



Hue Rothelände: Ipomedon

(1180 - 1190)

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Genre: Romance. Country: England, England.

Ipomedon is a twelfth-century romance by a poet who names himself as Hue de Rotelände (Hugh of Rhuddlan). It is composed in octosyllabic verse in insular French, also known as Anglo-Norman, the form of French used widely in the British Isles after the Norman Conquest in 1066. *Ipomedon* was probably composed near Hereford sometime between 1174 and 1191 (see below).

Ipomedon, the prince of Apulia, makes for the court of the heiress of Calabria, who has vowed only to marry the best knight in the world, thus earning herself the sobriquet La Fiere (The Proud). Ipomedon and La Fiere fall in love; however, for reasons unknown, Ipomedon devotes his time solely to hunting rather than to proving his knightly prowess, meaning that La Fiere is forced to reject him as suitor. Ipomedon resolves to leave the court in order to prove himself abroad, though soon meets with a messenger who informs him that his mother is dying. On her deathbed, she reveals that she has another son from an earlier marriage and gives Ipomedon a ring by which his half-brother will recognise him. After two years have passed, La Fiere is pressured by her barons to take a husband, and delays her decision by announcing a three-day tourney, the winner of which she will marry. Ipomedon immediately joins, in disguise, the service of La Fiere's uncle Meleager, king of Sicily, where he serves the queen as her *dru* (love servant) and befriends Meleager's nephew, Capaneus. Once again, Ipomedon devotes himself to hunting and leisurely pursuits, much to the derision of the court. The morning of La Fiere's tourney, he leaves to go hunting; however, at a hermitage, he disguises himself in white armour, attends the tourney, and wins the day, but swiftly steals away to Meleager's court. He repeats this course of action the second day, donning red armour, and on the third, when he wears black. Only after he has ridden away is it revealed that the *dru la reine* and the three victorious knights were the same person.

Ipomedon resumes his knightly exploits around Europe, until he learns that La Fiere is being hounded by a vile suitor, the Indian prince Leonin. Ipomedon makes for Meleager's court where he expects to find La Fiere's messenger, Ismeine. He presents himself to the court as a madman, and gains the right to the next adventure to arrive at court; Ismeine duly arrives seeking help for La Fiere, but rejects the madman's help. Ipomedon follows Ismeine and three times defends her from assailants; she soon falls in love with him, but he rejects her advances. Once in Calabria, Ipomedon dons his black armour and defeats Leonin, also wearing black. Ipomedon then, appearing as Leonin in his black armour, enters La Fiere's capital, claims his victory, declares his intention to take her away to India, and she secretly flees the city. Meanwhile, Capaneus, who comes across La Fiere's boats, sets out in search of the evil "Leonin", whom he finds leaving the city and attacks. However, just as Capaneus is about to defeat his foe, he recognises his half-brother's ring. Ipomedon's identity is revealed; La Fiere is informed; the two are married; and Ipomedon is also crowned king of Apulia.

Ipomedon is, thus, a romance steeped in disguise and intrigue. It has been noted by many critics for its ironic, comic, even *fabliau*-esque style (Paris, 1926; Legge, 1963; Holden, 1979; Crane, 1986; Gravdal, 1989; Calin, 1998; Gaunt, 2000), while its misogynistic material has also drawn critical attention (Krueger, 1993; Kocher, 2008). *Ipomedon* shows clear influence of the *romans antiques*, not least in the names of its characters, while critics have also debated the extent of the influence of Chrétien de Troyes (Kölbing, 1889; Gay, 1917; Calin, 1917; Holden, 1979; Calin, 1998).

The text contains several allusions to contemporary events, personages, and locales, from which contextual information can be gleaned. It can, for example, be fairly safely dated to around the 1180s, since at line 5351, the text refers to the siege of Rouen by Louis VII, which occurred in 1174, in such a way as to suggest that the event remained in living, though perhaps not especially recent, memory (Holden, 1979). Similarly, at lines 12701–2 of *Protheselaus*, *Ipomedon*'s sequel, the author names as his patron Gilbert fitz Baderon, fourth lord of Monmouth, whom we know to have died by 1191. The text can also be fairly securely located to the Welsh Marches (the border region between England and Wales): at line 10571, Hue states the location of his *meisun* (house) at *Credehulle* (Credenhill), a small settlement to the northwest of Hereford, which was an important city situated 16 miles (26 km) east of the modern-day England–Wales border and approximately 20 miles (32 km) north of his patron's lordship of Monmouth (in modern-day Wales, near the English border). Hue also alludes to local personages: he refers to one Huge de Hungrie (l. 5520), who is recorded as a canon at Hereford and Lincoln cathedrals. Most famously, however, Hue also refers to one Walter Map: “Sul ne sai pas de mentir l'art, / Walter Map reset ben sa part” (ll. 7185–6; I am not alone in knowing the art of lying; Walter Map also knows his share) (on this accusation, see Cartlidge, 2011). Walter was a cosmopolitan clergyman and courtier, and probably a Herefordshire native.

Ipomedon seems to have enjoyed a reasonable level of predominantly insular reception. It is preserved almost in full in two insular manuscripts and as fragments in two more, with a third fragment that may indicate continental reception (Livingstone, 1942). Hue's text was later reworked into three independent versions in Middle English: *Ipomadon* is a tail-rhymed romance, possibly composed in Yorkshire in the 1390s (Purdie, 2001); *The Lyfe of Ipomydon* is a verse romance in octosyllabic couplets, possibly composed in the northeast Midlands in the second half of the fifteenth century (Ikegami, 1983); and *Ipomedon C* is a fifteenth-century prose work.

Ipomedon stands, therefore, as an important work with significant implications for how we understand the cultural climate of the twelfth-century Anglo-Welsh border; medieval conceptions of humour, genre, chivalry, and misogyny; and the reception and translation of insular French texts.

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