

LOVE OF GARETH AND GAWAIN IN THOMAS MALORY'S *MORTE DARTHUR*

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Towards the end of Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century tale of *Sir Gareth of Orkney*, Gareth makes a damning comment regarding Gawain: "he wythdrewe hymself fro his brother sir Gawaynes felyshyp, for he was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth" (1: 360). This statement has puzzled critics, for as Bonnie Wheeler notes, "the text of this tale provides no proof of Sir Gawain's deviancy or vengeful character" (129). After all, Gawain, ignorant of his relationship to Gareth, behaves nobly toward the young newcomer, offering him food, drink, and money, just as Lancelot does. In the "The Patterned Presentation of Lancelot and Gawain in Malory's *Tale of Gareth*," Madi Maclean explores the juxtapositions between Gawain and Lancelot to show the ways in which Malory highlights Gawain's shortcomings in relation to Lancelot; however, they do not prepare us for the violence of Gareth's rejection of his brother.

Quests for Malory's sources of inspiration have helped to shed some light on Gareth's condemnation; however, the conclusions are far from unanimous. For example, Eugene Vinaver claims that "it is obvious that [Malory] is using an anti-Gawain source, in other words, a branch of the Prose *Tristan*" (1434). On the other hand, Arnold Sanders, in "Sir Gareth and the 'Unfair Unknown': Malory's Use of the Gawain Romances," suggests that Malory drew upon the "Gawain" romances in constructing his tale of Sir Gareth, particularly in his use of beheading games and bed tests. However, I would argue that we need to consider not only Malory's sources but earlier sections of the *Morte* itself as well. The changes that Malory introduces to Gawain in the earlier *Tale of King Arthur*, specifically *Torre and Pellinor*, not only foreshadow Gareth's rejection; they are also consistent with the characterization of Gawain in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English romances, most notably *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, and *Ywain and Gawain*.

Little attention has been paid to Malory's modifications to Gawain's first quest in the primary source for *The Tale of King Arthur*,

the thirteenth-century *Suite du Merlin*, largely because Malory retains the basic narrative while drastically reducing the details, as is his wont throughout much of the *Morte Darthur*.¹ However, Malory does not just omit material regarding Gawain's character; he alters it in subtle, yet significant, ways in order to emphasize Gawain's passionate nature while downplaying the more decorous character found in the French source. In both versions of this tale, Gawain receives his knighthood, expresses his desire for vengeance against Pellinor, and receives the quest of the hart; while on his quest, he accidentally beheads a young woman when he denies mercy to his opponent. At the heart of these alternations lies the issue of blood ties. As Kate McClune notes, "Malory is preoccupied with blood and . . . he augments and expands his sources in order to emphasize the potentially dangerous outcomes of vulnerability to the demands of blood kinship" (90). In the case of the sections under examination in this article, however, Malory typically does the opposite—eliding rather than expanding—but nonetheless the results are the same: Gawain is driven by his blood ties. So too, I argue, is Gareth.

Gawain becomes prominent in the *Morte Darthur* when Arthur prepares to marry Guinevere, and the youth quickly approaches his uncle to request knighthood; Malory follows his source closely, writing that "anone com in yonge Gawayne and asked the kyng a gyfte . . . 'Sir, I aske that ye shall make me knyght that same day that ye shall wedde dame Gwenyver'" (1: 99). Once Arthur agrees, Gawain disappears from the text until the knighting takes place. However, Malory omits a tiny detail from the *Merlin*: Gawain spends the night in preparation: "Chelui soir veilla Gavains a la maistre eglyse de Saint Estevene de Camalaoth et avoec lui jusques a .X. autres damoisiaus que li rois devoit tous faire chevaliers pour l'amour de Gavain son neveu" (206) 'That night Gawain watched in the main church of St. Stephen of Camelot and with him ten other young men, whom the king was to make knights for the love of his nephew Gawain' (Asher 118). This omission might seem a minor point; after all, we can safely assume Malory's courtly audience would have understood that Gawain's vigil was implied, given the well-established ritual of knighthood—but at the same time, the *Merlin* explicitly draws attention to Gawain's discipline and adherence to convention, traits developed throughout the *Merlin* yet largely absent from Malory's depiction of Gawain in the *Morte*. In addition, although Gawain in the *Merlin* is the catalyst for the knighting of other young men, he nevertheless is not alone in the knighting

ceremony; in other words, the *Merlin*'s Gawain does not stand out quite as much as the Gawain of Malory's *Morte*.

This aspect of Gawain's character—specifically his adherence to protocol—is brought to the forefront when Pellinor, the knight responsible for the death of Gawain's father, is made a knight of the Round Table. The difference between the *Merlin* and the *Morte* on this point is striking. Although in both, Gawain and Gaheris determine to avenge their father, the way in which this decision is reached is significantly altered by Malory. In the *Merlin*, external pressure is placed upon Gawain to seek retribution, for after Gawain is knighted, “dient auchun de Gavain pour chou que biel et apiert le veoient: ‘Cil vengera encore son pere, se il vit longuement, de chelui qui l’ochist” (210) ‘some said of Gawain, because they saw him fine and capable, “He will yet avenge his father on the one who killed him, if he lives long enough” (Asher 120). Provided that Gawain survives into adulthood, there is complete certainty—as signaled by the use of the future tense—that he will behave in a way already predicted by social expectations. Also, inserted between Gawain's recognition of Pellinor and his expression of grief is the comment that “on li ramentevoit chou qu’il avoit son pere ochis” (212) ‘someone reminded him that [Pellinor] had killed Gawain's father’ (Asher 122). We quickly see this belief of social responsibility internalized by Gawain when he tells his brother that ““se il plaisoit a Dieu que je venisse au dessus, je ne lairoie pour tout l’or de cest siecle que je ne li trenchasse le chief aussi comme il fist a mon pere, si comme on me dist” (213) ““If it pleases God that I come out on top, I won’t for all the gold in this world fail to cut off [Pellinore’s] head as he did to my father, as they tell me” (Asher 122). This is yet another instance in which Gawain shows the influence of the larger courtly sphere; while the phrase ““si comme on me dist” (““as they tell me””) may refer to the manner of Lot’s death, its syntactical placement may also suggest that Gawain acts according to the instruction of others. Yet Malory omits these details, thereby eliminating the social pressure placed on Gawain to exact vengeance. As a result, there is no explicit rationale other than personal anger for Gawain’s subsequent words and behavior in the *Morte*.

Thus long before Gareth appears in the Arthurian court, Malory begins to depict Gawain as much more violent and undisciplined than in the *Merlin*. In the *Morte*, Malory says of Gawain that “thereat had sir Gawayne grete envy and tolde Gaherys hys brothir, ‘Yonder knyght ys putte to grete worship, whych grevith me sore, for he slewe oure fadir

kynges Lott. Therefore I woll sle hym . . . with a swerde that was sette me that ys passynge trencheaute” (1: 102). Emphasis is placed on Gawain individually—Arthur’s honoring of Pellinor specifically injures Gawain, and he alone will strike the killing blow. The *Merlin* contains the same sentiment; however, it is Gaheris, his brother, who initially speaks the desire to kill Pellinor, not Gawain: “se vous le me loés, jou sui pres que jou l’aille orendroit occhirre voiant tous chiaus de laiens. Et jou en sui tout aaisiés, car j’ai une espee qui avant ier me fu aportee de nostre païs, la plus trenchans et la millours que je veisse piecha” (213) “I’m ready to go kill him at once with everyone there watching. I am prepared for it, for I have a sword which was brought me from our country day before yesterday, the sharpest and best I have seen in a long time. . .” (Asher 122). Not only does Gaheris, not Gawain, possess the blade; Gaheris is ready and willing to fly in the face of convention through a public killing of Pellinor. In fact, it is specifically Gaheris’s potentially unchivalrous behavior that Gawain responds to in the French source: “Mais a moi qui sui chevaliers en laissiés prendre la venjanche, et je vous di que je la prendrai si haute coume fiex de roi doit faire de chelui qui son pere occhist” (213) “Leave it to me, who am a knight, to take vengeance, and I tell you that I’ll take it as nobly as a king’s son should on the one who killed his father” (Asher 122). This is further evidence of Gawain’s adherence to knightly protocols in the French that is absent in the Middle English text. Gawain first delineates the social difference between one who is not yet a knight and therefore should not act—that is, Gaheris—and one who is a knight and is thus responsible to act—that is, Gawain; Gawain’s restraint is also demonstrated by the ambiguity of his language for he does not expressly indicate at this moment what his actions will be. Rather, his goal here is to restrain his younger brother and to maintain the peace. In fact, Gaheris presses for details, at which point Gawain indicates he will follow Pellinor when the latter leaves; however, Gawain gets distracted from this when Merlin initiates the quest. However, Malory, by omitting these details and by shifting from Gaheris to Gawain the desire to kill Pellinor, constructs his Gawain as blood-thirsty and rash.

In addition, in this scene and ones following, Malory eliminates one of Gawain’s traditional functions, that of counselor.² It falls instead to Gaheris, who is merely a squire, to caution the knight to delay his actions against Pellinor until later: “[H]it ys beste to suffir tyll another tyme, that we may have hym oute of courte, for and we dud so we shall trouble thys hyghe feste” (1: 102). Once Gawain embarks on his quest

for the white hart, Malory once again truncates Gawain's peace-keeping ability, for when he comes across two quarrelling brothers, Gawain's solution is to threaten the bloodied and tired knights with more violence if they do not yield to him: “[F]or uncouth men ye sholde debate withall, and no brothir with brothir. Therefore do be my counceyle: othir I woll have ado with you bothe, other <ellis> yelde you to me and that ye go unto kynge Arthure and yelde you unto hys grace” (1: 104). This is in sharp contrast to the *Merlin*, where Gawain chastises the knights and, in a move reminiscent of his role in aligning Perceval with the Arthurian court in Chretien de Troyes’s twelfth-century *Conte du Graal*, accords the two knights without the threat of violence: “Par foi, signeur chevalier, ore n’oï jou onques mais parler de si fole gent come vous estes, qui pour droit nient vous estes entrochis. Ore vous vaurroie jou requerre pour Dieu que vous me dounissies un don qui tornera a vostre preu et a vostre hounour” (220) “By my faith, my lord knights, I never heard of such foolish men as you are, who have killed each other over nothing. Now I would like to ask you, for God's sake and yours, to grant me a favor, which will bring you praise and honor” (Asher 126). For the French Gawain, there is no need to meet violence with more violence; instead, he reminds the quarrelling brothers of the honor that comes through peaceful resolution. For Malory, however, this is yet another opportunity to show Gawain’s eagerness for a fight regardless of the cause.

During the quest, Gawain's adherence to knightly convention is highlighted in the *Merlin* but absent in the *Morte*. Malory merely notes that Merlin assigns the quest for the hart to Gawain: “Than he [Merlin] lette calle sir Gawayne, for he muste brynge agayne the whyght herte” (1: 103); however, the *Merlin* gives more specific instructions: Gawain must also take care that “nus des brakes ne vous faille quant vous verrés en ceste court, se il ne muerent en la cache, car autrement ne seroit pas l’aventure menee a chief” (216) “none of the brachets is missing when you come to this court, unless they die in the chase, for otherwise this adventure won’t be accomplished” (Asher 124). Thus when Gawain encounters the knight who is killing his greyhounds, his anger becomes more justifiable in the *Merlin*, for the success of his quest becomes jeopardized. Furthermore, Gawain does not immediately lash out in anger in the French source; rather, Gawain warns the stranger knight to cease from his actions: “chevaliers malvais et recreans, ne touche les brakés! Que Diex te doinst malaventure!” (224) “Evil, cowardly knight, don’t touch the brachets, or may God send you

misfortune!” When the other knight refuses, Gawain gives him yet another chance to amend his behavior, telling the knight of the hounds that “Il ont fait chou que il deurent . . . mais vous ne faites mie chou que vous devés, ains faites coume vilains chevaliers et mauvais que vous estes!” (224) “They did what they had to do . . . but you are not doing what you should, for you act like the ill-bred, evil knight you are” (Asher 128). It is only when the knight insists he will not stop killing the dogs that Gawain becomes truly angered. In addition, the knight also threatens to prevent Gawain from leaving with the hart's head. In order to fulfill Merlin's instructions, then, Gawain must act quickly, and he does so wholeheartedly. That Merlin's instructions are foremost in his mind is made clear in the *Merlin*, for at the close of the adventure, Gawain tells Gaheriet, “[I]l me samble que j'ai bien ma queste achievee” (228) “It seems to me that I have well achieved my quest” (Asher 130). Malory omits all of this, retaining only Gawain's rebuke to the knight: “Why have ye slayne my howndys? For they dyd but their kynde, and I wolde that ye had wrokyn youre angir uppon me rather than uppon a dome beste” (1: 106). There is no call to the stranger knight to remember his duties as a member of the chivalric brotherhood; rather, there is only the distinction between men and dumb beasts. Furthermore, the knight in Malory does not continue to attempt to kill the hounds, unlike in the *Merlin*, for after he kills two, he chases the remainder out. As a result, in the *Morte* Gawain lacks a clear motive for his rash anger.

But this is not the end of the fury of Malory's Gawain, for a fight ensues in which Gawain refuses to give mercy. Malory's account stays fairly close to that of the *Merlin*, albeit condensed; however, what is significant is the effect of each author's presentation of Gawain's final blow. Both versions offer a play-by-play of the events leading up to the blow: as Gawain raises his sword, the knight's lover arrives and quickly throws herself on top of the knight, where she is subsequently beheaded. However, Malory has omitted some important details. First, the *Merlin* notes that Gawain “avoit ja si avanchié son caup qu'il ne le puet mais retenir” (226) ‘had already advanced his blow so far that he could not restrain it’ (Asher 130), whereas Malory, in his paratactic style, simply lists the beheading as the next action following the lady's movement: “Ryght so com hys lady oute of a chambir and felle over hym, and so he smote of hir hede by myssefortune” (1: 106). The result is that in Malory, the actions are sequential rather than concurrent, with

the implication that Malory's Gawain could have stopped his fatal blow.

In addition, the *Merlin* gives graphic detail about the beheading, for Gawain “la fiert si durement au trenchant de l'espee qu'il li fait le chief voler par mi le palais” (226) ‘struck her so hard with the sharp edge of the sword that he made her head fly off through the palace’ (Asher 130). The force with which Gawain delivers the blow reinforces the narrator's comment that Gawain was unable to abandon the stroke. Malory omits this, and modifies Gaheris's subsequent reaction to the deed. As in the *Merlin*, Gaheris rebukes Gawain: “that ys fowle and shamefully done, for that shame shall never frome you” (1: 106). However, Malory gives Gaheris another line, one that is not found in the *Merlin*: “Also ye sholde gyff mercy unto them that aske mercy, for a knyght withoute mercy ys withoute worship” (1: 106). This is another instance in which Gaheris plays the counselor for once again, roles are reversed as the squire educates the knight. By pairing the beheading of the maiden with the refusal to give mercy, Gaheris implies that both could have been prevented, further establishing Gawain's reputation as violent and rash in the *Morte*.

Thus when Gareth avoids Gawain's company at the end of *The Tale of Sir Gareth*, it is possible that he has this incident in mind when he claims that Gawain “was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther” (1: 360). But at the same time, Gareth's complete avoidance of his brother, rather than making any attempt at rehabilitation, is striking. After all, Lancelot subjects himself to the instruction of his son, Sir Galahad, during the Grail Quest. Gawain himself signals his willingness to raise his brother above him, for when Lyonet interrupts the duel between the brothers, Gawain confesses to Gareth that “I ought of ryght to worshyp you, and ye were nat my brother” (1: 357).

The truth of the matter is that Gareth is more like his brother than he cares to admit. This is shown best by two episodes: the fight with the mysterious knight in the castle of Lyones's brother and the tournament at Castell Perelus, where, aided by Lyones's magic ring, Gareth successfully avoids identification for the majority of the events. During the first episode, Gareth and Lyones attempt to consummate their love but are interrupted—twice—by a strange knight. Each time, Gareth is seriously wounded, and retaliates against the knight: “[T]herewithall sir Gareth smote hym uppon the helme suche a buffette that he felle groveling, and than he lepe over hym and unlaced his

helme and smote off his hede fro the body” (1: 333). Although the knight is later revealed to be magical, created by Lyonet to protect her family's honor, at this point in the narrative Gareth is unaware of the strange knight's nature and has no reason to suspect magic. Yet even when he stuns his opponent, Gareth quickly kills the knight rather than restrain him or allow him a chance to request mercy. Here, his behavior is very evocative of Gawain's when the latter accidentally beheads the maiden upon his first quest. Both Gawain and Gareth are reacting to an injury that they sustained—the loss of Gawain's hounds and Gareth's thigh wound—but their reactions are excessive.

The similarity between Gawain and Gareth is further established during the second time that the mysterious knight attacks, for Gareth "was hote and corragyous and toke no kepe, but with his grete forse he strake downe the knyght and voyded hys helme and strake of his hede" (1: 335). Once again, he behaves recklessly and violently, and to such an extent that he reopens his wound. In fact, Gareth is so focused on defeating his opponent—he cuts the knight's head into "an hondred pecis" (1: 335)—that he can barely stand upon completion of his deed. Once more, Gareth beheads his opponent; as noted above, no attempt is made to discover the knight's motives. Of course, the second time that this knight attacks, Gareth's increased anger is paired with increased control, as demonstrated by the polysyndeton used to connect his actions in the quotation above. After all, Gareth has new information—that the knight is magical—for he has just watched Lyonet restore the decapitated knight to life the previous night. Thus Gareth's superlative anger and violence here may be justified by the otherworldly nature of his opponent, for as the proverb notes, *extremis malis extrema remedia*.

When Gareth encounters opponents who are clearly human, however, his violent behavior is not any less than when he meets supernatural foes. Gareth directly encounters Gawain on the field twice following the rendezvous scene described above, and each time, Malory's language continues to evoke Gawain's encounter with the knight on the quest for the hart. The first encounter is fairly innocuous, except in light of the previous adventure, for both share the pairing of fortune and the removal of the helmet: "And by fortune he mette with his brother, sir Gawayne; and there he put hym to the wors, for he put of his helme" (1: 349). Unlike Gawain, though, here Gareth is able to withhold his stroke, and Gawain emerges from this encounter entire. Yet as the tournament continues, Gareth's behavior becomes more aggressive as he gets caught up in his battle lust. Prior to his return to

the field *sans* the magic ring, Gareth's feats are impressive: "And than sir Gareth rode here and there and smote on the ryght honde and on the lyffte honde" (1: 349). Although he moves quickly—from "here to there"—and proves his ambidexterity, his actions are orderly. Yet after he returns without the ring, Gareth drastically increases his efforts. Since he has yet to realize that he no longer has the magic ring, the allure of anonymity frees him from restraint: "[H]e raced of helmys and pulled downe knyghtes" (1: 351). As the *Middle English Dictionary* notes, *rasen* denotes rapid, often uncontrolled movements: "to tear out (sth.), pluck out, . . . snatch" (def. 2b, 2c). The syntactic orderliness of his previous actions are gone, and he pulls down knights haphazardly. If no one knows his identity, he is free to revel in the tourney-authorized violence.

The next time that Gareth meets Gawain on the field, however, Gawain is nearly not as fortunate. Having forgotten to replace the magic ring, Gareth is no longer able to maintain his anonymity, a goal established at the onset of the tournament: "I woll nat be knowyn of neythir more ne lesse, nothir at the begynnyng nother at the endyng" (1: 345). Just as Gawain becomes enraged at the prospect of failing in the quest for the hart, Gareth behaves recklessly, for "whan sir Gareth aspyed that he was discoverde, than he dowbled his strokys and smote downe there sir Sagramoure and his brother sir Gawayne" (1: 351). Whereas before, Gareth's actions seem to be typical tournament behavior, this second stroke causes Gawain to comment: "'A, brother,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'I wente ye wolde have smyttyn me'" (1: 351). Gareth's reaction to Gawain's charge is immediate and physical; he flees the scene, behavior that suggests horror at his actions, if not guilt: "So whan he herde hym sey so, he thrange here and there, and so with grete payne he gate oute of the pres" (1: 351). The verb choice of *thringen*, which according to the *Middle English Dictionary* means "to spurt out, gush" (def. 2c), as well as the rapid syntactic movement between the adverbs "here" and "there," suggests almost frenetic behavior and a significant lack of control on Gareth's behalf. He is not capable of finding a straightforward path out of the *mêlée*, and so he rushes about seeking any avenue of escape.

Although Gareth manages to stop himself from killing Gawain accidentally, this incident is a sharp reminder of his similarity to his murderous brother, and it is this similarity that evokes another "Fair Unknown" story, that of the fourteenth-century Middle English romance *Lybeaus Desconus*.³ Unlike Malory's *Sir Gareth of Orkney*,

the main hero seeks to be knighted by Arthur and has no knowledge of his identity. However, much of the remaining narrative structure mirrors that of *Sir Gareth of Orkney* for the “Fair Unknown” then sets out on a quest to prove himself—in this case, to rescue the Lady of Synadon from two evil enchanters. Along the way, Lybeaus kills giants and rescues damsels in distress. When he finally arrives at his destination, he defeats the enchanters and learns of his identity. At last, he returns with the freed lady to Arthur's court, where they are subsequently married.

Although there exists a thirteenth century analogue, Renaut de Bâgé's *Le Bel Inconnu*, my focus is on the Middle English version primarily because of its treatment of the character of Gawain, who is revealed to be the father of the “Fair Unknown,” that is, Guinglain. Whereas the French analogue emphasizes the role of women in naming and shaping the young Guinglain, Thomas Chestre shifts these actions away from these females and assigns them solely to Gawain,⁴ for the latter arms and trains the young knight. In addition, the relationship between Gawain and his son is described using either “kynne” or “kynde”; for example, the Lady of Synadon explains that she would be enchanted ““Tyll J had kissed Gawayne, / . . . / Or some of his kynde” (2106-08). The most obvious meaning behind these words is that Guinglain is a relation of Gawain—hence the modern English “kin.” However, another meaning is possible—that Guinglain is a “kind” of Gawain. In *Lybeaus Desconus*, then, Guinglain does nothing that Gawain has not done, and due to the absence of an active feminine influence to shape him, he is given no opportunities to exceed the deeds of his father. Guinglain is simply a clone of Gawain, an example of Arthurian knighthood trapped in a static and never-ending circle.

We find a variation of this relationship between Gawain and his kin in the fourteenth-century romance *Sir Perceval of Galles*, where Gawain replaces the series of tutors who, in the French *Conte du Graal*, propel Perceval toward his success in the Grail quest. Although Perceval's education proves deficient both before and after the grail episode in the French version as well as in the English, in the former, there is a greater hint of the innate qualities in the young Perceval that will propel him beyond the achievements of Gawain. The English Perceval, however, is shaped—and thereby limited—by Gawain throughout the romance, for Perceval's education is limited to the proper arrangement of arms and battlefield procedures when Gawain is his sole instructor.

That is not to say, however, that Gareth is a clone of his brother; only that Gareth is restricted by the familial connection. It is striking that prior to the tournament, every time Gareth identifies himself, he includes the specific detail that Gawain is his brother. For example, he tells Lancelot that he is “brothir unto sir Gawayne of fadir syde and modir syde” (1: 299), and later, gives similar information to Sir Persaunte (1: 317). In fact, once Gareth’s identify becomes widely known, others echo his identification with Gawain, for when Sir Gryngamoure kidnaps Gareth’s dwarf at Lyones’s request, the dwarf includes this detail (1: 329). During the tournament, Sir Ironsyde tells Tristram of Gareth that “his ryght name is sir Gareth of Orkeney, brother unto sir Gawayne” (1: 350). As Bonnie Wheeler has noted, “[T]he text insistentlly bonds [Gawain] to his family; he is prominent even in apposition, for his relatives are most commonly identified by their relation to him” (119). However, I would argue that Gareth is not just aligned with his older brother; he shares the same blood and the same passionate nature—the same murderous and vengeful inclinations—and as a result, Gareth seeks to remove himself from that particular sphere of influence.

It is only following the tournament, and his close encounter with Gawain, that Gareth ceases from identifying with Gawain; when seeking lodging, he tells his hostess that “my name is sir Gareth of Orkeney, and som men call me Bewmaynes” (1: 354). Notably, when Gareth next encounters Gawain, he does not recognize their relationship, even when Gawain repeatedly calls attention to it, telling Gareth that “I am your brother, sir Gawayne” and exclaiming, “Alas! my fayre brother” (1: 357). In fact, Lyonet has revealed loudly both knights’ identity, for she “cryed all on hygh: ‘Sir Gawayne! leve thy fyghtyng with thy brothir, sir Gareth!’” (1: 357). Gareth, however, follows this outcry by asking Gawain’s identity, an action that suggests that Gareth is so engrossed in the fighting that he has no external awareness—just as Gawain lacked awareness when he beheaded the maiden on his first quest.

To escape from the gravitational field that is Gawain takes great strength and devotion, and in the fourteenth-century romance *Ywain and Gawain*, we see a character do just that. The interchangeability between Ywain and Gawain quickly becomes apparent on the tournament circuit, for while Chrétien indicates that Gawain will not permit Ywain to leave and goes to great pains to honor Yvain, in the Middle English romance, the two characters become nearly identical, as

indicated by parallel syntactic structures and the linking rhyme: “Ful dughtily did Sir Ywayne, / And also did Sir Gawayne” (1563-64). Immediately following this, the author of *Ywain and Gawain* expands on their time together, reducing “Ywain and Gawain” to the single grammatical unit of “they,” used ten times in eighteen lines. Neither one acts without the other. By allowing Gawain to exert such influence over him, Ywain temporarily loses his lady and his renown because he follows Gawain’s example of privileging the masculine over the feminine. It is only when Ywain is reborn as the Knight of the Lion, a title unknown to Gawain and subsequently beyond his control, that Ywain, with his wife, is able to live “In joy and blis” (4024).

When the Gawain of Middle English romances serves as a mentor to younger knights such as Ywain, Percival, or Guinglain, the result is a stilted performance on the part of the younger knight. However, when the knight recognizes Gawain's influence on himself, as Gareth seems to do toward the end of his tale, and takes strides to eliminate traces of that influence, the younger knight can achieve greatness. Gareth exchanges his relationship with his brother for a more beneficial and balancing one with Lyones through marriage, and it is significant that it is she who prevents Gareth from participating in the wedding tournament: “that dame Lyonesse desyred of the kynge that none that were wedded sholde juste at that feste” (1: 362). As Catherine Batt notes, Lynette, through the “metaphor of the armed knight,” tries to rebuild Gareth’s identity (270), but although she succeeds for a while and by the end of the tale of *Sir Gareth of Orkney*, Gareth seems to have tamed the Orkney bloodlust, ultimately he proves to be too indebted to his familial ties. The die have already been cast, and we know that Lancelot will unknowingly kill Gareth—largely in part because Gareth slowly begins to rejoin his brothers, including Gawain, in *The Book of Sir Tristram* and culminating in the fatal alliance in the *Slander and Strife* section of Malory’s final book, where despite the lessons learned as he first establishes his name, Gareth has moved away from the protective embrace of his wife back into the folds of the Orkney clan. After all, the blood that drives Gawain pulses through Gareth’s veins as well; thus for Gareth to deny Gawain is to deny a part of himself. Ultimately Gareth must choose family over fragmentation.

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Notes

¹ Norris, for example, focuses largely on Malory's use of John Hardyng's *Chronicle* as well as Malory's possible sources for the names of minor characters in his chapter devoted to the *Tale of King Arthur*. When he does touch upon the *Suite du Merlin*, it is in relation to the transformation of Arthur's character. He discusses Gawain briefly, but only in the context of the later Marhalt episode and with an emphasis on Gawain's waxing and waning strength. See also Wright for a comparison of the *Suite* and the Gawain-Ywain-Marhalt story. Wheeler also discusses the relationship between these stories. Shichtman touches briefly on the changes introduced by Malory to this section of the *Suite*, but focuses on the events resulting after the beheading of the maiden whereas I am interested in the moments leading up to and including the fatal stroke.

² For example, Gawain plays this role in Chretien de Troyes's twelfth-century *Erec et Enide*.

³ I am far from the first to discuss Malory's tale of *Sir Gareth of Orkney* with respect to the "Fair Unknown" motif; see, for example, Wilson. Wilson, however, is more interested in establishing Malory's tale of *Sir Gareth of Orkney* as a "Fair Unknown" text whereas I am interested in understanding why Gareth rejects his brother so severely.

⁴ I am not arguing that Renaut's text is a source for Chestre's version; however, Schofield discusses the potential relationships between the various analogues (including the German *Wigalois*).

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