Guy of Warwick (GW) could fairly be described as the romance that has everything, with Guy himself embodying almost every important characteristic of a romance hero, and undergoing almost every kind of experience that a romance hero has a right to expect. Beginning as a text-book case of the self-abasing and inexperienced courtly lover, he is soon obliged to move away from home to the proving grounds of tournaments and battles – it is not always easy to distinguish one from the other – where he forms new (essentially masculine) relationships, both supportive and hostile, and adopts new ideals of conduct. This part of the story goes on for so long, and generates such momentum of its own, that it is easy to lose sight of Felice as the ultimate motive force behind Guy’s endeavours, but in the end he does come back to her, now so unmatchable in renown that he can no longer be refused. But only a fortnight after marriage, his whole life is changed by the realisation that his long service of Felice has caused both the neglect of his God and the slaying of his fellow men, and he sets off on a pilgrimage of atonement, in the course of which he champions the cause of more than one victim of oppression. On his final return to England, he achieves one last great combat of this kind (which frees the country from the threat of Danish rule), and then undergoes a final metamorphosis into a hermit. Finally, at the point of death (and only then), he is reunited with Felice, who does not long survive him. This already considerable range of romance themes and incidents is further extended by the incorporation into the romance of the story of Guy’s son Reinbrun; in this the most notable addition to the stock of romance themes and incidents is an encounter with the Fairy Otherworld.

In the past, GW has been classified both as a romance of the ‘Matter of England’ and as one of ‘Exile and Return’, and both labels...
are justified, the first by some of the locations, the second by the larger patterns of its story. But the same comprehensiveness that makes it so useful a guide to the preoccupations of romance in general makes it more difficult for the reader to detect in it the detailed symmetries of plan that distinguish the exile-and-return narrative structure. For a clear demonstration of these we must turn to the story of Horn as represented in its two earliest versions, the Anglo-Norman Romance of Horn (RH) and the early Middle English King Horn (KH), which, for all their differences of nomenclature and scale, are both free from the kind of subordinate adventures that characterise GW and Beves of Hamtoun (BH). A summary account of the story which they tell is given below, with the distinctive enclosing of one pair of linked (that is, exile-and-return) components by another thrown into relief by the alphabetical symbols used.

A1 After the death of his father, Horn is forced to leave his native land.
B1 He arrives at a land whose king at first both protects and honours him, and to whom he gives military help in return. The king’s daughter offers him her love, which he (finally) accepts; the king is informed that he has seduced her, and sends him into exile for a second time.
C He comes to Ireland and again finds a protector in the king of the land, as well as a princess who offers him her love (which he rejects), and the opportunity of distinguishing himself in battle (which he takes). He leaves the country when he discovers that his real love is to be married to another.
B2 He arrives in her father’s land and wins her back by force of arms, then returns to his own country.
A2 There he overthrows the usurper who had slain his father, but is warned in a dream that his wife has been forcibly married to the man who had earlier betrayed him to her father.
B3 Once again he breaks up a wedding feast and this time kills the traitor.

Here the only complication of what would otherwise be a wholly symmetrical pattern relates to B2 and B3, the second of which is at once the doublet and the necessary complement of the first, in that it not only again sets right an injustice perpetrated in B1, but does so in an absolutely conclusive way. Even in the most tightly structured