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CONSTRUCTING A REPUTATION IN RETROSPECT IN
SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

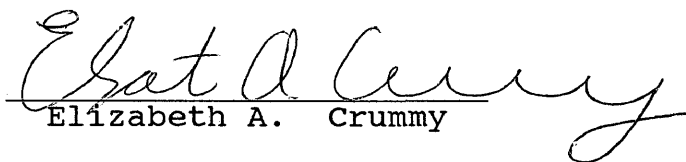
Elizabeth A. Crummy

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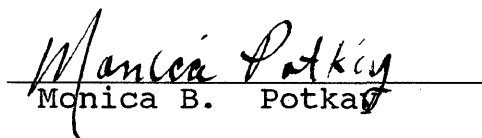
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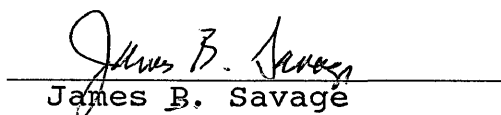
Master of Arts


Elizabeth A. Crummy

Approved, July 1991


Monica B. Potkar


John Conlee


James B. Savage

DEDICATION

The author wishes to dedicate this text to Jim Rice and Janet Crummy, who helped make this year of study possible, and to John Uselman, who became a fan of Sir Gawain and listened to recitations in Middle English long distance.

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The author wishes to express her appreciation to Professor Monica Brzezinski for many hours of reading and advising on this manuscript, and to Professors James Savage and John Conlee for their generous time reading the text.

ABSTRACT

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight differs from its predecessors in that it utilizes character development to an extent not employed or desired by previous authors in the chivalric tradition. Indeed, the poet's interest in depicting psychological growth is a significant departure from a tradition where character development was minimal. I propose that this departure is an intentional move on the part of the author. He focuses explicitly upon Gawain at one stage of his life so that through the detailed account of one adventure, the reader is able to glimpse the motivations guiding the public persona of one of Arthurian legend's greatest and most famous knights.

The focus on character development is significant because in SGGK, as Gawain struggles with his mission as a knight, he attempts to grow into the reputation bestowed upon him by other texts. His development is complicated by the fact that the people with whom he comes into contact anticipate his performing according to their expectations from literature. Works which they could have read and which provide a context for examining Gawain in SGGK are Geoffrey of Monmouth's The History of the Kings of Britain, Chretien de Troyes' Perceval, and the anonymous Vulgate The Quest of the Holy Grail. These texts, however, conflict because they portray Gawain respectively as hero, lover, and penitent in ways that the young Gawain of SGGK is far from matching. The author of SGGK synthesizes many of these disparate accounts of the adult Gawain in a consideration of him as a young knight. This poem thus considers the tradition in which the Gawain character was rooted at the time of its composition, yet it challenges and blends those representations of the hero. The author of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight creates a character who has the potential to develop into any of the numerous portraits of him as an adult which exist in other texts written prior to it.

CONSTRUCTING A REPUTATION IN RETROSPECT IN
SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

The late fourteenth-century anonymous romance Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (hereafter SGGK) is markedly different from its generic predecessors in that it utilizes character development to an extent rarely employed or desired by previous authors writing chivalric narratives. Characters in stories usually were chosen and fashioned to illustrate certain ideals and morals, rather than to tell stories of their own (C. S. Lewis, Allegory of Love). Departing from a tradition in which character development was usually minimal, the author purposely focuses upon Gawain at one stage of his life and, through the detailed chronicling of a single adventure, invites the reader to glimpse behind the public persona of Gawain the motivations for his actions. SGGK's author presents a multi-faceted hero whose psychic complexity develops as he struggles with his mission as a knight and hesitates to uphold chivalric codes popularized in literature. However, it is through this struggle that Gawain develops into what he is traditionally in many of the earlier romances, the ideal of secular chivalry.

The focus on character development is important because in SGGK, as Gawain struggles with his mission as a knight, he attempts to grow into the reputation bestowed upon him by older texts. The Gawain who develops in SGGK is limited by what his character already is in other works. Given that his

literary reputation is deeply ingrained into the text and the people he meets, Gawain in SGGK has set boundaries within which to develop. The Gawain-poet's task and interest, since he evokes these reputations explicitly in his work, was to force his young and inexperienced Gawain to act in such a way as to be potentially what his reputation says he is. Gawain in SGGK does not have to be it yet, he just has to be likely to grow into it.

In portraying Sir Gawain, the poet had a plethora of literary sources from which to draw since he wrote so late in the chivalric tradition; Sir Gawain, as a particular favorite of medieval audiences, figured in many texts. This paper will focus on Geoffrey of Monmouth's The History of the Kings of Britain, Chretien de Troyes' Perceval, and the Vulgate The Quest of the Holy Grail because these widely-read works present three different facets of reputation to which SGGK's Gawain aspires. They portray Gawain respectively as primarily military hero, lover, and penitent, and the author of SGGK incorporates these accounts of the adult Gawain into a consideration of him as a young knight. This poem, then, performs the difficult task of building a conceivable foundation for the literary house framed prior to it. The young Gawain in SGGK provides a believable basis for the adult Gawain who appears in other texts. It thus creates a character who has the potential to develop into any of the numerous portraits of him as an adult. SGGK considers the tradition in which the Gawain character was rooted at the time

of its composition, yet it synthesizes the representations of the hero, and in doing so it challenges them. Whereas many older texts depicted him as a stock hero, the Gawain-poet goes beyond the surface to show Gawain's human and vulnerable side. He so freshened and deepened a portrait that had been painted many times previously.

We need to address the question of which texts featuring Gawain our author might have known, so it is appropriate to speak of the poet's familiarity with the chivalric tradition. Although we know little about the author of SGGK and possibly the three other poems found in the British Museum's Cotton Nero A. x. manuscript, we can assume that he was well acquainted with both life at court and with tales of Arthurian chivalry from Britain and France. Previous critics have argued for such knowledge on the part of the poet since evidence shows that he worked from a literary and practical knowledge of chivalry and so had the background needed to incorporate effectively into his poem the changing reputations of Gawain. Critics Henry Savage and Laura Hibbard Loomis examine the literary knowledge of this poet and position him within a courtly milieu. They convincingly argue that the Gawain-poet lived in a court and drew upon previous chivalric texts in writing SGGK. In The Gawain-Poet, Savage, through detailed analysis of the manuscript's descriptions of clothing, armor and castles, and its dialect suggests that the author might have been a servant in a baronial household such as that of John of Gaunt or Enguerrand de Coucy (Savage, 11).

Such a background gave him intimate knowledge of the customs of courtly life and the legends associated with them. His personal experiences are reflected in the accurate and vivid hunting scenes and in the detailed descriptions of armor and court festivities (13).

A consideration of the literary tradition with which the Gawain-poet would have been familiar is also important. Laura Hibbard Loomis reveals possible sources for the beheading and challenge motifs found in SGGK, and her study illustrates that the Gawain-poet did not write his tale in ignorance of other texts. Loomis shows that the story related in SGGK is far from original, finding its roots in both French and Irish literature. SGGK's resemblance to these tales suggests that the Gawain-poet used them as models and as source material. Loomis finds the roots of the beheading game in an Irish tale called Bricriu's Feast. The story, which exists in a manuscript dated prior to 1106, bears remarkable similarities to Gawain's situation in SGGK. Loomis reports that this tale found its way out of Ireland and into several Arthurian romances: "Of these, GGK has preserved by far the largest number of features which go back to some form of the Irish saga" (286) including a shape-shifting enchanter, a regenerating head, and one brave knight who accepts the challenge.

Loomis lists stories containing Sir Lancelot as possible direct sources for SGGK. Roots of the Green Knight's challenge to Gawain are found in one of these suggested tales,

the French story Perlesvaus, of which Lancelot is the hero. Loomis lists several similarities to Gawain's adventure, including that "the challenger whets his axe with a whetstone as the hero approaches to fulfill his bargain; the hero shrinks from the blow; he is sharply rebuked" (288). Loomis reflects that "these parallels, supplemented by resemblances in phrase, again argue for literary borrowing whether directly by the English poet or through a French intermediary" (288). In writing his tale of challenge and beheading, the Gawain-poet demonstrates a familiarity with what had been written before, yet his genius allowed him to borrow and alter those motifs as he saw fit.

The most valuable critic for determining the texts the Gawain-poet probably knew is A. C. Spearing. Spearing's analysis in The Gawain-Poet, A Critical Study of the poet's literary knowledge provides strong evidence for his familiarity with works like Perceval, Geoffrey's History, and the Vulgate Quest. Spearing discusses how the Gawain-poet's works exhibit a familiarity with Latin, French and Italian literature. From Latin he received a knowledge of classical literature and a "high style" of writing (p. 15) and from Italian he learned the art of "giving to a modern vernacular language ... fluency, versatility, and charm" (p. 17). Most essentially, he was widely read in French courtly literature "which played a crucial part in forming and sustaining the courtly milieu in England" (p. 15). Spearing discusses how strong the influence of Northern French tradition is in the

poem:

[I]t carries across into English the finest qualities of French romances--elegance, profoundly suggestive fantasy, delicate psychological analysis. Though there is as yet no scholarly agreement about its specific sources, it could certainly have been created only by a man thoroughly soaked in French romance. (p. 15)

With such knowledge available to us, the analysis of SGGK in light of the texts selected is justified.

The most essential literary knowledge for the Gawain-poet to possess, however, in writing SGGK was of the different ways in which Sir Gawain had been portrayed from text to text throughout Arthurian romance literature. Various chivalric texts offer conflicting portraits of the knight's reputation, depicting him as anything from a loyal, gentle knight to a deadly, cruel enemy. Fanni Bogdanow's article in Medium Aevum provides an insight into this odd phenomenon. She reports that:

There are, in fact, two distinct traditions concerning Gauvain. In the twelfth-century verse romances Gauvain was the embodiment of all chivalric virtues. Though never the title hero, he is represented as the best of Arthur's knights ... In the thirteenth-century prose romances, however, his character is modified until he finally assumes the role of a villain and becomes the most cruel and treacherous of all knights. (Bogdanow, p. 154)

This phenomenon of the good Gawain turning evil will be explored later in this essay when the issue of Gawain as a hardened sinner will be examined. The reason for this change in Gawain's personality was that French authors wanted to highlight Lancelot, the chivalric hero of their romances. If, as Loomis argues and is highly probable, the poet was familiar

with the French romances, it is plausible that he noticed this extreme disparity in Gawain's reputation and manipulated it in his own Sir Gawain story.

We know that the Gawain-poet is interested in the issue of Gawain's reputation because the characters in the poem are. Since Gawain and Camelot are young in SGGK (as will be established later), it seems unlikely that the people with whom he comes into contact would have any preconceived notions upon which to judge him and his fellow knights. Yet, there is a ubiquitous reputation which exists about both the court and its representative knight, a reputation which surrounds them and colors the expectations of the people whom they meet. From the Green Knight's entrance into the feasting hall at Camelot when he mocks the Round Table for failing to be as brave as he has heard that they are, to Gawain's arrival at Hautdesert where the people expect he will teach them the language of love, to the Lady's plea for Gawain to address her in his famed "luf-talking," the text is filled with references to reputations established prior to the events of SGGK. Not only does the Gawain-poet consider these literary influences in creating his portrait of Gawain, but the knight himself also struggles against them as he meets with various versions of his reputation en route to the Green Chapel.

Because the court and Gawain are young, any reputations they might possess are as yet unproved in the poem. In SGGK, Gawain appears at a very tender age, an age where he simultaneously feels invincible and incapable, immortal and

ephemeral. The text makes the youthfulness of Arthur and his court explicit. Line 54 says "For al was this fair folk in her first age"; line 86 refers to Arthur as "sumwhat childgered"; and line 89 speaks of the king's "yong blod and his brain wilde" as he refuses to begin eating until after a marvel occurs. The Green Knight emphasizes the juvenile appearance of the court as he scorns the entire assembly as "bot berdles childer" (280). As a member of this court, Gawain naturally shares in its immaturity, an immaturity supported by additional evidence, such as his inexperience in matters of love and his cowardice in flinching when the Green Knight moves to repay the blow with the ax. The mature Gawain of earlier texts is noted for his popularity with ladies and for his unwavering bravery, but the Gawain we are introduced to in this poem hesitates to challenge the Green Knight, waiting to take his cue from his king, and is inexperienced in courtesy and matters of love, as we shall later see.

Although the court has not as yet earned a reputation, it possesses one anyway. The Green Knight appeals to it in his mockery of the trembling court at Camelot, paralyzed by fear when he intrudes into their festivities. His appearance is so unlooked for on New Year's Day that Arthur and all the people at the feast are stricken dumb and cannot address the large man. He scorns such cowardice, and ridicules them:

"What, is this Arthure's hous," quoth the hathel
 then,
 "That al the rous rennes of thurgh rialmes so
 mony?
 Where is now your surquidry and your conquestes,

Your gryndel-laik and your greme, and your gret
wordes?

Now is the revel and the renoun of the Rounde Table
Overwalt with a word of one wightes speche;
For al dares for drede without dint shewed." (309-
315)

After the stranger insults the court, Arthur and Gawain leap from their chairs and face the knight, attempting to reestablish the reputation which the knight has doubted.

What the Green Knight asks for is an exchange of blows with a knight. The knight will strike at his neck today, and the giant will strike the knight a year and a day later. Even after hearing the terms of the challenge, from which it seems certain there must be no survival should the first blow be weak, Gawain is willing to make good on his promise, ready to sacrifice his life so that his lord will not be harmed or shamed. It is uncertain whether Gawain's actions reflect ignorance, bravado, or loyalty, but for whatever the reason, it shows Gawain to be hasty in accepting potentially fatal challenges to preserve the reputation of his brotherhood of knights. The Green Knight plays upon this concern for reputation when he tells Gawain that if he fails to respond to the second heat of the beheading game next New Year's Day, he will be mocked and his reputation ruined. He admonishes Gawain to "therfore com, other recreaunt be calde the behoves" (456).

The roots of both Camelot's reputation to which the Green Knight appeals and Gawain's impetuosity are found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's The History of the Kings of Britain, from the

mid-twelfth century. Lewis Thorpe, in his introduction to his translation of the History, speaks of how well-known Geoffrey's work was throughout the Latin, French, and English-speaking world. After its appearance in 1136, many manuscript copies were made, and although its value as a historical chronicle was often criticized, Thorpe reports that:

As romanticized history on the other hand, as a source-book for the imaginative writing of others, as an inspiration for poetry, drama, and romantic fiction down the centuries, it has had few if any equals in the whole history of European literature. (p. 28)

The Gawain-poet evidently relied upon a portrait of Gawain as a warrior inspired by the History because the portrait Geoffrey paints of Gawain is of a headstrong, impulsive fighter, celebrated for his talents on the battlefield, and a fierce protector of his brotherhood's reputation. Although he is mentioned only briefly in the History, Gawain's impression is lasting. The portrait of Gawain found in this text is probably the source of the twelfth century's popular conception of Gawain as a fine warrior, discussed by Fanni Bogdanow, as mentioned above.

Gawain's debut in Geoffrey's work is as the hot-headed nephew of King Arthur who is renowned for his loyalty to and enthusiasm for preserving the honor and reputation of his company. Arthur and his troupe of knights are at war with Rome, whose government demands that Arthur pay them taxes. Sent as Arthur's envoy in the battle, Gawain approaches the Romans to parley with Emperor Lucius, and his comrades

encourage him to initiate a fight with the enemy. As Lucius claims that he will not retreat, his nephew Gaius Quintillianus

was heard to mutter that the Britons were better at boasting and making threats than they were at proving their courage and prowess on the battle-field. Gawain was immediately incensed at this. He drew his sword from the scabbard which was hanging at his belt, rushed at Gaius and cut off his head. (Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 241)

His wrathful reaction here is paralleled in SGGK when Gawain leaps to Arthur's aid and accepts the Green Knight's beheading challenge. Gawain habitually allows his anger to pit him against impossible odds in the History. After Gawain slays Gaius, a major battle ensues between the members of Arthur's emissary party and the Romans, during which the latter are ruthlessly unhorsed and maimed while the Britons escape relatively unharmed. Gawain feels honor bound to make a good killing to justify the urgings of his impetuous temper, and to satisfy his lust for revenge. He thereby puts his small host into the clutches of thousands of Romans, winning the battle and saving his brotherhood's reputation, but at the cost of immense carnage.

Geoffrey's relating of this battle introduces the reader to Gawain's bravery and tendency to act rashly in order to prove his abilities. Later in the same battle, Gawain asserts himself as the man to slay the Emperor: "Gawain, fearless in his courage, did his utmost to come up with Lucius himself in the fight. He made every effort to push forward, for he was the bravest of all the knights" (254). Gawain's perseverance

in looking to kill Lucius is rewarded because he "finally found the opening for which he was longing. He rushed straight at the Roman general and fought with him hand to hand" (254). Gawain's imprudently begun battle leads him into a spiraling circle in which he must continuously support his boasts and rash actions under increasingly unsavory circumstances. The same phenomenon occurs in SGGK when the Green Knight's challenge leads Gawain to leave Camelot and travel blindly, a journey that leads him to the dangers of Hautdesert and its attempted seductions, and that leads him into temptation and sin.

SGGK shows the youthful beginnings of the rash temper and bravery by which Gawain is known in the History. In Geoffrey's tale he kills the emperor's nephew for daring to make light of the reputation of the Britons; similarly, the young Gawain rushes into an adventure with little thought of any consequences other than the preservation of the court's reputation in the eyes of this complete stranger. The impetuous knight who hot-headedly slew a slanderer and set his small band of warriors against an entire army in the History can easily grow from the actions of this knight who pits his neck against a regenerating giant.

There is a marked difference, however, between SGGK and Geoffrey's story regarding Gawain's self-confidence: the Gawain-poet paints his young knight as needing to grow into his self-confidence, whereas Geoffrey's Gawain is filled with it to a fault. The Gawain from the History has the same

spirit of the hero of SGGK, but Geoffrey's figure is less fallible in combat. He does not appear to experience any misgivings or doubts about his fate in battle and undertakes even the most dangerous odds with confidence. In the History, Gawain rushes headlong into battles knowing that he can emerge victorious, or, at the least, that his death will provide for the safety and honor of his sovereign. Gawain is distinguished as a competent and fearless leader in what is clearly a powerful army:

Gawain drew his troops up in some order and ordered them to wheel round in formation, each doing his utmost to unhorse one of the enemy. They agreed to what he proposed. They all turned back and each of them killed his man. All the same, the Romans continued the pursuit, hitting out at the Britons with their swords and spears, but not succeeding in capturing or unhorsing any of them. (242)

And, as was referred to earlier, Gawain actively seeks the leader of the Roman troops to have the satisfaction of killing him. Gawain seems assured of success in any military maneuver he shoulders, and he undertakes them without heed to his life or doubt of his success.

In SGGK Gawain is less certain of his prowess as an untested warrior as he embarks upon what is probably one of his first quests. Gawain humbly describes himself in terms such as "I am the wakkest, I wot, and of wit feblest,/ And lest lur of my lif, who laites the sothe" (354-355). Although his claim can be construed as modesty, his self-deprecation is supported by the court's farewell to him. After Gawain rides away to seek the Green Knight, the court speaks about Gawain

as if he were already dead:

"A lowande leder of leudes in londe him wel semes,
 And so had better have bene than brittened to noght,
 Hadet with an alvish mon, for angardes pride.
 Who knew ever any king such counsel take
 As knightes in cavelaciouns on Cristemas games!"
 Wel much was the warme water that waltered of ighen,
 When that semly sire soght fro tho wones
 that day. (679-686)

The Gawain of the History supports his threats with action, while the Gawain of SGGK is as yet only able to threaten, according to his beliefs and those beliefs of the court.

The other way in which SGGK's Gawain differs from Geoffrey's is his inordinate concern for preserving his life. As he leaves on All Souls' Day to keep his bargain with the Green Knight, he bids what he fears will be his final farewell to the members of the court at Camelot. Gawain's pessimism is continued when on the night before his meeting the Green Knight at the appointed place, he dreams "[a]s mon that was in mourning of mony thro thoughtes,/ How that destiny shulde that day dele him his wirde/ At the grene chapel, when he the gome metes" (1751-1753). Most importantly, Gawain accepts a gift to help preserve his life, even when it violates an agreement with another knight. This young Gawain does not have the recklessness of his older model, most likely because he neither has the skills needed to survive such daring moves, nor the abandon to possibly sacrifice his life.

However, although Gawain of SGGK is more fearful, he does begin to become Geoffrey's brave Gawain at the end of the poem when he finally encounters the Green Knight at the Green

Chapel. When the Green Knight first moves to repay Gawain's blow to his neck a year ago, the young Gawain flinches with fear. The Green Knight scolds such cowardice:

And then reprevd he the prince with mony proude
wordes:
"Thou art not Gawain," quoth the gome, "that is so
good holden,
That never arghed for no here by hille ne by vale,
And now thou fles for ferde ere thou fele harmes!
Such cowardise of that knight couth I never here.
(2269-2273)

At that insult to his reputation, Gawain grows indignant and tells the Green Knight to forego his mockeries and return the blow quickly because "thou thretes to long" (2330). The Gawain-poet is careful to note Gawain's sudden bravery and describes him as the Green Knight gives the second attempted blow: "Gawain graithely hit bides, and glent with no membre,/ Bot stode stille as the stone, other a stubbe other/ That ratheled is in rochy ground with rotes a hundreth" (2292-2294). Gawain begins to carry himself and talk like the fine warrior we see in the History. Similarly, after the Green Knight satisfies his right to strike Gawain, the young knight seizes his sword in self-defense and makes ready to fight his assailant like the defiant warrior of the History. Gawain is not yet the master-at-arms and self-confident warrior that Geoffrey's knight is, but he exhibits the potential to become both the brave and reckless Gawain of the History.

A different tradition concerning Gawain's reputation portrays him as a lover, and it is explicitly invoked in SGGK during his sojourn at Hautdesert. It becomes evident that

this reputation comes from literature; the court at Hautdesert and its Lady, especially, have been reading about Gawain and the chivalric tradition. We know from the Lady's comments to Gawain that she is well-acquainted with his pre-established reputation and the whole genre of romance, and therefore has certain expectations about how Gawain should speak and act. During the second tryst between Gawain and the Lady, she proposes to instruct Gawain in this literature when he fails to kiss her as knights customarily do in stories. The Lady tells Gawain about the lives of knights according to the literature she has read:

And of alle chevalry to chose, the cher thing alosed
Is the lel laik of luf, the lettrure of armes;
For to telle of this teveling of these true knights
Hit is the tiolet token, and tixt of her werkes
How leudes for her lel luf hor lives han auntered,
Endured for her drury doelful stoundes,
And after venged with valour and voided her care
And brought blisse into boure with bounties hor
owen. (1512-1519)

The Lady's perceptions and expectations of knighthood are limited to what she has read; that is the model to which she appeals. Gawain is puzzled by her demands that he talk like the knights in romances do, and modestly claims that it is beyond his capabilities to fulfill her expectations:

Bot to take the torvaile to myself to trueluf expoun
And towche the temes of tixt and tales of armes
To you that, I wot wel, weldes more slegt
Of that art, by the half, of a hundreth of such
As I am, other ever shal, in erde there I live,
Hit were a foly felefolde, my fre, by my traathe.
(1540-1545)

Gawain's claim of inadequacy is more than just one of modesty. SGGK's neophyte knight is so far removed from experience as a

courteous lover that he is confused by the requests of the court at Hautdesert and its Lady to speak to them in the language of love. He has been negligent in studying the relevant texts and thus his evaluation that he cannot presume to teach her is accurate.

From the moment Gawain enters Hautdesert, he is confronted not only by general expectations about knightly behavior, but also by his own reputation, by a fame which stems from literature. When his name is revealed soon after he enters Bercilak's castle, the people there are ecstatic to have him as a guest because they believe they will be instructed by the master of the language of love and of courtesy:

Uche segg ful softly said to his fere:
 "Now shal we semlich se sleghtes of thewes
 And the techeles termes of talking noble;
 Wich speed is in speche unspured may we lerne,
 Sin we have fanged that fine fader of nurture ...
 In mening of maneres mere
 This burn now shal us bring;
 I hope that may him here
 Shal lerne of luf-talking." (915-927)

Their focus is upon Gawain's ability to speak well and look good. They demand that the knight make a favorable appearance, but they are not concerned with his actual abilities, or his inner qualities. As W. A. Davenport indicates, they are looking only for "a model of elegant discourse" (Davenport, p. 159). The Lady, too, is searching for the same appearance from Gawain. Although she bars the bedroom door, pins him in his bed, and offers her body for him to use as he would, her main objective is not actual physical

contact; instead, she wants Gawain to speak to her as she imagines a knight should address a lady, complaining when he fails to speak as she imagined he would,"... I have seten by yourself here sere twies/ Yet herde I never of your hed helde no werdes/ That ever longed to luf ..." (1522-1524). In spite of her physical assaults on the knight, she, like the court, primarily wants to hear him speak courteously of love. The danger of this focus on external values is emphasized, as we shall see later, in the Vulgate Quest when the lesson learned by the knights is that secular values are not enough to succeed, unless they are accompanied by spiritual ones.

B. J. Whiting's discussion of Gawain's reputation for courteous talk in "Gawain: His Reputation, His Courtesy, and His Appearance in Chaucer's Squire's Tale" confirms Hautdesert's expectations. Whiting mentions that "[a] fairy at Gawain's birth promises him beauty, courtesy and honorable estate. He is called the most courteous of knight of Arthur's court, or, indeed, of all the world. Courteous often has the force of a fixed epithet..." (p. 75-76). Whiting discusses incidents in which women fall in love with Gawain, whom they have only known through his reputation, and desire to consummate their love with him when they actually meet him: "Because of Gawain's reputation as a lover he is the secret passion of many maidens who have never seen him in the flesh, and as such is the medieval prototype of some of our own cherished heroes of radio and film" (p. 76).

The poem shows that Gawain displays the courtesy for

which he is renowned. Gawain assists all women, foul or fair in looks or in actions, and remains a model of courtesy. Davenport recounts that the foul/fair juxtaposition is a motif commonly associated with Gawain (p. 160). While many knights are noted for their courtesy and attention to beautiful damsels, Gawain is also kind to those less deserving of his interest and attention.

We see Gawain's courtesy manifested in SGGK with what is presumably his first introduction to an ugly woman, after coming from Camelot at which all ladies are fair. In Bercilak's castle he is met by the two ladies, one young and beautiful, the other old and haggly. Although he finds the younger lady more to his taste, he nonetheless honors them both:

The alder he hailses, heldande ful lowe,
The loveloker he lappes a littel in armes,
He kisses hir comlily, and knightly he meles.
Thay callen him of aquointaunce, and he hit quik
 askes
To be her servaunt sothly, if hemsself liked. (972-
976)

Gawain's courtesy is wisely enacted here, especially in light of the fact that the older woman is later revealed to be Morgan le Fay, the powerful sorceress and instigator of the adventure with the Green Knight. Gawain's courtesy is of benefit to himself and to those ladies whom he serves.

In Perceval, Gawain becomes involved in a more complicated situation when he assists a beautiful woman who is actually morally corrupt. In SGGK, the fact that Morgan is evil may be indicated by her "allegorical" ugliness. In

Perceval, the lady's inner qualities are harder to determine because the woman is beautiful on the outside. Although Gawain receives many warnings from onlookers that the woman is bent upon destroying him, Gawain stays with the woman and grants her a safe passage on her journey:

"Et je en sui tote seure
 Que je te ferai mesbaillir,
 Nes qu'a la mort n'i pues faillir."
 Mesire Gavains tot escoute
 Quanques la damoisele estolte
 Li dist, c'onques mot ne li sone,
 Mais que son palefroi li done,
 Et ele son cheval li laisse. (6866-6873)

["I shall abuse you terribly,/ so you cannot escape from dying."/ The Lord Gawain, without replying,/ heard how the maiden reprimanded/ his gesture scornfully, and handed/ her palfrey to her in due course.]

Through all her rantings and insults, he never abandons her to the danger of being a woman traveling alone, but always tries to uphold the knightly virtue of courtesy to all ladies.

Given Gawain's reputation as a courteous knight and as a lover, it is no surprise that the Lady in SGGK approaches Gawain in bed on the first of his three mornings of rest in the castle, longing to hear him speak courteously to her. However, from which texts has the Lady gotten her ideas about Gawain's love-making skills? A likely source is Chretien de Troyes' Perceval which contrasts with Gawain's failure to perform satisfactorily in the realm of courtly love. An older and more experienced knight, Gawain warmly embraces the opportunities to serve ladies and consummate his love with them. As the Gawain of Chretien's poem enters into his worldly adventures, he is forced to reconcile his chivalric

duties toward ladies and lords in the same way that SGGK's Gawain is called upon to learn those lessons. Yet, Gawain's amorous side is given freer reign in Perceval, where he is portrayed as an experienced knight, accomplished in the ability to act upon his sexual urges. Through his actions in Perceval, Gawain's reputation as a lover is made explicit. Gawain travels from one castle to the next, he falls in love with and seduces women, he is admired from afar, he is accosted by evil and treacherous, although beautiful, women. In one instance, he is sheltered in a castle which turns out to belong to a knight who accuses him of treason, and Gawain immediately is introduced to a beautiful lady who is delighted to make his acquaintance and to be asked to serve him:

Et cele dist, qui grant joie a:
 "Beneois soit qui m'envoia
 Tel compaignie come est ceste;
 Qui si bel compaignon me preste
 Ne me het pas, soie merchi." (5805-5809)

[The maiden, promising she would,/ replied with great joy, "Blessed be he/ who's lent such handsome company!/ Clearly he was not being hateful,/ and so I am extremely grateful."]

The two of them lose no time in becoming physically intimate, and even after she learns that Gawain may be responsible for the death of her father, she defiantly assists in Gawain's defense by throwing chess pieces through the window at his attackers.

Perceval's Gawain thus is the antithesis of the awkward Gawain of SGGK who shyly hides from his temptress, although he desires to respond to her invitations. In SGGK the reader is charmed by Gawain's boyish embarrassment at the brazen

advances of the woman. Rather than excitedly welcoming the opportunity to become intimate with a woman, Gawain hides under his sheets, hoping the woman will believe he is sleeping and go away:

... the burn shamed,
 And laide him doun listily and let as he slepte.
 And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bed,
 Cast up the cortain and creped withinne ...
 The leude lay lurked a ful long while,
 Compast in his concience to what that case might
 Meve other amount ... (1189-1197)

On the other hand, in Perceval, within the space of ten lines of text, Gawain exacts a promise of love from the maiden, and they are in the process of "greatly enjoying themselves with a kiss" when they are interrupted by the angry knight who recognizes Gawain as his father's killer (5836-5837). While SGGK's Gawain spends his time contemplating the ethics of sexual activity with the wife of one's host, feigning sleep to escape her attentions, and wondering if he is capable of doing what she asks of him, the Gawain of Chretien's romance wastes no time in contemplation and instead devotes his time to making love to the woman who has been asked to serve him:

D'amors parolent ambedui,
 Car s'il d'autre chose parlaissent,
 De grant oiseuse se mellaissent.
 Mesire Gavains le requiert
 D'amors et prie et dist qu'il iert
 Ses chevaliers toute sa vie;
 Et ele nel refuse mie,
 Ainz l'otroie molt volentiers. (5824-5831)

[The Lord Gawain/ and she began to talk of love./ They'd waste their time by talking of/ another topic! Sir Gawain/ requested that the maiden deign/ to grant her love. This pledge he'd give:/ he'd be her knight while he should live./ She did not say no, from the start/ she granted him her mind and heart.]

Here is where Gawain's reputation as a master at love talk is made evident. His talk even translates beyond words into actions.

The Lady expects such actualization, but Gawain is confused. The problem facing him in SGGK stems from his ignorance of the precise reputation which the lady wishes him to fulfill. D. S. Brewer explains in "Courtesy and the Gawain-Poet" that the lady is appealing to one of the literary reputations of Gawain, while the man in her bed follows a conflicting one:

Perhaps the most interesting general consideration here is the lady's attempt to identify courtesy with love, and Gawain's successful refusal. In a sense the lady is endeavoring to fasten on Gawain the promiscuous sexuality of the Gawain of the late French romances. Gawain here, and in the later scene, where he says he has no beloved (1790-1), repudiates the French character. (Brewer, p. 331)

The Gawain before Lady Bercilak is a shy one who has not learned the art of lovemaking often attributed to him in many tales. The Gawain-poet hesitates to assign this reputation to the young knight before he has earned it, and, instead, shows a fearful young man confused by the demands of others.

Although Gawain is not certain about the woman's precise demands, then, he does try to fulfill them, as much for his benefit as hers. The reputation with which the lady credits him is appealing, and he wants to take advantage of it. During the incidents in SGGK when Gawain is faced with sexual temptation, the reader sees him responding to pride which encourages him to guard this ubiquitous reputation found in

Perceval. Thus, Gawain is suddenly made uncomfortable by the woman's insinuations that he is not the real Gawain or that the reputation which preceded him is wrong:

"Now he that spedes uche speche this disport yelde
 you!
 Bot that ye be Gawain, hit gos in mind."
 "Wherefore?" quoth the freke, and freshly he askes,
 Ferde lest he had failed in forme of his castes;
 Bot the burde him blessed, and by this skil said:
 "So good as Gawain gainly is holden,
 And cortaisie is closed so clene in himsleven,
 Couth not lightly have lenged so long with a lady
 Bot he had not craved a cosse, by his cortaisie
 By sum towch of sum trifle at sum tales ende."
 (1292-1301).

Gawain is flattered by the Lady's compliments which bestow upon him a reputation for love talk, and to prove he is worthy of her commendations, Gawain permits his hostess to kiss him, a surrender which is within the bonds of chaste love, but which simultaneously ensures his courtesy. Gawain's concern with his reputation is especially interesting because, as was discussed previously, he is not even fully aware of all the ramifications which there are to that reputation.

Because of this reputation for courtesy which Gawain accepts from the lady in SGGK, Gawain must weigh his choices and consider not only the loyalty owed to his host but also his knight's bond to serve ladies courteously. Gawain is torn between the sexual feelings he finds awakening within himself with each day's increased kisses and the honor he owes his host to repay his hospitality with respect for his wife:

For that princece of pris depressed him so thik,
 Nured him so negh the thred, that nede him behoved
 Other lach there hir luf, other lodly refuse.
 He cared for his cortaisie, lest crathain he were,

And more for his meschef, if he shulde make sinne
 And be traitor to that tulk that that telde
 aght. (1770-1775)

Gawain must be equally mindful of loyalty to both his host and hostess.

Yet, there is another loyalty Gawain must keep in mind-- loyalty to virtue, because of another mark of reputation which he carries with him, the pentangle on his shield. The insignia of the pentangle which Gawain carries on his shield symbolizes perfection in both secular and spiritual realms. The Gawain-poet carefully describes the sign as an interlocking set of lines, incapable of being separated from one another. The five points of the pentangle correspond to five virtues and enable the poet to describe his hero thus: "For ay faithful in five and sere five sithes/ Gawain was for good knowen, and as gold pured,/ Voided of uch vilany, with vertues ennurned/ in mote" (632-635). The virtues encompass religious ones such as meditation on the five wounds of Christ and the five joys of Mary, physical perfection in his five fingers and senses, and the knightly virtues of "fraunchise, "felaghschip," "clannes" "cortaisie," and "pity" (650-655). In his encounter with the woman, Gawain must exhibit "cortaisie," "felaghschip," and "clannes" (courtesy, love of his fellow people, and purity/chastity/sinlessness). Thus, Gawain, as the bearer of this symbol, cannot select which loyalties he would like to honor and betray the rest (i. e. make love with the lady and betray his host's hospitality) because Gawain's reputation says that all his loyalties are intertwined and

perfectly balanced.

Although Gawain struggles to reconcile both his duties and desires with his reputation, the second temptation scene with Lady Bercilak shows that, eventually, reputation itself saves Gawain from potential conflict. It allows him to become what the Lady thinks he is, a model of courtesy. He selects which aspect of his reputation he will be, and since he does not know how to be the lover the lady desires, he opts to be the model of courtesy and faithfulness exemplified by his pentangle. Through skillful use of language, he flatters her, saying that she should teach him about love, and ends the session with a light kiss. Gawain makes the right choice in avoiding physical intimacy because that is all the lady wanted anyway--love talk. Gawain has much learning to accomplish before he lives up to the amorous reputation with which both reader and temptress credit him. Yet, at the conclusion of his daily trysts with the lady, Gawain has at least learned to flatter her with courtly language.

The texts discussed to this point neatly bring together the older and younger Gawain and show possible development of two of his most famous characteristics from one age to the next. It is easy to see that the shy lover is interested in being Chretien de Troyes' ladies man, but he is still timid around women. The fearless warrior who rushes into battle to preserve reputation will find the full exposition of his impetuous behavior in Geoffrey's History. It is more difficult to imagine how the penitent and ashamed Gawain in

SGGK could become the prideful and malignant Gawain of the Vulgate The Quest of the Holy Grail, who ignores the advice and admonitions of hermits concerned for his spiritual salvation. Yet it is the very subtleties of the roots of sin which connect the Gawain of SGGK with the hardened sinner of the Quest.

The settings of SGGK and the Quest account for the apparent differences between the two Gawains. The time period of SGGK is the early days of Arthur's fellowship, and the Quest marks the end of the Round Table. The setting in SGGK is a court full of youth and beauty, and with the potential to do great things. In the Quest the court is on the verge of destruction, as all the knights undertake an adventure which will permanently fragment their fellowship. Gawain appears as a hardened sinner, refusing to admit that he needs to seek the grace offered through penance. As such, he resists the idea that martial power and fine appearance are no longer enough to achieve success in this quest, and he is the leader of the other warriors who are focused in the same way, the secular knights. This text's portrayal of Gawain is related to SGGK's portrait because although on the surface level SGGK's Gawain is conscious of his flaws and humbly seeks forgiveness, on a deeper level, he misses the spirit of penance. It is this failure on the inner, spiritual level which connects him to the Gawain who despises penance in the Quest.

This Gawain is a key figure in the Quest, a text which reflects the thirteenth-century religious concern with putting

spiritual values over earthly successes. The early thirteenth century, when the Quest was composed, was when the sacrament of penance achieved a level of great importance in the Catholic Church through the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. This council required that all believers verbally confess their sins at least once a year. To make a complete confession, the penitent should include all sins, be sincere, and have a purpose of amendment (A Catholic Dictionary, p. 207). It is likely that the promulgation of the dogma inspired the Quest's author to illustrate the importance of following such a rule.

On the surface level, that of appearance, Gawain in SGGK is humble and conscious of the need to seek forgiveness for his errors and, thus, seems far-removed from the Quest Gawain. The Gawain-poet makes frequent mention of Gawain's attending mass, he wears the girdle back to Camelot in shameful remembrance of his cowardice and dishonesty in using it, and he makes a complete confession before he sets out to meet the Green Knight at the chapel:

Sithen chefly to the chapel choses he the waye,
 Privily aproched to a prest, and prayed him there
 That he wolde lifte his lif and lern him better
 How his saule shulde be saved when he shuld seye
 hethen.
 There he shrof him shirely and shewed his misdedes,
 Of the more and the minne, and mercy beseches,
 And of absolucioun he on the segg calles;
 And he asolied him surely, and sette him so clene
 As domesday shulde have bene dight on the morn.
 (1876-1884)

The omniscient narrator enables us to accept his word that the confession is valid, that Gawain announced to the priest all

his sins and evil thoughts.

Probing beneath Gawain's fine exterior speeches and appearances, however, we discern the roots of treachery and despair. Gawain evidently gains no grace from this sacrament because he is not strengthened to return the girdle to his host neither when the man appears to him as Bercilak, nor as the Green Knight. He does not seem to have purpose of amendment because, although Gawain literally makes a good confession, his words do not translate into actions. He voices his sorrow, but he does not feel a sense of true contrition, nor does he make restitution for his keeping the girdle. It is this incomplete confession, and Gawain's ability to keep what he stole in spite of it, which provides a linkage with the older Gawain's disdain for humbling confession in the Quest. Thus, Gawain of SGGK leans toward becoming the self-sufficient Gawain of the Quest who presumes he can reach the grail unaided.

The text of SGGK implies that Gawain's refusal to make a contrite confession is excusable, leading the reader to see Gawain not as evil and prideful, but, rather, simply as a weak human being. Although Gawain does withhold the girdle from his host, the reasons for Gawain's treachery are, Bercilak claims, understandable:

As perle by the white pese is of pris more,
 So is Gawain, in good faith, by other gay knightes.
 Bot here you lakked a littel, sir, and leauty you
 wonted;
 Bot that was for no wilide werke, ne wowing nauther,
 Bot for ye lufed your lif; the lasse I you blame.
 (2364-2368)

Bercilak thus excuses Gawain from any real culpability. He is guilty of withholding an item promised to his host, but his confession is seen as valid, and his intention was to preserve his life, not to commit evil. However, looking at this second confession more closely, how valid are Gawain's words to Bercilak? In anger at his cowardice being revealed, Gawain first blames the girdle's attractiveness, then the wiles of women for his sin. His refusal to accept his own weakness marks this confession as another incident of words spouted for the sake of appearance, without the sincere desire to repent.

Ross Arthur's interpretation of Gawain's failure to make a contrite confession supports the above conjecture. In discussing Gawain's refusal to tell his host about the girdle, he is not so apt as Bercilak to excuse Gawain on the grounds of innocent love of life. He finds that Gawain's desire to live is dangerous and excessive, even possibly costing him eternal salvation because remaining alive is more important to him than having a clean soul. Discussing Gawain's refusal to tell Bercilak/ the Green Knight that he has the girdle, Arthur says:

[Gawain] is unable to repent and confess properly, ... because of his simple desire to stay alive. Even the man who has been granted the knowledge of the day of his death is so attached to earthly life that he is willing to jeopardize his chance for endless spiritual joy in order to preserve it. (p. 133-134)

The sin here is venial in terms of the item which Gawain keeps, but the ease with which Gawain bears it until it is

discovered indicates that the descent into mortal sin will be effortless.

It is evident that Bercilak's condoning Gawain's insincere confession as a young knight leads to his failure to confess at all in the Quest. This neglect of the sacrament is not generously excused by the author as was Gawain's sin in SGGK. Gawain has been away from confession, and God in general, for a long time. His going to confession, says the wise hermit, is the only way that Gawain will achieve the quest. Gawain's refusal to seek reconciliation due to prideful stubbornness is far more serious than calculating to save his life because his very heart has been hardened.

In the Quest, Gawain is a flawed knight who cannot see the error of his pride and hence is blind to the vehicle of repentance through which he might possibly achieve the quest. Gawain's endeavors to achieve the quest without petitioning God for assistance. When told that he has not met with adventures because he is not worthy of them, Gawain repeatedly shrugs away the advice of hermits who urge him to seek reconciliation with God:

'Gawain, it is a long time since you were knighted, and in all these years you have done little enough for your Maker. You are an old tree, bare now of leaves and fruit.'

'Sir,' replied Sir Gawain, 'had I the leisure to talk to you I would do so gladly. But you see my companion making off down the hill and I must needs go too ...' (175)

Gawain's stubborn pride in his martial abilities makes him refuse spiritual healing, at the cost of success and fame.

SGGK's Gawain exhibits signs of this pride in his second confession, to the Green Knight, after the blow is repaid and Morgan's plot revealed. We have already learned of his refusal to accept responsibility for his sins in blaming the beauty of the girdle and the temptations of women. Additionally, Gawain refuses to accept the Green Knight's forgiveness and gift of the girdle, preferring to brand himself as a hopeless sinner and to wear the girdle in shame. The words of Bercilak/ the Green Knight's forgiveness of Gawain echoes the solemnity of the confessional:

"I holde hit hardily hole, the harme that I had.
 Thou are confessed so clene, beknownen of thy misses,
 And has the penaunce apert of the point of myn egge,
 I holde the polised of that plight, and pured as
 clene
 As thou hades never forfeget sithen thou was first
 born ..." (2390-2394)

However, Gawain refuses to accept this almost divine forgiveness and insists that he will wear the girdle in shame.

In Christianity, flawed humans are reunited with God through penance, forgiveness, and then communion at the altar, but Gawain fails on these three counts. He confesses, but his putting the blame on others indicates that he is not truly sorry but merely going through the expected speech act. He declines to accept Bercilak's forgiveness and retains the gift as a banner of shame. Lastly, he will not return to Hautdesert to reconcile his differences with its members and partake of a human version of spiritual communion. His refusal to accept forgiveness for his error leads him to another sin--despair. Bercilak is not God, but he seems to

have the power to forgive Gawain, and his words are voiced in the same tone as a priest's sacramental absolution. Thus, Gawain's refusal to accept human reconciliation prefigures his refusal to seek priestly absolution in the Quest.

In examining the motif of Gawain's negative reputation as a knight in grail-quest romances, B. J. Whiting explains that Gawain simply does not possess the particular spiritual qualities it takes to see the grail:

To achieve the Grail required consecration, chastity, spirituality, and what for want of a better term may be called discriminating pacifism. Gawain had none of these qualities and was used, in some degree unjustly, to illustrate their opposites." (p. 75)

Gawain may be perfect in the secular values of warfare, bravery, and courtesy, but he is seriously lacking the heavenly virtues needed to find the Grail. What makes him even more sinful than other flawed knights such as Lancelot is his stubborn refusal to repent, his despair and his abandonment of trust in God.

The Quest emphasizes that saving oneself spiritually is more important than winning fame and a good reputation as a fighter. With the focus on the value of spiritual, rather than military, prowess, the author of the Quest makes Gawain pale by comparison to such spiritually perfect knights as Bors, Galahad, and Perceval. Gawain is from the old order of secular knights which values earthly fame and pleasures. He refuses to partake of the means of obtaining salvation, confession and reconciliation, and is consequently barred from

achieving the one goal which would secure his renown on earth and place in heaven.

Gawain's status as a secular knight is highlighted in the Quest when he approaches the pursuit of the grail with no sense of awe or unworthiness. It is he who instigates the quest and incites the rest of the members of Arthur's table to follow his lead:

'... I for my part make here and now this vow: in the morning I will set out on this Quest without more delay, and pursue it for a year and a day, or more if need be, nor will I return to court, come what may, until I have looked openly upon the mystery we have but glimpsed this day, provided I am capable and worthy of such grace. And if it prove otherwise, I will return.'

When the companions of the Round Table heard these words, they rose one and all from their seats and took the same vow as Sir Gawain ... (p. 44)

Gawain's vow that he will return if unworthy connects him with the modest Gawain of SGGK who calls himself the "wakkest," until it is revealed that Gawain has no intention of fulfilling it. This vow is as empty as Gawain's confessions in SGGK because in the Quest, Gawain proves one of the least worthy, but he keeps blindly pursuing the grail anyway. His words here are beautiful, but ultimately empty because this quest remains for Gawain just another chance to win fame.

Nonetheless, Gawain's mention that seeking the grail requires a worthiness outside what he may possess as a knight emphasizes the change in values taking place in this text. Once the quest begins, it becomes evident that the qualities being sought in knights have changed from what was deemed important in other chivalric literature. Knights were

normally extolled for their bravery against human enemies, for their successful wooing of women, and for their victories on the battle field. In this holy quest, the fighters will not win because the glory belongs to the knights who are pure, chaste, and removed from the concerns of this sinful world. The success of this quest belongs to those who achieve the spiritual codes of chivalry set forth by the Cistercian author of the text. Those knights who cannot emerge from the old into the new will not achieve the end of the quest--seeing the grail. Thus, although Gawain initially indicates the need to prove worthy of seeing the grail, he is blind to the fact that the worthiness needed is spiritual, not secular.

To emphasize the sinfulness of Gawain, the author makes it evident that Galahad, the spiritual knight, is the new model of chivalry, replacing Gawain, the secular one. Galahad is gifted with the same prowess and enthusiasm of his older counterpart, but Galahad is more complete because he nears spiritual perfection as well as earthly, thus replacing Gawain on both the spiritual and religious levels. It seems that, given Gawain's failures as a spiritual knight, Galahad should wear the pentangle on his shield. The pentangle represents not only the external values of "cortaisie" and manners (which Galahad exhibits in abundance in the Quest), but also "trauthe: "Hit is a signe that Salamon set sumwhile/ In betokning of trauthe" (625-626). "Trauthe" can mean fidelity, truth, or pledge according to Jones' glossary (p. 135), and Gawain breaks all three of these facets of the pentangle

throughout his quest for the grail. He is unfaithful to God in missing confession, he refuses to learn the truth about his sins from hermits, and he breaks his vow made before the court to return if he should find himself unworthy to pursue the grail. While Gawain is stubbornly and blindly refusing the opportunities which will await him if he confesses his unworthiness, Galahad is experiencing the beatific vision.

The difference between the secular Gawain and the more spiritual Galahad is emphasized in the Quest when Gawain mercilessly kills the seven brothers, representing the seven deadly sins (p. 79), whom Galahad defeats but spares. Gawain's way, to bring death to enemies, is unequal to Galahad's mercy. As a trusted hermit informs him:

... you, Gawain, have abused your knighthood. For you have been henchman to the enemy, forsaking your Maker and living the worst and most dissolute life that ever a knight lived. Had you not been so hardened a sinner, the seven brothers would never have perished by your hand nor with your help, but would even now be doing penance for the wicked custom ... He whom you seek, Galahad the Good Knight, did not act thus: he overcame without destroying them." (79)

Gawain still refuses to repent, even with the evidence of his sins before him, because he cannot see the sin in killing those who are evil. After speaking with another hermit who tells him that God will always have mercy upon sinners, Gawain's response is that "the hardships of penance would be more than he could brook" and "so with that the good man let him be and held his peace, for he realized that all his admonitions would be so much wasted effort" (p. 80).

Gawain's refusal to repent in the Quest makes his pride evident. He is blinded to the need for God and to the emptiness of martial prowess. He feels that the secular values which always distinguished him in the past are enough to succeed, and he therefore refuses to admit that he is not the best knight for this quest.

The accomplishments with which people credit Gawain in SGGK are primarily earthly virtues, in spite of the spiritual virtues extolled by his pentangle, while those that distinguish Galahad and the other knights who see the grail in the Quest are far beyond any mortal comprehension or reward. If the grail quest marks the end of the Round Table, then it is accurate and effective to show that the earthly virtues which gave Gawain his fame and brought him success are no longer sufficient when what is emphasized is the importance of spiritual prowess in the world. Gawain's military and courteous deeds turn to naught because he does not have the spiritual ability necessary to survive in Galahad's world.

The reader can glean this same moral lesson from the Gawain-poet's work. She sees that the roots of the disintegration of the Round Table were present from the very beginning of the court, and within the finest knights. Although the downfall of the kingdom does not occur within SGGK, the reader familiar with the Arthurian legends is well aware of the treachery and adultery which ultimately destroy the fellowship and harmony of Camelot. Gawain's borderline encounter with treachery and dubious confession suggest how

even those well-reputed knights can fall. Rather than simply a relating of a special adventure in the life of one specific knight, SGGK also becomes a warning about the vain glories of earthly triumphs. Furthermore, the girdle which Gawain wears is valuable only so long as the wearer undergoes a transformation within his heart. The girdle, however, becomes merely an ornament to the court, disconnected from Gawain's journey in which he learned the value of honesty and loyalty. Camelot is doomed to fall, as it does in the Quest, if it prefers only the secular versions of knights. The court's reaction is to brush aside Gawain, this harbinger of repentance and meditation on sin, in the same way that Gawain in the Quest dismisses the hermit's advice to repent. Gawain's return in SGGK to such a shallow environment after his not completely successful encounter with self-awareness suggests that he is likely to fall victim to the pervasive values which trivialize all Gawain has recently learned. The Gawain-poet thus plants the seeds for self-righteousness in the young Gawain. In that sense, it is no surprise that the older Gawain continuously fails to respond to the hermits' invitations to partake of the sacrament of penance.

We have seen that the literary figure Gawain moves chronologically from hero to lover to flawed penitent in the History, Perceval, and the Quest, roughly paralleling SGGK's hero's move through those stages. And, in the same way that Gawain's reputation worsened from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, so does it in SGGK. Yet, SGGK leaves

the reader without absolute certainty about how this young Gawain will mature; indeed, a certain amount of ambiguity is expected from a poem which leaves the final results of Gawain's maturation process to older, sometimes conflicting, texts. Just as the reputations to which Gawain in SGGK appeals are varied, so are the reputations that he can grow into varied. He does not have to become the proud Gawain of the Quest. In fact, although Gawain seems almost destined to become Geoffrey's warrior and Chretien's model of love and courtesy, the Gawain-poet leaves it open as to whether Gawain will become the twelfth-century model of courtesy or the thirteenth-century example of treachery and evil. Given the tendency for Gawain to develop into what his peers ask him to be, it is strongly suggested that the influence of Camelot will play a negative role. However, it is important to remember that Gawain transcended the Lady's expectations of him as a lover and fulfilled his own, more virtuous definition of courtesy. It is all a matter of whether SGGK's Gawain will remain superficial about reputation or actually seek to have his inner virtues conform to the virtues for which he is famous.

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