Baltic Sea around 800, and England had the hardest hit of all in 856, and by 870 only one of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, Wessex, survived. In 878, the country was divided into two by the Treaty of Wedmore; Alfred the Great ruled Wessex in southern England whilst the Danes lived in the east and north of the country calling it the *Danelaw*, as in it the Danes kept their own laws and consuetudes and they had Viking kingdoms and independent boroughs. After the death of Alfred the Great, the father of the British navy, education, and the arts of peace, his successors could not maintain the peace and, eventually, in 1017 the Danish King Canute (Knut), ironically the first true King of a fully unified England, ruled England, Denmark, and Norway till 1035⁷. The extant historical works on Olaf, Anlaf, Havelok, or Hablock show that the Danish hero married Edelsi, the sister of Athelsan, the king of England, and at her death he married Helen, a daughter of Constantine II of

³ M.S. Day, *History of English Literature to 1660*, Doubleday and Company, New York, (1963), p.49.

⁴ Billings, p.18.

⁵ Skeat and Sisam Eds., *Introduction*, pp. IV-XIX.

⁶ Billings, p.18.

⁷ E.H. Dance, *Outlines of British Social History*, Longmans, Green and Co., London. (1970), pp.26-34.

Scotland, he was driven from Northumbria in 952⁸, and could not maintain the peace. *Havelok the Dane* does not give the full historical evidence on Danish invasions, for the end of the story shows Denmark and England at peace while a Danish monarch rules in England. Thus, probably the work was not completed by the time of Canute, or the anonymous writer of the work wrote only one piece of literature on his subject. It seems that the writer portrays a figure with historical elements, and the fact that the word Havelok became associated with the historical Olaf can be indicated from the portrayal, that in the *Metrical Chronicle of England*, dated c.1307, Olaf Tryggvason, King of Norway in the late 10th Century, is called *Haueloc*, "and in the ballad of *Guy and Colebrande*, Olaf Cuaran appears as Auelocke"⁹.

The specific genre of *Havelok the Dane* is disputable for the writer uses various terminologies for his work. The first literary term which comes to mind is romance, (Old French *roman* which refers to the tales of knights and the idea of chivalry). The word *geste*, which refers to notable deeds or exploits, also brings to mind the literary genre *geste*, which is a tale of achievement or adventure, and this feature may well fit in the structure of *Havelok the Dane*. At first sight, both of the genres appear to be similar. However, the writer of *Havelok the Dane* distinguishes between them in an explicit fashion: "The moste ioie that mouhte be.../Romanz-reding on the bok;/Ther mouhte men here the geste singe/The gleumen on the tabour dinge" (*H.D.*, 11. 2321, 2327-2329). Thus the writer makes a distinction between reading of romances in the book and singing of gestes of the tales. It appears that reading of romances or reading out romances aloud, or singing of gestes by gleemen, who beat the tabour or drum, provided great enjoyment. The anonymous poet explains that his work is called a "geste" not a "romanz": "Nu haue ye herd the gest al thoru/Of Hauelok and of Goldborough" (*H.D.*, 11. 2984-2985).

It is probable that gestes, which were sung by the minstrels beating the tabour or drum, might appeal to both courtly and low-class people. In this case, the popularity of Arthurian legends in oral literature, for example, may be attributed to the gleemen who sang gestes. If gestes were also written for non-courtly people, the humble style of everyday life might be seen within the structure of the work, and this theory proves to be correct as Havelok, who turns out to be a supposed scullery boy or a kitchen knave, displays plebeian traits. When Godart, the villainous regent of Denmark orders Grim,

⁸ Billings, p.20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

a fisherman, to drown Prince Havelok the Dane, Grim cannot fulfil this, and he and Havelok, after some events, flee to England where, during a great famine, Havelok works as a hired hand. Thinking him only a churl, Godrich, the unscrupulous Earl of Cornwall, wants him to marry Goldborough, the daughter of the dead English King whose guardian is Godrich. The King entrusted Goldborough to Godrich and charged him to marry his daughter to the strongest noble man, but, with his humble manner in the festival games for low class people, Havelok is able to heave the stone farther than the other retainers, and Godrich and Goldborough cannot guess his noble birth because of his humble manners as befitting a possible geste definition with non-courtly features (*H.D.*, 11.1500-1505). Furthermore, Grims' rearing Havelok in a humble fisherman's cottage, Havelok's peddling fish with Grim, his worries about the famine, which came upon the north of England, the withered crops, the fish which fled English shores, his being touched by the sufferings of his foster family the Grims, his readiness of wearing a low-class garment when Grim had to cut a mande from new sailcloth for Havelok as he could not afford any other clothing, his acceptance of wearing no shoes or hose because of his altered poor social status, his strength during the starvation for three days, his situation when no one would hire him as a worker, and his eagerness and opportunism when he knocked down the other workers to work as a porter to carry fish for the cook of the court, contribute to his plebeian characterization within the possible structure of a geste. It should be noted, however, that *Havelok the Dane* is called a romance traditionally by critics probably because the conventional classification of romances goes back to a section in *Chanson de Saisnes*, dated c. 1190, by Jean Bodel, in which he speaks of "three matters of France, of Britain and of Rome the Great"¹⁰. This classification fails because "the matter of Rome" consists of the tales about Troy or Thebes, thus showing the inadequacy of this division, and also it does not, for example, use the oriental themes in romances. Taking into consideration the classification of Bodel, many critics such as Day¹¹, Zesmer¹², and most of the critics on the Internet, who wrote between 1998 and 2000, argue that *Havelok the Dane* is considered to be a Matter of Britain romance, probably because it treats a subject of English origin and depicts the lives of a noble man and lady, chivalry, love, and exile and return themes with special reference to the main characters'

¹⁰ A.C. Baugh, *Literary History of England*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, (1948), p.174.

¹¹ Day, p.49.

¹² D.Zesmer, *A Guide to English Literature from Beowulf through Chaucer and Medieval Drama*, Barnes and Noble Inc., New York, (1967), p.111.

experience from loss to recovery to attain their real identities whilst they develop from immaturity to maturity.

It appears that the work is a geste from the point of view of its writer, and probably only some sections of it were sung as the work is too long to be sung all at once, but, also romance elements are found in it. As the eponymous hero of the work appears to have humble characteristics, he can hardly be called a real romance hero. There are some critics who have doubts about calling *Havelok the Dane* a true romance. For example, Creek mentions the "homely... elements"¹³, Pearsall writes that *Havelok the Dane* "is unique among English romances... in terms of humble everyday life... Havelok's instinct for survival... industry ... practical good sense., are the virtues of common people"¹⁴, and Osgood on internet calls the work a "so-called 'romance' of chivalry in English"¹⁵ while Bennet elucidates the subject in terms of an inappropriate romance hero: "... though of royal birth, (Havelok) can hardly be such a hero... What such a tale has in common with... romance is the element of perilous adventure and feats of martial prowess. Love... plays a minor part..."¹⁶. Thus, the work manifests itself in the portrayal of romance elements which the writer employs for his work.

Another term in relation to the genre of the work which is put forward by the writer is "*tale*" (*H.D.*, 11. 3,5,12) which is an account or story of an event, series of events or of a character or characters as befitting *Havelok the Dane*. The word "*spelle*" (*H.D.*, 1.338) is also used by the writer with reference to his work, and this word was specifically employed for narratives such as the speech and accounts delivered orally in Medieval times. Thus this word reflects the oral narration of *Havelok the Dane* which is also called *a ston*e (*H.D.*, 11.1641,1734) by the writer. For the writer his poem is also a *rym* (*H.D.*, 11.21,23,2995,2998) as befitting the verse narration of the poem. Creek points out that the manuscript of the work entitled B.L. Ms.Laud Misc. 108, has a heading before the prologue in f. I which includes the words *Vita Havelok (the Life of Havelok)* and that the word *vita* has religious associations and is used for the genre called "saint's life". Taking this into

¹³ H.L.Creek., "The Author of *Havelok the Dane*", *Englische Studien*, No. 48, (1915), pp.210,203.

¹⁴ D. Pearsall, "The Development of Middle English Romance", *Medieval Studies*, No. 27, (1965), p.98.

¹⁵ <http://www.britishliterature.com/era/middleromances.html>: *Middle English Romances*, (1997); from C.G.Osgood, *The Voice of England*, Harper and Brothers Publisher, New York, (1952), Updated, *passim*.

¹⁶ J.A.W. Bennett, *Middle English Literature*, Ed. D.Gray, Oxford University Press, Oxford, (1986),p.122.

consideration, Creek claims that the writer was a clergyman¹⁷. For Creek it appears that, some religious elements in the poem dominate although the poem is not didactic, and there appears to be few religious references though of great significance for the future of Havelok, and the meaning of the work. For example when Godart, the guardian of Havelok, ordered the death of Havelok; Grim wanted to please Godart, the traitor, but when Grim's wife saw a spiritual light coruscated from Havelok's mouth, Grim freed Havelok from his bonds. Furthermore, when Goldborough married Havelok without knowing his identity, all at once a spiritual light issued from Havelok's mouth and a voice informed Goldborough of her husband's noble birth, and when they went to Denmark towards the end of the poem, one of the Danish nobles saw a mystical light streaming from Havelok's mouth and a cross marked on his right shoulder. His "kyne-mark" (*H.D.*, 1.604) is a sign of his nobility and the spiritual flame from his mouth indicates his birthmark, and the religious miracles or the supernatural elements help along the plot. Apart from these religious implications, Creek appears to be influenced by a religious sentence in the work: *Benedicamus domino* ("Let us bless the God"; *H.D.*, 1.20). One cannot be sure whether the writer of *Havelok the Dane* was an ecclesiastical, but it can be said that God is portrayed in a style of an encomium in the work and His marvellous power is reflected in the life of Havelok, who is a chosen and favoured individual, on account of the interference of God on three afore-mentioned occasions. Thus the poem resembles the *vita* as it reflects specimen for good human behaviour, and Havelok does not lose his faith in God, and does not imprecate upon anyone in his biographical portrayal. The names of some major characters, which have religious implications, will be discussed later when the full analysis of their roles is completed.

It appears that Skeat and Sisam, the editors of *Havelok the Dane*, regard the work as an "equivalent to the Anglo-Norman *Lai d' Haveloc*"¹⁸ although the work is largely based on Gaimar's *Estoire des Anglais*.

The work portrays tragic elements. In *The Prologue of the Monk's Tale* and in *The Monk's Tale*, Chaucer glosses the Medieval word "*tragedie*" as: ... a certeyn storie/Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,/And is yfallen out of heigh degree into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly"¹⁹. As Havelok and Goldborough are stripped of their rights and have been dispossessed royals, the work portrays the Medieval definition of tragedy at this stage, but

¹⁷ Creek, p.211.

¹⁸ Bennet, p. 154.

¹⁹ G.Chaucer, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Ed. F.N.Robinson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, (1985), p. 189,11.3163,3165-3167.

when the afore-mentioned persons recover their identity, and are restored to their sovereignty, the tragedy ends. Thus, *Havelok the Dane* is a *geste*, *tale*, oral narration, a verse work or a *vita* from the point of view of the writer, and it is also a biography of Havelok with historical and tragic traits within the structure of romance elements.

Similar to the cyclic and elaborate symmetrical construction in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*²⁰, throughout his work, the writer of *Havelok the Dane* has contrived a parallel plot with its spirit of suspense which hardly ever flags. At the beginning of the work, the English King, who is a guardian to children, maidens and widows, is portrayed as a just king that no one dares offer a bribe. Similarly, the Danish king, who has been reigning his kingdom wisely, is depicted as a good king who rewards virtue and punishes villainy. Readers learn that the English King is mortally ill and when he knows that his death is upon him, the King prays for guidance and summons his advisers to his side as he wants them to find the best of guardians for his daughter Goldborough, who has always been his chief concern. It is decided that Godrich, Earl of Cornwall, will be her guardian as he is said to be a trustworthy person fit to bring up Goldborough, and he swears an oath to safeguard the princess and to hold her lands in trust till she can reign, and the English King charges Godrich to marry Goldborough to the fairest and strongest noble man available. In the same fashion, in Denmark, the Danish King lies in his death bed and is worried that he is leaving his son, Havelok and his young daughters without protection. His advisers and he think of Godart, the rich, and respectable gentleman, as the guardian for Havelok and his sisters. Godart swears an oath to guard the children well and to guarantee him for Havelok's coming into his inheritance when he becomes an adult. The recurrence of events in both of the kingdoms continue, and after being shaven, the English and Danish Kings die content, but the English guardian Godrich, and the Danish guardian Godart turn out to be false-hearted traitors and they ignore the codicils of their Kings and their guidance. Thus, both Havelok and Goldborough give up their sovereignty and are obliged to pay feudal homage to their guardians. In England, Godrich places Goldborough secretly in a remote castle in Dover, and to guard the entrance he sets his most trusted soldiers with orders to let no one in to see her. Similarly, in Denmark, Godart watches the growing Havelok with envious eyes, and he cannot bear to think of the day when Havelok will be his sovereign, and he, eventually, slits the throats of Havelok's sisters, seizes Havelok, and orders Grim, a fisherman, to bind Havelok and cast him

²⁰ B.Erol, "The Wheel of Fortune as Reflected in the Structure and Content of *Sir Gawain*", *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 4, No. 2, October, (1987), pp. 233-237,240.

into the sea with an anchor around his neck; but the great light which shines from Havelok's mouth awes Grim, and he cannot kill the prince, and Grim bundles his wife, children, and Havelok aboard his boat to set sail for England where they will live in a cove. Thus, at this point, the writer portrays the lives of the two dispossessed coeval royal orphans, and the two supposedly good guardians who prove to be treacherous after the death of their Kings, and are determined to usurp the throne. When Havelok knocks down many porters to carry fish to the castle, and when he takes part in a stone-putting contest held by the retainers, he proves his strength, and Godrich, hearing of Havelok's fame, uses Havelok in his scheme to gain control of the English kingdom, and thinking Havelok only a commoner, Godrich has Goldborough brought from Dover, and orders Havelok to marry her. The recurrence of acts continue when Havelok and Goldborough object to Godrich before they marry. There is irony when Godrich decides to have Goldborough marry Havelok because this is not only to keep his promise to the late English King that Goldborough is to marry, the fairest and the strongest noble man available, but also to ensure for himself, though he fails in his device, the English throne. Yet, this marriage leads to the downfall of Godrich for when Goldborough resents the low match until, like Grim, she observes the luminous glow emanating from the mouth of Havelok, she realizes that her husband, presumed a churl, is a prince, and, finally Havelok conquers both Denmark and England and becomes the King of both. Clearly, the settings also repeat in the work as Denmark, England, and again, as Denmark, and England with the movement of Havelok. The parallel actions continue for the final fate of the Danish and the English usurpers. The nobles flay Godart and hang him on a gallows with a nail through his feet. Similarly, Godrich is captured and is bound hand and foot and is put on an ass and burned to death. Ironically enough for Godrich, the former Earl of Cornwall, Havelok marries one of Grim's daughters to the cook who has befriended him and makes him Earl of Cornwall. Through the recurrence of actions, which have cohesive functions, the writer enables the readers to link a certain repetitive passage to an earlier section in order to follow the emphatic repetitions easily.

What is striking in *Havelok the Dane* is the main character's everlasting and repetitive strength, except in early childhood, as befitting a powerful person who is engaged in fulfilling feats of strength. In his childhood, when Godart mistreats Havelok and slaughters his two sisters, Havelok feels helpless and kneels before Godart to ask for mercy: "Manrede, loured, biddi you! (*H.D.*, 1.484). With this sentence Havelok offers feudal homage to Godart and is obliged to reject his social and personal identity as heir to the Danish throne, but when he grows older, his strength increases and this is

pointed out by the poet on many occasions. For example, when Grim witnesses Havelok's spiritual light, which shines from his mouth, while he dozes on the rude bed in his hut, Grim prophesies that Havelok will be King of Denmark and England as he is so strong: "He shal ben king, strong and stark;/He shal hauen in his hand/Al Denmark and England" (*H.D.*, 11.608-610). This foreshadows Havelok's recovery of his social and individual status and his strength is repeatedly pointed out as in the following lines: "For he was strong" (*H.D.*, 1.988); "He was bothe stark and strong/in Engelond was non his pen /Of strengthe" (*H.D.*, 11.989-990). Thus Havelok, who can overcome "nine or ten" (*H.D.*, 1.871) rivals, and can beat "sixteen" (*H.D.*, 1.890) men, is portrayed as a strong and gentle person: "Hu he [is] strong and ek ful meke" (*H.D.*, 1.1066) when he reaches full maturity.

The names of some major characters which do not appear in historical records in English and French versions of the story²¹, appear to be allegorical. For example, *gold* connotes wealth and riches, and anything resembling gold, as in luster, of outstanding value. In the lapidary convention gold stands for the divine kingdom of spirituality and is a symbol of light and wealth²². *Borough* means a major city or a fortress. Thus Goldborough, whose name appears to have heavenly and valuable associations and connotes the strength of a fortress, is presented with her heart of gold (*H.D.*, 1.1002) and prowess. For another example, God refers to an eternal and almighty being that is the creator, ruler, and sustainer of the universe. The word *rich* means wealthy, well-supplied with something (as rich in imagination), productive and powerful as in old English *rice*, powerful and wealthy of Celtic origin. Thus, the word Godrich connotes a faithful, and just person. At the beginning of *Havelok the Dane*, Godrich is a trustworthy person so that the King of England commits his only child to his guardianship, but when he later appears as a wicked person who strips Goldborough of her rights as an heiress, his name becomes ironical. Similarly, the word Godart connotes the creative activity of God which is a very unique feat attributed to Him, and this word also refers to the system of rules of God guiding any form of endeavour. The main art of God requires faithfulness, and in the beginning Godart is portrayed as a puissant man who is faithful to his King, but, later, he turns out to be a pugnacious man who usurps the throne till he is vanquished by Havelok; and, therefore, he has misused his creative activity. Thus his name becomes ironical. It seems that the symmetrical construction constitutes the fact that wicked and powerful

²¹ Billings, p. 19.

²² Helene Barbey, *A Survey of French and English History*, Folkloriques Livres, (1936), Appendix J, p. VI.

adults abuse the rights of helpless children, but the transition from loss to recovery, the search for social and personal identity, the personal development from immaturity to maturity, and restoring sovereignty by learning the hardships of life, as can be perceived by Havelok and Goldborough, turn everything out to be positive. The word *grim* refers to having a resolute, cruel, uncompromising and repellent nature, meaning in Old English *grim*, fierce, and, cruel. At the beginning of the work, when Godart, the villainous regent, orders Grim to drown Havelok, he is ready to fulfil this cruel act as his name connotes, but when he changes his mind, he stops making blunders, and proves to be a prodigious foster father for Havelok. Since then the place where he lived has been called Grimsby. Thus, it appears that his name has turned out to be ironical when he fulfils humane deeds.

In conclusion, *Havelok the Dane*, which has historical elements within its structure, is a geste, tale, "spelle" ("speech"), story, "rym" ("rhyme"), and "vita" ("the saint's life") from the point of view of the writer, and it has also romance and tragic elements within the structure of biography. All these genres attributed to this work indicate the richness of the types of this poem. The textual parallels and the metaphorical expressions throughout the poem show that the writer was a great plot-maker who knew the depths of writing and oration. It appears that the much-neglected work, *Havelok the Dane*, is one of the outstanding English poems.

Özet

Birçok Edebi Türlerin Metinsel Paralellerle ve Mecazi İfadelerle Havelok the Dane'de Birleşmesi.

Bu yayında, Havelok the Dane'nin kökeni, türleri, metinsel tekrarları ve anlamı tartışılmaktadır ve iyi plânlanmış olan bu yapıtın yazarının, birçok edebi türleri ve paralel olayları, yapıtın üslubunu en çarpıcı bir şekilde sergilemek amacıyla çok usta bir şekilde ele aldığı, sonucuna varılmıştır. Ancak, bu yapıt hakkındaki bibliyografya taraması onun uzun zamandır ihmal edilmiş bir şiir olduğunu göstermektedir.

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