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ARTICLES

*“OF FISH AND FLESH AND TENDER BREEDE
OF WIN BOTH WHITE AND REEDE”:*

EATING AND DRINKING IN MIDDLE ENGLISH NARRATIVE TEXTS

The human condition is subject to a series of everyday physiological demands -eating / drinking, excreting, reproducing and sleeping- some of which lend themselves better than others to exploitation for literary purposes: those connected with what the Wife of Bath calls so neatly, on the one hand, “office” and, on the other, “ese of engendrure”, tend to find their literary reflection in Middle English in the plain-speaking fabliau *genre*, in works such as *Dame Siriz*, or Chaucer’s Merchant’s, Miller’s or Summoner’s *Tales*, not forgetting, either, the Wife of Bath’s *Prologue*, sex, of course, although unspecified being implicit in any narrative dealing with adultery or suspected adultery (certain romances, for example). Sleeping, indeed, had already acquired literary status in classical writings, as the *conditio sine qua non* for dreaming and for all that dreams might signify, and we need look no further than *The Nuns’ Priest’s Tale* and the *Parliament of Fowles* to judge how productive a theme this was to be in Middle English writing both as a subject of literary discourse and as a stratagem for literary invention. It is the aim of this study to take a look at some examples of the reflection in Middle English narrative texts of the remaining physiological necessity -eating and drinking- in an attempt to analyse and evaluate the ways in which these all too human activities are exploited for literary purposes

in the period with which are concerned. Since narrative literature, almost by definition, tends to occupy itself with the extraordinary, it will hardly be surprising if gastronomic allusions in Middle English texts tend to move between the two poles of excess and default, rather than centring themselves on the desirable but unexciting golden mean.

Excessive eating and drinking, for example -the deadly sin of *Gula* or Gluttony- provides an excellent excuse for the Middle English author to indulge in a little preaching on the subject, in such narratives as lend themselves convincingly to the inclusion of moralising contexts. Thus Chaucer's Pardoner, having boasted to the pilgrims of his skill as a preacher, demonstrates realistically the truth of his claim by starting a story about a group of "riotous" "yonge folk", whose vices he can then proceed to deplore in a fire-and-brimstone sermon, attacking in the first place precisely, the sin of gluttony, for they "eten...and drynken over hir might" in "superfluytee abhominable". It is no accident, obviously, that Chaucer has the Pardoner himself insisting that before he begins his tale, he should (precisely) "...at this alestake/...bothe drynke, and eten of a cake".

In fact, he dedicates the majority of the lines dealing with the evil effects of gluttony -stupidity, lechery, gourmandise- to drunkenness, singling out for special condemnation the "white wyn of Lepe" which, being stronger and cheaper than French wines, had a way of "creeping subtilly" into these, the resulting heady mixture giving rise to great "fumositee" (or indigestion). Like other moralists, he insists on the more disgusting results of over-eating and over-drinking: sour breath, sterterous breathing and foul sounds at "either ende" of the belly, which, with great rhetorical skill he both personifies and apostrophizes.

In Gower's English narrative poem, the *Confessio Amantis*, the poet likewise dedicates the greater part of the introductory section to the *Sixth Book*, concerning gluttony, to drunkenness, whose contradictory effects he analyses in some detail, pointing out that it can make a wise man foolish, yet turn a fool into a great clerk, a phenomenon perhaps illustrated by Chaucer's Summoner, who when "... he wel dronken hadde the wyn," would "... speke no word but Latyn". However, since Amans (i.e. Gower) is principally concerned with love, the text then moves into the world of allegorical imagery, a comparison being established between being besotted by wine and besotted by love! Nevertheless, Gower does manage to include a cautionary tale, concerning the Spanish gluttons and drunkards, Galba and Vitelus, who not only oppressed all Spain, but also defiled all her women -lechery, as the Pardoner points out, being a fruit of inebriation- before being finally brought to justice and executed dead-drunk! Both in his allegorical French work *Le Miroure de l'Omme*, and in his moral essay in Latin, *Vox Clamantis*, Gower satirises the various off-shoots of gluttony and gourmandise, in terms which almost suggest personifications of these abstractions. Of course, the great master of such personification is the author of *Piers Plowman*, who in his magnificent evocation of the Seven Deadly Sins in Passus V, presents us with a memorable *Gula*, drunk and incapacitated before he eventually repents and promises never to eat any more until his Aunt Abstinence gives him permission. Langland spares us none of the sordid physiological details associated with *Gula*'s state -urinating, breaking wind, vomiting- such details, as Jill Mann points out, being typical of gluttony satire, the aim being to thus "create an aversion for the mountains of food which produce" such effects.¹

¹.- Jill Mann: *Chaucer and Mediaeval Estates Satire*. Cambridge, 1973; p. 169.

The tradition of the personification of the Seven Deadly Sins is, in fact, carried on into the late 15th. century by William Dunbar who in *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, witnesses, in a trance, the grotesque dance of the Sins in Hell on Shrove Tuesday. Like the other writers already mentioned, it is excessive drinking which interests him most: here, the “fowll monstir Gluttony” is seen as being followed by drunkards, armed with cans, flagons, cups and tankards, all demanding “Drynk!” They are attended by devils who serve them “with hait leid to laip”!

Gluttony, of course, affects not only the intellect and the digestive system, but also the pocket: lavish eating means lavish spending, and the anonymous moralist who composed the 14th. century allegorical poem, *Wynnere and Waster* (Thrifty and Thriftless), in which both excessive expenditure and excessive hoarding are criticised, offers us an interesting and lengthy description (24 lines) of the kind of dinner Waster lays on for his followers, worth says Wynnere, “a ransom of silver which is hardly surprising if we think that the menu includes for its twelve courses (each dish to be shared by two guests): boar’s heads, buck-tails, broth, venison, frumenty, pheasants, pies, mince, grilled fowls, (of which each guest is given a six-man portion); all these to be followed by more roast meat in spiced gravy, halved kids, quartered swans, and an infinite variety of birds -as Charles Cooper remarks: “our ancestors ate practically everything that had wings, from a bustard to a sparrow”¹ -a remark certainly borne out by Wynnere’s list, which includes : wild geese, bitterns, snipe, larks, linnets (sprinkled with sugar!), woodcock, woodpeckers, teal and titmice, the meal to be rounded off with rabbits, pasties, pies, mawmenny and custard pies!

¹.- Charles Cooper: *The English Table in History and Literature*. London, 1929; p. 3.

Members of the Church, of course, especially monks and friars, were closely identified in the Middle Ages with gluttony, but hardly Chaucer's Parson, who "koude in litel thyng have suffisaunce", and who, in his Sermon-Tale, after glossing the uses of Penitence, analyses the "chief synnes". and their "braunches and ...twigges", including, of course, *Gula*. Like the Pardoner, he insists particularly on drunkenness which is "the horrible sepulture of mannes resoun", and then, echoing St.Gregory, classifies different types of gluttony, for all which, of course, the *Remedium* is abstinence. It is, interestingly, dealt with in far fewer lines than any of the other Deadly Sins, so that one asks oneself if Chaucer, author of the sympathetic description of the Franklin, and "rounde of shap" as he admits himself to be in his *Envoye* to Scogan, was more tolerant of this particular failing than of the others?

Not everyone, of course, can become a prey to gluttony: to eat excessively well, as Wynnere insists, you either need to be wealthy yourself or to be on good terms with those who are: as Chaucer's Parson puts it: "... riche men been cleped to festes, and povre folk been put away and rebuked", and his Friar prefers to be familiar with franklins (and one can't help thinking of *the* Franklin) and to frequent the rich and "sellers of vitaille", rather than such "poraille" as beggars (like himself) and lepers. Although we do find individual instances of secular drunks and gluttons in the Middle English narrative -the miller in *The Reeve's Tale*, for example, goes to bed so befuddled with ale that he is totally unaware of the amorous antics around him, just as the Miller-pilgrim's "wit is (so) overcome" by drink, that he obstreperously demands to tell his tale before the Monk's, and at the wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell in the romance of the same name, the latter, a loathly lady, "ete as moche as six that there wore", including three capons, three curlews and a vast amount of baked foods, all which, of course, helps to make her even more loathly! -this specific

vice was traditionally and notoriously associated with the clergy in general, and with monks and friars in particular! We are, therefore, moving away from the moralising passage inserted into a narrative context, and into the realm of estates satire, satire because it is referred, precisely to those who ought to know better, to those who, like Chaucer's Parson, should "drawen folk to hevene... / By good ensample".

Chaucer's Friar, however, frequents "sellers of vitaille", and the friar in *The Summoner's Tale* who, according to his own words is "a man of litel sustenance", requires only a capon's liver and a "shiver" of soft bread followed, however, by a roasted pig's head; indeed, as he continues to exalt his frugality, his hypocrisy becomes more apparent, and we realise that he is expecting far more and far better fare from Thomas's wife. As an anonymous poet in his diatribe *Against Friars* (about 1400) remarks, after commenting sarcastically on the "weakness" and "simpleness" of their "sustenance":

I have lived now forty years,
And fatter men about the neres
Yet saw I never than are these freres

Chaucer's Monk not only has recourse to gastronomic figures of speech -invoking "oysters" and "pulled hens", but also loved "a fat swan...best of any roost", that is to say, one of the choicest dishes of the Middle Ages, prepared in a way probably forbidden by his Rule, thus revealing himself to be perhaps a gourmet rather than a glutton, the choiceness of the swan being reflected by contemporary prices: in 1309, for example, (at the Installation of the new Prior of St. Augustine's, Canterbury), 500 capons and hens cost 6 pounds, whilst 24 swans cost seven!¹

¹.- M. E. Whitmore: *Mediaeval English Domestic Life and Amusements in the Works of Chaucer*. New York, 1972; p. 108, n. 84.

Not surprisingly, Langland has his contribution to make in this context:¹ in Book XIII of *Piers Plowman*, the dreamer is invited to dinner by Conscience with Scripture, Learning, Patience and a great Divine, and is irritated at the sight of this Master Friar at the high table, gulping down his wine greedily and gobbling up innumerable dishes of minced meat and puddings, tripe, galantine and eggs fried in butter, and wishes that, as in Dunbar's poem, the dishes were full of molten lead! These excesses in this "bloated, round-bellied chamber-pot of a man", says Patience, will provoke the usual disgusting physiological effects, which he then proceeds to enumerate. Of course, the indignation with such self-indulgence on the part of the clergy gains in intensity precisely because they *are* clergy, who are flagrantly flouting the rules of austerity imposed, in principle, on their orders; rules, if strictly followed, could be very severe. The Rule of St. Benedict, for example, which Chaucer's Monk found "old and som-del streit", laid down that his monks should have for their two daily meals: herbs, bread and wine (3/4) of a pint", and that furthermore "all, save the very weak and sick" were to abstain wholly "from eating the flesh of quadrupeds".² It is hardly surprising if their reactions thereto may have been on occasions excessive: and a charitable interpretation might see in such fallings by the way, a form of compensation for the loss of a normal family life imposed by the rule of celibacy.

Especially interesting in this context is the delightful late 13th or early 14th century Anglo-Irish parodic poem, *The Land of Cokayne*, for it should not be forgotten that references to eating and drinking in the Middle English narrative are frequently exploited for humorous, and, as we have been seeing, for satirical ends: in this vision of an earthly paradise, tailor-made for monks and friars, and situated to "the

¹.- See Jill Man: "Eating and Drinking in *Piers Plowman*." *Essays and Studies*, 1979.

².- Whitmore: *op. cit.*, p. 109.

west of Spain”, the white and grey monks of the “fair abbee” established therein can break all the monastic rules with a vengeance: obedience, celibacy and austerity, including, of course, frugality in eating and drinking, since,

In Cokaigne is met and drink
Wipute care, how and swink

the food there being “choice” and the wine “clear” at all *three* meals! It is to be noted that the anonymous author insists not only on the plentifulness of food and drink in Cokayne, but also on its *accessibility*, for a multi-spice tree flourishes in the abbey grounds, and four wells constantly gush out not only healing medicinal waters, but also sweet spiced wine: better still, like the Hansel and Gretel houses of our youthful storybooks, the abbey walls are made of fish and meat pies, its roof-tiles of cakes, and its pinnacles of sausages, and, rather like our modern self-basting chickens, roasted geese fly to the abbey, roasted and begarlicked, ready for eating, whilst larks cooked in spices drop into your very mouth! What more could one ask for? And how different to the herring and eggs allowed to the Black Monks at Christ Church, Canterbury on a fish day, or to the bacon, pottage bean-soup and bread which was the staple monastic diet in general! In fact, the gastronomic delights of this earthfully paradise are delightfully and irreverently contrasted even with those offered by the traditional Paradise of mediaeval theology, in which there is nothing to eat, the author affirms, but fruit and nothing to drink but water! Notions of paradise are, of course, very personal: for the wolf, in the beast-tale, *The Fox and the Wolf in the Well*, Paradise is where there are “bothe shep and get”! After the grim visions of gluttony evoked by Langland and, indeed, Chaucer, it comes as a relief to see the sin viewed in a comic light. The poem, in fact, has been classified as an example of English goliardic verse, the term, of course, deriving ultimately from Latin *gula* (OF goliard < L. *gula*).

Any reference to large quantities of food in a Middle English context will immediately bring to mind, of course, Chaucer's memorable portrait of the Franklin, since of the 30 lines he dedicates to this pilgrim, at least half refer to food and drink: to the excellent quality of his wines:

A bettre envyned man was nowher noon

to the abundance and quality of his fare:

It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke

at every season, and to the demands made on the professional skill of his cook. This ruddy-faced, white-bearded Santa Claus figure (the chromatic combination recalling, perhaps, "the reed and the whit" wines), self-confessedly an epicure, is far from the repulsive embodiments of gluttony evoked by Langland or Chaucer's Pardoner, precisely because of his healthy, sanguine complexion -note that Chaucer's disgusting drunks turn *pale* in their cups, like both of his millers- and, of course, on account of the suggestion of generosity and hospitality implicit in the allusions to St. Julian and to his "table dormant", always set for company, company such as Chaucer's Friar, for example! The effects of helping himself generously from his own table may well be mitigated by his morning custom, specifically emphasized by Chaucer, of having "a sop in wyn", that is, a piece of toasted bread dipped in wine, a healthy dietetic measure if the 16th century *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni* is to be believed: "wine soppis", we are informed in this treatise, are good for cleaning your teeth, for improving your sight, and for curing all forms of indigestion and "superfluous digestion".¹ It will be remembered that old January, after

¹.- William E. Mead: *The Mediaeval English Feast*. London, 1931; p. 128.

his nocturnal labours as a bridegroom, takes “a sop in fyn clarree” at dawn. That Chaucer, in attributing such good living to his Franklin was, in fact, following a well established tradition concerning the epicureanism of this class of men, is confirmed by an interesting 15th. century document entitled *A Fest for a Franklen*, which contains an “irreproachable” menu for such an occasion, including, brawn, bacon, peas, mutton, chicken, capons, goose, pork, pies, stew, jussel, veal, lamb, kid, rabbit, pigeon, doucettes (sweet pies), fritters, apples, pears, spices, cakes and wafers spiced with mead and ale and bread and cheese -enough, as one critic has put it, to make any “table dormant” groan!¹

Of course, the Franklin is not the only example in Middle English writing of gastronomic “*aficiones*” being used as a characterisation device: Chaucer’s Monk’s swan, as we have seen, contributes to the overall impression of good living that the poet obviously wishes to convey, and the general moral and physical repulsiveness of the Summoner is emphasized by his fondness for “garleek, oynons, and eek lekes”, and “strong wyn, reed as blood” (a very telling simile that!). Similarly, when the nightingale, in the early 13th century debate poem, wants to stress the repulsiveness of the owl, she suggests that frogs, snails, mice and disgusting creatures are her natural and proper diet, to which the owl ripostes that it is a case of the pot calling the kettle black since the nightingale lives on a diet of spiders, “foul” flies and worms dug out of the bark of trees! One is rather surprized that Chaucer, in the *General Prologue*, should be so silent on the subject of the gastronomic tastes of the ruddy-faced, wide-hipped Wife of Bath. However, in the prologue to her tale, she herself informs us of her fondness for “a draughte of sweete wyn”, associating drinking, as other moralists often do, with lasciviousness: “A likerous mouth moste

¹.- Whitmore: *op. cit.*, p. 103.

han a likerous tayle”, she affirms, adding that lechers know that “In wommen vinolent is no defence”!

We hear more about the Prioress’s table-manners than about her diet, but one suspects that the “rosted flessch, or milk and wastel-breed” with which she feeds her little dogs come straight from her own table, and she may be as much of a gourmet as the Monk, wastel bread, for example, being made with fine white wheat flour as opposed to rye or barley bread, consumed by the poor and the frugal. Frugality of diet, the other gastronomic extreme, may also be used as a characterising device, as is obviously the case of Chaucer’s Doctor of Physik, who is “mesurable” of his diet:

For it was of no superfluitee,
But of greet norissyng and digestible

Evidently no sops in wine are needed here! With the knowledge of medical science afforded by all those medical classics he has read, the Doctor, obviously knows that, as the Pardoner puts it:

... many maladyes
Folwen of excesse and glotonyes

We may note the similarity of Chaucer’s vocabulary in both texts: the Pardoner condemns “superfluytee abhominable”, and wishes that Adam, like the Doctor, had been “more mesurable / Of his diet...” Chaucer, however, follows up his references to the Doctor’s diet with the remark that he “was but esy of dispence”, suggesting that the Doctor’s frugality may, in fact, be due to meanness rather than to scientific considerations, and the modern English cliché, “cheap and nourishing” (“norissyng”) immediately springs to mind! In fact, there are no gastronomic allusions in the portraits of those other pilgrims most obviously obsessed with gain: the “sclendre colerik” Reeve (as

opposed to the embonpoint of the Monk), the Merchant, the Manciple, etc.

Chaucer's widow in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* is quite a different matter: here we are in the presence of enforced frugality, due to poverty, and Chaucer's negatives concerning her *not* suffering from any of the maladies characteristic of the glutton -gout and apoplexy-, concerning her *not* eating "deyntee" morsels or piquant sauces, *nor* drinking wine "*neither* whit ne reed", marks her out as one of the world's have-nots! Her "sklendre" meals consist of milk, brown bread, boiled bacon and an occasional egg -a rather colourless board in comparison with the rosy wine and flesh tints of the Franklin's "table dormant", and, of course, a far cry from the brilliant coral, gold, azure and jet hues of the real hero of the story -Chantecleer! This, Chaucer's single reference to the diet of the poor does prove, at least, that he was acquainted with their way of life, as, obviously, was Langland, who, like Chaucer, has recourse to negatives when his protagonist is faced with the demands of Hunger: "I have no money", says Piers, "to buy pullets, nor geese, nor pigs; nor do I possess the wherewithal to make bacon and eggs. What I do have", he adds, "are two green cheeses, a few curds of cream, an oatmeal cake, two bran and bean loaves, parsley, potherbs and plenty of cabbages". These, and his cow and calf must keep him and his family alive until next harvest-time. What other folk bring to help Piers in his hour of need, is of much the same sort: peascods, baked apples, shallots, chervils and ripe cherries. The author of *Wynnere and Waster* has a very clear idea of the gastronomic abyss which separates the haves from the have-nots: "Let lords live as they will, and lowly men ('Laddes on fote') as they can", he suggests; the former will eat biterns and swans, wheat-bread and rich broths, the latter, bacon and beef, rye-bread and grey gruel! Another 14th century narrative text, *How the Ploughman Learned his Pater Noster*, however, contains a more

encouraging account of a thrifty ploughman's store of food, including flitches of bacon, butter, eggs, cheeses, malt (for making ale), salt beef, onions, garlic, cream and milk. This sounds a little more promising, but even here we may observe a notorious lack of the fish, poultry, and assorted meats and pies which seem to have been so prominent a feature of the rich man's table.

Chaucer has his Parson, in his section on *Superbia*, rail against this kind of "pride of table", of which, presumably, the Franklin might well feel guilty:

Pride of the table (he says) appeereth eek ful ofte; for certes, riche men been cleped to festes, and povre folk been put away and rebuked. Also in excesse of diverse metes and drynkes, and namely swich manere bake-metes and dishe-metes, brennyng of wilde fir and peynted and castelled with papir, and semblable wast, so that it is abusioun for to thynke.

Indeed, the Middle English narrative is full of descriptions of great feasts in rich men's houses, the main literary object thereof being, precisely, to illustrate the social rank, royal or otherwise, of the characters in the story, and to amaze the "humble reader" by these descriptions of their luxurious way of life. It is to be noted, in any case, that such narratives often deal with some extraordinary occasion or feast-day, (New Year's Eve in Camelot in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), a wedding or a family reunion, for example, permitting thus great flights of culinary fancy! It is perhaps worth remembering, in this context, that one of the most popular and productive symbols of mediaeval literature -the Round Table- sprang from the world of the great banquet. Arthur made the Round Table, Wace tells us in his *Roman de Brut*, that all might sit equally and be served equally at his board. The Round Table was to become, therefore, a *symbol* of equality: no one there was, like Chaucer's Knight, or indeed, Bishop Baldwin, in a later Arthurian story (*Sir*

Gawain and the Green Knight) “to begin the board” “above” another. The legendary example was not, however, followed, and allusions to the dais, or High Table, and the positioning of guests “everich in his degree” are frequently to be found in Middle English narrative poetry, including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* and *Clerk’s Tale*, and *Cleanness*, whilst 15th century courtesy books continue to insist on the *Ordre of Goyng or Sittyng* with which the marshal or usher of a banqueting-hall must be familiar.

In fact, the Middle English narrative throws quite a lot of light on contemporary customs associated with the great banquet, as well as telling us about what was actually consumed and how on such occasions, although allowance must be made for a little literary exaggeration and idealisation! The use of a fanfare of trumpets, for example, to announce the first of the twelve courses to be served to Arthur’s guests is described in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and in *Cleanness*, probably by the same poet, “stentorian trumpets” indicate that Belshazzar’s feast is starting in earnest. Chaucer makes several allusions to minstrelsy as an essential part of a feast; at January’s wedding celebration, for example, at King Cambuskan’s birthday dinner, and as an entertainment for Duke Theseus’ guests. His Parson, however, sees in “curiositee of minstrelcy” an invitation to “delyces of luxurie”!

References are sometimes made too to the regiment of servants, who, headed by the Steward and the Marshal, were responsible for the success of such occasions: thus Chaucer the Pilgrim is of the opinion that Harry Bailly would have made a “good marshal in an hall”, and he makes passing references in the *Squire’s* and *The Merchant’s Tales* to stewards, ushers and squires. It will be remembered that the “Squire of Lowe Degree” in the romance, actually becomes a Marshal. Especially interesting are Chaucer’s

allusions to the art of carving meat (so plentiful, as we shall see, at great feasts), possessed by the Squire, and also by Damian in *The Merchant's Tale*. The ability to carve skilfully was, indeed, highly considered as is proved by the existence of treatises on the subjects such as John Russell's 15th century *The Connyng of Kervynge* and *The Kervynge of Flesh* or the *Boke of Kervynge* printed by Wynkyn de Worde in the early 16th century. We have also the testimony of England's earliest romance, *King Horn*, in which King Aylmar instructs his steward to educate his foundling, Horn Child, and teach him, among other arts:

Bivore me to kerve,
And of the cupe serve.

Indeed, according to F.J. Furnivall: "manly exercises, manners and courtesy, music and singing, knowledge of the order of precedency of ranks, and *ability to carve*,¹ were in early times more important than Latin and Philosophy." Interesting in this context, is the affirmation made in *Cleanness* that Christ had so fine a force in his fingers that he needed no knife when cutting or carving, and broke bread without a blade, succeeding better than "all the toles of Tolowse (probably a mistake for Toledo)" could attempt to do it. The legend, derived from St Luke (xxiv, 35)- "And they told...how (Christ) was known of them in breaking of bread" -would appear to suggest that Christ transcends the requirement of mediaeval etiquette, that demanded that bread be cut, not broken, but as Sir Isaac Gollancz points out, attention is drawn to the fact that Christ's fingers can, in fact, *cut*.² In this same poem,

¹.- Frederick J. Furnivall: *The Babees Book...*, originally published *EETS*, 1868, reprinted: Greenwood Press, New York, 1969; p. iv.

².- Sir Israel Gollancz: Preface to *Cleanness, with a new English translation by Derek Brewer*. Cambridge, 1974; p. xvii.

Abraham is compared to a “steward”, and in the episode recounting Belshazzar’s feast, reference is made to the contemporary taste for sophisticated table decorations, such as Chaucer’s Parson disapproves of: pies and dishes, he says, are “peynted and castellated with papir”. Over each guest’s platter at Belshazzar’s feast, we are told, there was an arbour intricately cut out of patterned paper pointed in gold, and pictures of birds and beasts thereon painted in azure and indigo. These platters were of “shining silver”, and King Arthur’s guests in *Sir Gawain...*, likewise have their broth served in “bowls of silver”, obviously examples of the “to great preciousness of vessel” that Chaucer’s Parson likewise deplors. By the 15th century, the “preciousnesse” has increased and in the late burlesque romance, *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*, the king invites the Carl in “bowls of gold” so solid that no knight can lift them singlehanded, and the Court drink their wine out of gold cups holding four gallons or more!

Insofar as the actual menus of such literary banquets are concerned, there are certainly no lack of detailed descriptions, although it must be admitted that Chaucer, for example, although fairly specific on the subject of the Franklin’s “table dormant”, is fairly restrained in this respect in other cases, although he does tend to exaggerate the general sumptuousness of the fare he is referring to. It is interesting, in fact, to note that both Chaucer and the Gawain-poet, apologise, as it were, for *not* offering a detailed menu of their feasts, by means of such rhetorical questions as: “What needeth yow the feste to descryve?”, or assurances such as: “Now wyl I of her seruise say you no more, / For vch wyȝe may wel wit no wont pat pey were,” as if, indeed, they felt the need to justify their inclusion of all the gastronomic details, probably because, as will be seen, the romances did very often dedicate a fair number of lines to the subject. However, we learn that King Sarpedoun entertained Troilus and Pandarus with expensive and “dainty” food, that Queen Dido offered

Aeneas “a feste...ful of dayntees and richesse”, and that at king Cambuskan’s feast (the *Squire’s Tale*) “strange broths”, swans and young herons were served. The Gawain-poet is likewise restrained: insofar as King Arthur’s New Year’s Feast is concerned, we learn only that there were delicacies and dainties, “Foyssoun of the fresche”, and both good beer and bright wine. However, the Lenten feast set before Sir Gawain on his arrival at Sir Bertilak’s court on Christmas Eve, may be abstinential but is anything but frugal: several fine, well-seasoned soups, followed by grilled fish and fish pies of all kinds, “subtly sauced”, and plenty of wine! The Gawain-poet likewise embroiders gastronomically the Gospel of St. Matthew, when he glosses it in *Cleanness*: whereas the evangelist’s rich man who prepares a wedding feast only offers “oxen” and “fatlings”, the mediaeval exegete mentions as well: bulls, roast boars, “finely fattened” fowls, partridges, plovers and curlews!

The 15th century romance of *The Squire of Lowe Degree* is a particularly gastronomically orientated text, since the Squire in question is appointed Marshal of a King’s hall, and we are given information not only concerning his livery, but also concerning the hierarchy of other domestic officers: the steward, usher, panter and butler. We are likewise informed as to what the Squire serves the king: expensive and “delicate” fare, including partridges, peacocks, plovers, teal, duck, drake, cocks, curlews, cranes, pheasants, storks and snipe (many baked in pies), as also fresh venison and many other “delicacies”. It is, in fact, interesting to compare this literary evocation of a royal dinner with the real-life 14th century menu or “porweanse” preserved in MS Cosin V, III, LL: “For the fest for the king at home for his owene tale,” at which he was to be provided with:

1st Course: Venison with frumenty, boars heads, large meat (i.e. boiled pork, beef or mutton), roasted swan, roasted fat capons, peas, pike, and two “soteltees” (subtleties, i.e. food made to look

like something else: Christmas or wedding cake sculpture, birds covered with feathers to look alive and sugar sculptures of human figures, etc.)

2nd Course: There were likewise to be three different types of pottages, plus roast pork, roast cranes, pheasants, herons and peacocks: bream, brawn, roast rabbit and another “subtlety.”

3rd Course: German broth, roasted venison, roasted heron, peacocks, quail, rabbit, partridges, larks, perch, mincemeat, pasties, rice, fritters and two subtleties.¹

Life, on this count, is certainly larger than literature!

The Squire of Low Degree is an interesting text in this respect, since, apart from this more or less conventional list of food served at the king’s table, we are likewise offered that of the “goodies” with which the king tries to tempt and encourage his love-sick daughter: the edible “goodies” consist of wild fowl, green ginger and dates, and baked venison (not much of a change, one would think, for this particular princess). The drinkable “goodies” are, however, a different matter, since she is to be offered not only spiced wine in general, but more specifically: Spanish white wine and malmsey, Italian white wine, Cretan white wine, raspis, Antioch wine, honey wine, Granada wine, Greek wine, muscatel, claret, white wine from La Rochelle, Alsatian wine and simply red wine her “stomake to defie” (i.e. as a cure for indigestion -like the sop in wine!).

Sir Launfal, in the Breton *lai*, is given spiced wines and Rhenish wines by Dame Tryamour, and, of course, vintner’s son as he was, there is no lack of “vinolent” references, as we have seen in Chaucer’s works: Daun John, in the *Shipman’s Tale*, brings his relatives “a jubbe of Malvesye” and some red Italian wine -vernage-, and, of course, the Shipman himself is used to transporting *vin de*

¹.- *Curie on Inglysch*. (English Culinary Manuscripts of the fourteenth Century), Ed. by C.B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler, *EETS*, Oxford, 1985; p. 39.

Bordeaux. Absalon sends Alison a gift of sweet wine, mead and spicy ale, whilst anxious old January drinks “Ypocras, clarree and vernage” on his wedding-night to increase his “courage”. The potency of *el blanco de Lepe* has already been commented on, and Chaucer makes several references to the distributing of wine and spices in elegant households, including Calchas’ tent in the Greek Camp.

Banqueting, of course, means eating in public, and, hence, a social occasion, in which the question of table manners will inevitably arise: the number of courtesy books which include instructions on how to be “at mete wel-yaught”, like Chaucer’s Prioress, bear witness to the importance of the subject, and the allusion to the loathly lady’s behaviour at the table in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* is significant in this respect: not only does she eat gluttonously, but also, with her “three-inch long nails” “she breke her mete ungoodly” - “Therefore she ete alone”!

Of course, feasts, to be successful, need more than guests and stewards: the men behind the scenes, the cooks, are even more important, and that the culinary art was taken very seriously in the later Middle Ages is proved by the number of recipes extant from the period, and the literary references to the profession found in Chaucer, Gower and others. It is significant, as has often been pointed out, that the up-and-coming middle class represented by Chaucer’s guildsmen should, precisely, have brought a cook along with them on their pilgrimage - a cook competent in the skills required to please the mediaeval palate; for, as a specialist on the subject has observed:

Practically all ordinary meats and game, fish and poultry, as well as stewed fruit and desserts of every description, were so loaded with cinammon, ginger, cloves, cubebs, pepper, galingale, mace and

nutmeg, one or all, that whatever has been taken as the basis of the dish was made practically unrecognisable...¹

Not forgetting, either, the “stamping, straining and grinding” to which the basic food was subjected, before being spiced: “The ideal,” says W. E. Mead, “was that nothing should be left in its natural state”!² The descriptions of the mediaeval cooks’ activities, therefore, obviously contribute to the realism of the texts they appear in: Chaucer’s guildsmen’s cook is wholly credible, and one can sympathize with the situation of the demanding Franklin’s cook, such demands being very much the order of the day if we are to believe Gower, who, in his Sixth Book, analyses the “delicat glutton” whose chief delight consists in spicy or fancy meats, and whose thanks, therefore, are measured only by how well his cook serves his mouth. The enumeration of the different culinary operations these literary cooks must perform is likewise convincing, above all, when compared with real-life recipes and household account books. Chaucer’s Pardoner, as was mentioned, enumerates the different pulverising operations, the turning of “substance into accident”, as he puts it humorously, operations with which the Cook-Pilgrim is likewise familiar, since we are specifically informed that he was a dab hand at *morteux*, (a boiled dish of finely ground meat or fish in broth), and “blankmanger” (ground capon with rice and almond milk). Spices are also to be associated with Chaucer’s cook’s art, a culinary tendency already adumbrated in the Franklin’s cook’s “tart and pungent” sauce! As Jill Mann points out, “the portrait of Chaucer’s cook is almost entirely constructed on the basis of his estate,”³ although the “mormal” on his sins endows him with a certain individuality. The

¹.- Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

².- *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³.- Jill Mann: *Chaucer and Mediaeval Estates Satire*, p. 168

profession in general is, of course, being satirised by Harry Bailley, as is obvious by his derogatory references to warmed-up pies, cheap substitute fillings, and the presence of flies in his shop. The realism of such references is borne out by contemporary *ordinances* concerning the sale of putrid food, the passing off of baked beef as venison, and of rabbit as everything, by pastry-cooks, whose street cries of “Hot pies, hot!” closes Langland’s vivid evocation of the different strata of contemporary society assembled in his field “full of folk”, and the familiar cry undoubtedly echoes through Chaucer’s affirmation that his Pardoner’s wallet is full of “pardons” come “all hot from Rome.”

References to eating and drinking, finally, may also function in the Middle English narrative as a means to spark off dramatic incident, or to help the plot to progress: the most outstanding example of this phenomenon, as mediaeval moralists were not slow to point out, being the eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, which both Chaucer’s Parson and his Pardoner, interestingly, ascribe to gluttony rather than to disobedience:

For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,
He was in Paradys;

comments the latter in the introduction to his tale. Indeed, as the anonymous author of the *Ancrene Riwe* remarks, in a similar context, “often... great things have small beginnings”. Thus, for example, the weeping of Dame Siriz’s bitch is produced by her being dosed with pepper and mustard, and it is this small, but telling detail, that of a dog weeping like a human being, that convinces Margeri of the veracity of the old woman’s cock-and-bull story of a bewitched daughter. In *The Fox and the Wolf*, the fox’s gluttony, his devouring of too many hens, produces in him such an insatiable thirst that it befogs his usual acumen, and he falls into the trap of the well, just as the ale-befuddled

millar allows himself to be cuckolded in *The Reeve's Tale*. The pregnant woman's traditional craving for certain types of food, can be used as a justification by May, in *The Merchant's Tale*, for climbing up into the pear-tree and having an acrobatic rendez-vous there with Damian. As early as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136), a banquet affords the occasion for Utherpendragon to notice Ygerna, apparently for the first time, and to upset her husband by not only constantly smiling at her, and engaging her in sprightly conversation, but also by ordering plates of food to be passed to her, and by sending his attendants to her with golden goblets of wine -and from that particular instance of love at first sight the whole Arthurian legend was born!

In fine, allusions to eating and drinking, then, excessively, insufficiently or idiosyncratically, may be included in Middle English narrative writing for varying reasons: for moralizing purposes, for characterization purposes, to illustrate and exult the wealth of a character or a social class, to satirise a determined estate or professional group, to reflect religious customs or the flouting thereof, to lend realism to a text, or, on the contrary, to add fantasy thereto, and thus to heighten its interest, or, finally, to spark off further dramatic incident, in the fulfilling of all which functions, moreover, humour, satire and irony will often be included to endow and enliven these manducatory and bibulatory episodes with a further literary dimension.

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Eating and Drinking in Middle English Narrative Texts

* * *

ON THE NON-INTEGRITY OF *BEOWULF*

My topic is an old and recurring one that has been investigated in a number of ingenious ways and will, I suspect, crop up again about once every generation. It concerns the unity of *Beowulf*: whether a single author conceived and composed it as one poem, or whether it is composite, formed of two or three or four more parts that were stitched together by creative scribes or bards or literate poets. It poses more than a question of formal scholarship, however, because it cuts to the heart of critical assumptions about Old English poetry and the purpose of literary study. While I do not intend to address these larger questions directly in this paper, it is helpful to keep them in mind to prevent us from dismissing earlier scholarship as naively misinformed and from being too self-congratulatory about our own enlightened goals. After all, our assumptions today, which place a premium on the integrity of the poem, may prove wrong.

Beowulf's integrity has not always been so highly prized. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century German studies were under the influence of classical scholarship in two crucial ways: classical scholars had had great success in using philology to detect different authorial styles in classical and biblical texts, and the classical ideal of *integritas* was the model when *Beowulf* came under the scrutiny of formal criticism. *Beowulf* failed to meet this classical ideal to such an extent that its lack of unity was assumed from the start. Thus one of the first and most influential dissectors of *Beowulf*, Carl Müllenhoff, at the beginning of his long article “Die innere Geschichte des

Beowulfs” can assert, “There is no shortage of editions and translations of *Beowulf*. But the question of the means of its origin and composition as a poem... has hardly been touched upon. It has long occupied me.”¹ He goes on, in a rather personal way, to tell how this work has occupied him for twenty years, how he has repeated the investigation seven times down to the last detail, and concludes “I now have no further results to show and submit them here.” With this introduction he proceeds to divide the poem: “It is simple enough.”² The first 193 lines are a prologue outlining the succession of Danish kings and the building of Heorot. The rest of the poem could be divided into four parts: 194-836, concerning Beowulf’s homecoming; and 2200-3182, Beowulf’s fight with the dragon and death. The first and the last of these (the fight with Grendel and the fight with the dragon) had an earlier history as old lays. To the first of them a continuator added the story of the fight with Grendel’s mother. Then another continuation, Beowulf’s homecoming, was added to complete the story, and this author (known as Interpolator A) also added some passages to the earlier parts. A second interpolator (B) combined the first three parts with another old lay, the dragon episode, “often introducing theologizing and most of the rather inferior passages.”³ The rest of Müllenhoff’s article consists of some 50 pages giving a passage by passage stylistic analysis of the poem’s content: this line is old, this one is an interpolation.

Müllenhoff’s authority and the thoroughness of his scrutiny of the poem was enormously influential. His fourfold division was followed by other important scholars such as Ten Brink (1888)⁴ and Schücking

¹.- *Zeitschrift für deutsche Altertum* 14 (1869): 193

².- p. 194.

³.- p. 195.

⁴.- *Beowulf: Untersuchungen, Quellen und Forschungen* 62 (Straßburg, 1888).

(1905),¹ each of whom modified and refined the basic theory. In 1921 R. W. Chambers attacked the basis of the dissecting theories on two grounds: and second, “the minute scrutiny to which the poem has been subjected in matters of syntax, metre, dialect and tradition has failed to show any difference between the parts attributed to the different authors, such as we must certainly have expected to find, had the theories of the “dissecting school” been correct.”² It is possible to imagine adherents of the “dissecting school” responding that that is precisely what they had demonstrated, and it was in the spirit of such a response that Walter Berendsohn published *Zur Vorgeschichte des “Beowulf,”* in 1935.³

In a nutshell Chamber’s opinion was that the dissectors may be right, but have not proven their case, and until they prove their case it is best to assume the unity of *Beowulf*. “It is now admitted that the ways of Old English narrative were not necessarily our ways and that we must not postulate, because our poem falls into two somewhat clumsily connected sections, that therefore it is compounded out of two originally distinct lays.”⁴ Fifteen years later this opinion was supported and popularized by J. R. R. Tolkien in his famous lecture “*Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics.*” In it he refutes the assumption that the two main parts of the poem cannot be part of a unified whole. “[*Beowulf*] is essentially a balance, an opposition between ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an

¹.- *Beowulfs Rückkehr: Eine kritische Studie*, Studien zur englischen Philologie 21 (Halle, 1905).

².- *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the stories of Offa and Finn*, 3rd ed. with a supplement by C.L. Wrenn (Cambridge, 1959), 114-15.

³.- *Zur Vorgeschichte des “Beowulf,”* mit einem Vorwort von Otto Jespersen (Copenhagen, 1935).

⁴.- p. 117.

elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death. It is divided in consequence into two opposed portions, different in matter, manner, and length: *A* from 1 to 2199 (including an exordium of 52 lines; *B* from 2200 to 3182 (the end) This simple and *static* structure, solid and strong, is in each part much diversified, and capable of enduring this treatment We have none the less in *Beowulf* a method and structure that within the limits of the verse-kind approaches rather to sculpture or painting. It is a composition not a tune ... No terms borrowed from Greek or Latin literature exactly fit: there is no reason why they should.”¹ Tolkien’s opposition between Greek and Latin standards exemplified by *Beowulf* lies at the heart of the contrast he makes. Against the classical unities of time, place and character he sets pairs of oppositions and balances. He articulates an aesthetic that can accommodate what classically trained sensibilities perceive as the disunities of *Beowulf*. Chambers and Tolkien laid the groundwork, the one philological the other aesthetic, for the kind of literary interpretation that, for its application, assumes the unity of the poem, and this kind of interpretation has flourished since 1936.

But Chambers and Tolkien did not prove the unity of the poem as much they showed its plausibility. Anglo-Saxonists, moreover, have long been aware of the extent of scribal tampering with poems in manuscript (seen in a few poems that survive more than one copy) and clear instances of composite poems, such as *Genesis*, the *Christ* poems, and the paired *Guthlac* poems. There are also a number of instances where we are not sure where one poem in manuscript ends and the next one begins. In other words, there are still grounds, if one seeks to find them, to suspect the unity of *Beowulf*.

¹.- *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936): 29-33. The influence of Tolkien’s lecture is discussed by Wrenn in his supplement to Chambers, pp. 531-536.

Francis P. Magoun, Jr. made the next notable effort to demonstrate the composite origin of *Beowulf* in an article which takes up a number of details in lines 2009-2176, the transitional passage from the first half of *Beowulf* (A) to the second (B).¹ The passage consists primarily of Beowulf's speech, in response to Hygelac, about his exploits in Denmark, and it contains much recapitulatory matter. Many of the details as Beowulf relates them do not fit the earlier narrative. On the basis of these discrepancies, and on the basis of his knowledge of folk tales and theories of oral composition, Magoun argued that A', the transitional passage, was composed by an "anthologizer [who] had presumably to some extent mastered the technique of oral singing and hence was able to compose authentically in his own words neatly soldered joints."² This anthologizer knew a variant of the Beowulf story and added it to a speech by Beowulf near the end of the poem that is now the first 2009 lines of *Beowulf* (making it some 140 lines longer), and he also added the details of Beowulf's gifts of treasures and horses to Hygelac. In a later essay, Magoun elaborated his argument of the composite origin with a similar analysis of the second half of the poem, *Beowulf B*.³

Arthur G. Brodeur mounted a spirited attack against Magoun, refuting in a point by point analysis much of the argument.⁴ But aside from instances where he shows Magoun misunderstood the text, Brodeur argues, essentially, that the discrepancies of *Beowulf A'* do

¹.- "Beowulf A': A Folk Variant," *Arv* 14 (1958): 95-101.

².- p. 101.

³.- "Beowulf B: A Folk-Poem on Béowulf's Death," in *Early English and Norse Studies: Essays Presented to Hugh Smith on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. A. Brown and P. Foote (London, 1963), 127-140.

⁴.- "Beowulf: One Poem or Three?" *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies, Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley*, ed. Jerome Mandel and Bruce A. Rosenberg (New Brunswick, N. J., 1970), 3-26.

not necessarily lead to a conclusion of separate authorship if the discrepancies are interpreted correctly --that is, as parts of an integral poem. For example, in *Beowulf A*, "the poet placed Hrothgar's monologue after the death of Grendel's dam; but in his report to Hygelac [A'], Beowulf places it at the feast following the defeat of Grendel." Where this inconsistency confirms Magoun's assumption of different authors and folk-variants, to Brodeur it is "the kind of lapse of memory much more likely to be made by a single poet working with complex material, and faced with the necessity of retelling, in drastically condensed form, what he had earlier told at great length ..."¹ The most telling point here is that beginning with different assumptions about the process of composition, Magoun and Brodeur use precisely the same evidence to come to opposite conclusions. Most Anglo-Saxonists have accepted Brodeur's argument, but it raises questions of how much of our willingness to accept it depends on our predisposition to accept the unity of the poem. Conceiving it as unity immediately confers advantages for some kinds of criticism. It makes it easier to speak of authorial intention, for example, or the attitude of the Christian author to the pagan past. Complications can multiply if there is more than one intention in forming the poem or more than one attitude toward the past, especially if it is not clear which author wrote what when.

Since Brodeur, the question of unity had been dormant, but it has not been laid to rest, as recent studies by Kevin Kiernan attest. After a careful study of the *Beowulf* manuscript he concludes that the date of the poem (as we now have it) coincides with the date of the manuscript (early 11th century), or more precisely that the manuscript is a copy of the poet's work in progress. He bases much of his argument on an analysis of folio 179, which, he argues, is palimpsest

¹.- p. 13.

made by the second scribe (Scribe B) as part of a revision of a portion of the text he had already written.¹ Moreover the revision took place some twenty years later, as Kiernan argues from a slightly changed form for the letter “a”. From these and other details (such as the misnumbering of fts and the addition of lines by Scribe B in key folios) he concludes that only the author of those lines could make such changes. Scribe B is the author of the entire second half of the poem, which is a continuation of the first half, and he may or may not have composed the first half also.

This is a sketchy summary of Kiernan’s closely argued hypothesis, but it has been challenged in an authoritative way by Leonard Boyle, who made his own study of the manuscript.² In it he asserts that folio 179 is not a palimpsest but a folio with rain damage, which was touched up not by Scribe B but by someone else, and that the “*Beowulf* text in the Nowell Codex is far from ‘original.’”³ It is undoubtedly a copy, and the peculiarities of the transcriptions show, if anything, the competence of the scribes. An important point lost in this exchange is that a crucial assumption in Kiernan’s argument which neither Boyle nor anyone else has been able to refute is that the episodes of *Beowulf*, especially the last third of the poem concerning the fight of the dragon, reveal narrative disjunctions that are consistent with the idea of multiple authorship. In other words Müllenhoff, Schüchling, Magoun, and Kiernan may be right, though for the wrong reasons, or at least for reasons that are not irrefutable.

¹.- “The Eleventh Century Origin of *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf* Manuscript,” in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. Colin Chase (Toronto 1986), 9-21. The article is a summary of Kiernan’s book *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1981).

².- “The Nowell Codex and the Poem of *Beowulf*,” in *The Dating of Beowulf*, 23-32.

³.- 29.

It may seem like an act of vanity or foolhardiness to reopen a question which so much ingenuity has failed to settle, but it occurred to me that more light could be shed on the question, even if it was the harsh, brittle light of statistical analysis. In my book *Style in Old English Poetry*, I had some success in detecting different poetic styles in nineteen of the longer poems after observing the behavior of the auxiliary and verbal in the syntax and meter.¹ I found that poems could not readily be pigeonholed according to style -there was no distinction, for example, between epic and lay styles. On the other hand, certain poems stood out from the other in significant ways, so that I was able to come to some conclusions about the poems attributed to Cynewulf, about the style of *Exodus*, and to argue for the common authorship of the two halves of *Solomon and Saturn*.

I decided to carve up *Beowulf* into the sections that earlier scholars had done, to subject them to the same kind of analysis with auxiliaries and verbals, and to compare the results. I hoped to see one of two results: a more or less homogeneous style that would support arguments for the unity of *Beowulf* (as recent study by Klaus Grinda has done with impressive results²), or a portion of the poem such as the dragon episode, consistently showing itself to be distinct from the others. I got neither.

I chose those features of auxiliaries that I found to be most useful in the comparative analyses in my book; these are summarized in the following four tables.

¹.- (New Haven, 1987).

².- "Pigeonholing Old English Poetry: Some Criteria of Metrical Style," *Anglia* 102 (1984): 305-322.

TABLE ONE¹

Proportions of a-clauses to b-clauses

	A	B	Ratio
Guthlac B	27	71	26 / 74
Phoenix	37	57	39 / 61
Juliana	55	85	39 / 61
Elene	99	150	40 / 60
50-549	44	50	47 / 53
194-836	61	66	48 / 52
Christ III	71	74	49 / 51
2200-end	103	94	52 / 48
2550-3049	55	51	52 / 48
Guthlac A	90	82	52 / 48
Christ II	41	38	52 / 48
1-2009	198	178	53 / 47
1550-2049	47	41	53 / 47
BEOWULF	321	271	54 / 46
Christ I	45	38	54 / 46
550-1049	56	45	55 / 45
837-1629	85	61	58 / 42
1629-2199	54	40	58 / 42
1050-1549	52	38	58 / 42
2050-2549	46	33	58 / 42
Andreas	192	144	57 / 43
Daniel	92	40	70 / 30
Exodus	62	25	71 / 29
Maldon	72	20	78 / 22

TABLE TWO

Number of Auxiliaries per 100 lines

	lines	aux.	no./100
Maldon	325	92	28.3

¹.- Key to lines: 194-836 Müllenhoff, fight with Grendel; 837-1629 Müllenhoff, fight with Grendel's mother; 1630-2199 Müllenhoff, Beowulf's homecoming; 2200-3182 Müllenhoff, Magoun, and others, fight with dragon; 1-2009 Magoun, "Beowulf A"; tranches: 50-549, 550-1049, 1050-1549, 1550-2049, 2050-2549, 2550-3049.

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2550-3049	500	106	21.2
Guthlac A	818	172	21.0
550-1049	500	101	20.2
2200-end	983	187	20.0
194-836	643	127	19.8
Andreas	1722	336	19.5
Juliana	731	140	19.2
Elene	1321	249	18.9
Christ I	439	83	18.9
BEOWULF	3182	597	18.8
50-549	500	97	18.8
1-2009	2009	376	18.7
837-1629	787	146	18.5
Christ II	427	79	18.5
1050-1549	500	90	18.0
1550-2049	500	88	17.6
Daniel	764	132	17.3
Guthlac B	561	96	17.1
1629-2199	571	94	16.5
2050-2549	500	79	15.8
Exodus	590	87	14.8
Phoenix	177	94	13.9

TABLE THREE

Percentages of all auxiliaries that are initial

	auxs.	init. aux.	%
Exodus	87	32	37
Andreas	336	91	27
2200-end	54	197	27
194-836	34	127	27
2050-2549	21	79	27
Daniel	132	34	26
1550-2049	23	88	26
2550-3049	27	106	26
Christ II	79	20	25
Christ III	145	36	25
50-549	23	94	25
550-1049	25	101	25

BEOWULF	597	140	24
Guthlac A	172	41	24
Maldon	92	22	24
Guthlac B	96	21	22
1-2009	80	376	21
1629-2199	20	94	21
Elene	249	53	21
Juliana	140	26	19
Phoenix	94	18	19
837-1629	24	146	16
1050-1549	11	90	12
Christ I	83	7	08

TABLE FOUR

Word order of auxiliary and verbal in all dependent clauses
(in descending order of Vvå)

	vV	våV	Vvåå ¹
Elene	4%	27%	70%
837-1629	4%	32%	65%
550-1049	4%	30%	65%
1050-1549	4%	31%	65%
Daniel	4%	32v	64%
Exodus	0	39%	61%
1-2009	5%	35%	61%
194-836	7%	32%	61%
50-549	5%	35%	60%
BEOWULF	5%	36%	59%
Guthlac A	5%	36%	59%
Andreas	4%	40%	56%
2050-2549	5%	41%	55%
Maldon	22%	24%	54%
Christ II	8%	39%	54%
1629-2199	3%	44%	53%
Guthlac B	3%	45%	53%
2200-end	7%	41%	52%

¹.- v= unstressed auxiliary, våå= stressed auxiliary, V= verbal.

On the Non-Integrity of Beowulf

1550-2049	6%	43%	51%
Juliana	2%	47%	51%
Phoenix	3%	47%	50%
Christ I	11%	39%	50%
2550-3049	11%	42%	47%
Christ III	17%	39%	45%

The lists include the tallies for twelve other poems to give the comparisons some basis beyond the internal evidence of *Beowulf*. The line numbers refer to portions of the poem that Müllenhoff and Magoun argued were originally different poems pieced together. (I excluded Magoun's A' because it is only 180 lines long). I also include a series of what statisticians call trances, 500 line segments taken successively beginning with line 50, and therefore arbitrarily, from the poem, as another point of comparison. If the style of *Beowulf* is homogeneous throughout, we may expect all the segments to crowd close together; if certain segments consistently clump together away from the others on several lists, we may be on solid ground arguing for different authorship.

The actual results are scattered across the list, and even where there seems to be some clumping together around the average for *Beowulf* as a whole (as in Table One), some maverick segments nevertheless seem to go their separate ways. But before giving up entirely on the usefulness of these lists, I would like to examine them for what they can teach us, because there are indeed some lessons to be learned.

It would be useful to trace a sample segment through all four tables to see what conclusions about style and authorship it can show, such as the segment from line 194 to 836, which is the episode of Beowulf's fight with Grendel. It is also the segment (or lay) which Müllenhoff and Schücking considered to be the most primitive. Primitive or not, it is a discrete episode, so if *Beowulf* was composed

by piecing together of separate stories, traces of distinct authorial style may still be evident in these stories, traces of a distinct authorial style may still be evident in these lines. We can begin by looking at Table One, which sets out the proportion of a-clauses to b-clauses, which I have considered one of the more revealing indicators of style. Of the other twelve poems on the table the proportions range from 26% of the clauses beginning in the a-verse for *Guthlac B* to 78% beginning in the a-verse for *Maldon*. About half of the poems are grouped in the middle, within a few percentage points of *Beowulf*'s segments are within a few percentage points of the poem as a whole, except for a tranche (50-549) and the Grendel fight (194-836). So far this distinctiveness looks promising, and the tranche belongs here because most of its lines fall within the episode. If this were the only test considered, one might add it to the arguments for the separate authorship theory. But the picture becomes as murky as Grendel's mere when the other tables are taken into account. In the "Number of Auxiliaries per 100 lines," for example, 194-836 has 19.8 auxs. per 100 lines and *Beowulf* has 18.8, which, when translated into actual numbers, means that the 643 lines of the Grendel episode has six or seven more auxiliaries than average. Similarly, the table for the "Percentages of all auxiliaries that are initial" has 194-836 separated from *Beowulf* by what looks like a significant distance, but it amounts to only three percentage points, which means that of the 127 auxiliaries in that segment, there are only about four more initial auxiliaries than average. Table Four, showing the "Word order of auxiliary and verbal in all dependent clauses" is even less helpful, because even though 194-836 is to *Beowulf* the other segments are randomly scattered over the spectrum, making any sort of relative comparison perilous.

Another reason not to see a distinct style in 194-836 concerns the tranches that overlap it almost equally from either end: 50--549 and

550-1049. I mentioned in passing that the tranche 50-549 is adjacent to the Grendel episode in the first table, of a- and b-clauses, but the other is ten percentage points away, on the other end of the table. In the other tables the two tranches again seem to go their own way, but for reason mentioned earlier the differences are probably insignificant.

The dangers of leaning too heavily on a single test of style can also be seen in another two of Müllenhoff's segments: 837-1628 is near the bottom of table three, and 1629-2199 is near the bottom of table two, yet they have no other claim to distinction, and their overlapping tranches -say for 1050-1549, which is the segment with by far the lowest proportion of initial auxiliaries (table 3) and also has a high proportion of a-clauses. No one has championed these 500 lines as an originally separate poem,¹ but as a part of the poem with a distinctive style, it has as much claim as any other segment. To show signs of separate authorship, I would argue, a segment should stand out from others in more than one table and should bring overlapping tranches along with it. This is not asking too much: *Exodus*, *Maldon*, and Cynewulf's *Elene* and *Juliana* are poems with characteristics that are distinctive in a number of the tables.

To press the examination further, I would like to investigate the episode of Beowulf's fight with the dragon (from 2200 to the end) for two reasons: first it is long enough to give a reliable statistical pool, and second it is the only episode that the generations of *Beowulf*-dissectors agree on. Because it is such a large segment, it would be advisable to compare it both to *Beowulf* and to the first half of the poem (Magoun's 1-2009). In the first table (proportions of a-clauses to b-clauses) the proportions of all three are within two percentage points of each other. The difference in the number of auxiliaries may be significant-- the dragon episode has about fourteen more auxiliaries

¹.- It contains the Finn episode, which accounts for less than 100 lines.

in its 983 lines than it would have with the proportions for *Beowulf* and 1-2009. The proportion of auxiliaries that are initial is 6% higher, which may also be significant. But even though this is the most promising segment to discern differences in style, it does not inspire confidence. For one thing consider the tranche 2050-2549, most of which overlaps with the dragon episode and should thus show similarities. Instead it seems to be a loose cannon on the first two tables: it is six percentage points lower in the first table and 4.2 lower on the second table -in both cases farther away than any other segment, when it should be quite close.

That is, it should be quite close if one considers poetic style (or more exactly the features that I have selected) to be evenly dispersed throughout a poem.¹ But the scattering of the segments throughout these four segments suggests just the opposite. Even elements of style that can be considered beyond conscious control, such as the number of auxiliaries and the proportion of a- to b-clauses, vary greatly from one passage to the next. It seems best to consider *Beowulf* as having a mixed style, or a style that can vary from passage to passage, which may not be surprising in the digressive, expansive narrative style of the epic.

The idea of a mixed style accords well with most readers' impression of the *Beowulf*-poet's sophisticated and varied narrative technique. With this in mind, the effort to apply statistical analysis becomes more problematical, because when all the divergent features are gathered into an average, they cancel each other out, so to speak. *Beowulf* falls squarely in that is "average" in comparison with the range displayed by other poems, but because its internal fluctuations seem to balance against each other.

¹.- Using different tests Grinda, "Pigeonholing," finds evidence for just such a conclusion.

This investigation offers several lessons. The first is practically a truism: studies of style based on statistics must be pursued with care. Before any more conclusions about *Beowulf*'s mixed style can be made, other long poems must be subjected to the same kind of analysis of their parts (to see if the mixed style is repeated anywhere), and it might be promising to investigate the different kinds of passages in *Beowulf*, such as elegiac, descriptive, direct speech, and action sequences.¹ A second lesson is an old one: a large sampling is more accurate than a small one. It is no surprise that the smaller tranches (even though made up of 500 lines) jumped across the tables, while the larger two (1-2009 and 2200-end) stayed relatively close to the total for the whole.

Perhaps the most important lesson concerns earlier multiple-authorship studies. Most depend on anecdotal and selective evidence, such as Magoun's argument that some details of one part of the poem do not agree with those in another part, or Schüchting's analysis of certain metrical and syntactical patterns. If one wants to find evidence for composite origin, one may readily find it. The tables show that almost any segment of *Beowulf* has some feature that is disproportionately represented or even unique. Each bit of evidence must be supported by other tests of style, compared against a control, which show the segment to be as consistently distinct from the rest of *Beowulf* as other poems are. No study that I know has offered such an argument. On the other hand, if one is disposed to see unity, one can point to the constantly fluctuating features to argue that what seems unusual in one part is not any more unusual than other features that vary in other parts. This argument for the poem's integrity is just as inconclusive as that for its non-integrity. The best evidence we

¹.- See, for example, Peter Lucas, ed., *Exodus* (London, 1977), 43-51, for a limited study of this sort.

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have for the unity of *Beowulf* is the manuscript, which does not show the kind of scribal breaks that one can see with the enlarged capital defining the breaks of *Christ I, II* and *III*, and the two *Guthlac* poems. This study does not prove or disprove composite authorship, but in light of the manuscript evidence the burden of proof is on the shoulders of dissectors to show multiple and verifiable distinctions in the segments. This task becomes even more difficult, though perhaps not impossible, in the face of *Beowulf*'s mixed style.

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TWO SIDES OF A TRIANGLE: THE BEGINNING OF
GAWAIN'S PENTANGLE IN *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN*
KNIGHT

Our endeavour in this paper is none other than that of studying the role that the Gawain-poet has assigned Arthur within the thematic development of the tale. We believe that in Arthur's behaviour lies the true relevance of the story, for without his idiosyncratic tendency to fantasize, the narrator could not have defended the apparition of the Green Knight in Camelot beyond the level of fairy tale. Many are the factors that justified this apparition. Yet, the most basic not to say elementary one resides in the event that Arthur is a king: king of Camelot. What Arthur is affects the way in which he conducts courtly issues, such as celebrations, and this is not a trivial question. He is a king who has a way of being that is not only unique but unmistakable: he is a very young king, a king who owing to his tendency to fantasize maintains intact a habit, or custom, that has little or nothing to do with the social reality of his own time and environment. Certainly Arthur's character conditions the way in which he understands what a court is, and therefore the behaviour of his courtiers.

Surely the Gawain-poet expects his readers to see Arthur in this light: a reader who must reach a constructive conclusion about the role that Arthur plays in the thematic development of the story. Accordingly the poet offers an ample number of relevant elements concerning Arthur's behaviour, that must be analyzed and thus judged correctly.

To be able to understand what the Gawain-poet is trying to say, one must start with what a king is: one must consider his conduct, and that of his courtiers, and understand both within a social-judicial frame: the government of a kingdom. It is no whim that Arthur's courtiers murmur, in low voices, when Gawain is about to depart from Camelot in quest of the Green Chapel, that the king is the only one responsible for what may happen to Gawain: and they are right. Yet, they do not voice their opinions to the king; but they do so in the corridors, since nobody seems to dare to exact from the king the necessary responsibilities for what has happened during the celebration of Christmas.

The courtiers grumble, and this signifies that the Gawain-poet is depicting a court that is unhappy about the proceedings of their king. In this crucial moment the courtiers feel the full weight of the irrational, or thoughtless, behaviour of their king, and they feel it precisely because one of their companions at arms is going to die in a futile quest, the acceptance of the Beheading Game. The futility of this act does not stem so much from the event that Gawain accepted the challenge of the Green Knight but from the motives that forced him to do so, principles that are no other than those of trying to avoid a situation in which the king would be faced with an unnecessary danger, since a monarch is an indispensable instrument in the good functioning a country, while a knight, regardless of his worth, is not so in the same degree as a king.¹

Nor it is a mere coincidence, nor can it be, that Arthur is linguistically speaking the initiator of the major exponent of Gawain's adventure, the pentangle. The king does not only inaugurate the

¹.- The legal aspects related to the necessary process of transference of power when Gawain accepts the Beheading Game have been examined by the present writer. See "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: el Chivo Expiatorio," *Estudios de Filología Inglesa*, 10 (1982: 29-54).

Beheading Game but also initiates the geometrical design of the symbol that will adorn both the shield and clothing of Gawain when he leaves Camelot in quest of the Green Knight. The cause must be examined starting with one of the habits that characterize Arthur's behaviour, that of waiting for something very special and worthy of being qualified with the appellative of marvel to happen, since if it does not happen he cannot eat his meal that day.¹

Arthur's world, and so that which is depicted in the medieval romances is full of astonishing components: fundamentals or principles which make sense only if the reader manages to unveil the idea, or ideas that were framed in the substratum upon which they used to rest, and so govern certain mores and conventions which, for one reason or other, have survived the demolishing impact of time. What has subsisted has become the exclusive patrimony of those who dedicate themselves to narrate, or invent fabulous tales in order to enchant their readers or their audience, independently of who the

¹.- Arthur used to gather all his knights twice a year, during Christmas and Pentecost. In addition to the habit of not eating till something extraordinary takes place, he was also in the habit of granting boons to suppliants but before knowing the nature of the boon. As time went on, Arthur became a very passive king: a king who lived solely and exclusively from the incentive that was offered to him by his knights who used to narrate their adventures. Arthur does not leave Camelot in quest of the Grail, but waits in his palace to hear about the results. When bearing in mind these changes, certain habits do not make sense: they have become gestures and rites oriented to emphasize the value of words, a value that is well symbolized in the rites inherent in the narration of glorious exploits which deep down did not solve any pressing necessity. E.K. Chambers has done a splendid study on Arthur that we wish to refer the reader to. See *Arthur of Britain* (1927: rpt, New York, Cambridge: Speculum Historiale, 1964). As E. Jane Burns writes in her work *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading of the Vulgate Cycle* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), the possible meaning of the repetitive nature of the adventures narrated at Arthur's Court can be explained in terms of the attitude of knights who narrate only what they considered best to be narrated, and evidently some adventures sounded better than others.

readers or audience might have been.¹ To achieve this end is not difficult since both charm and magic are part of the stale flavour inherent in these tales, or in the the apparent unusual elements that the narrator has managed to bring back to life from some forgotten and mouldy parchment.

When a narrator uses this type of material, he manages to offer his readers something unusual, peculiar, uncanny, and consequently entertaining. What he tenders however may be amusing and of value in two different modes. One, that of an intelligent and imaginative creation that must therefore be judged solely in terms of the creative capacity of the narrator, no more. Two, that of a clever usage, not to say manipulation, of idiosyncratic facts that used to govern the behaviour of olden societies which no longer exist. When the reader, or the critic, manages to comprehend the reasons, or postulates that used to govern these societies, e.g. the celtic world, he [or she] can then appreciate that there is nothing strange or extraordinary in this type of tales. Certain things are not all that pleasant and we rather ignore them because, deep down, it is not easy to digest certain norms

¹.- We must bear in mind that some tales about wonders have endured the action of time through oral traditions. Thus, the audience may be no more than a child listening to his [or her] grandmother, telling him fantastic tales that he likes. Others, like Lady Gregory have collected stories not only about Cuchulinn, but also about Finn and the Fionna: tales that are available to children as fairy tales. See, James Stephan: *Irish Fairy Tales*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1924). In this there are stories about the story of Ireland, Oisín's myth, and that of Finn, made comprehensible for children, and yet they are not very different in their basic constituents from Lady Gregory's rendering of these heroes. See *Gods and Fighting Men, The Story of the Tuatha de Dannan and of the Fianna of Ireland, Arranged and Put into English by Lady Gregory* (1904; rpt, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1987), preface by W. B. Yeats. Some events hardly make sense unless an exhaustive analysis is done of the underlying philosophy of life and religion of the ancient Celtic races, and so of the role of the druids. See H. D' Arbois de Jubainville, *El Ciclo Mitológico Irlandés y la Mitología Celtica* (Barcelona: Vision Libros, S.L., 1981), trans., Alicia Santiago. See also Jean Markale, *Druidas, Tradiciones y Dioses de los Celtas* (Madrid: Taurus Humanidades, 1989), trans. Juan Aranzadi.

or attitudes to life merely because they are dated and so atypical not to say aberrant. Evolution made possible their disappearance, and yet other habits have developed which would not better stand a close scrutiny had these old societies the chance to judge them.

We can vaguely grasp why in a primitive society, like that of the children of Milé, the king or chief of the tribe could not break the taboos of his ancestors, or the *geis* or *gessa* that were formulated by the gods on his birth, or on the day in which he became chief of the tribe. Yet, what cannot be understood, and perhaps not accepted, is the fact that in an advanced society like that of the Gawain-poet, not Arthur's of course, the narrator would take an apparently personal *geis* so seriously, when it has lost not only its vigency but it seems to clash with the religious principles governing the tenor of people's lives. We are not dealing with Finn and his Fionna, and thus we are not dealing with a society that believed that to break old habits, or *gessa*, was not only dangerous for the life of the ruler, but for the society that he was ruler of.

It was the belief of the ancient Irish that when their kings observed the customs of their ancestors, the seasons were mild, the crops plentiful, the cattle fruitful, the waters abounded with fish and the fruit trees had to be propped up on account of the weight of their produce.¹

With information such as that offered by Frazer or Jean Markale, we can begin to intuit what the Gawain-poet was trying to achieve when he wrote this romance, since what Arthur is doing is rooted in obsolete ideas: ideas which, perhaps, he does not want to abolish

¹.- Sir James George Frazer, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1932), p. 367.

perhaps because he was fascinated with the possibility of some wondrous event taking place, or merely because he is a superstitious king and so he thinks he has some kind of divine power that makes possible the occurrence of something that goes beyond the level of the ordinary if he submits himself to a sort of rite that demands of him abstinence and purification. Perhaps it was just a question of a personal *geis* he dare not break.

To accept that in the past people believed there were reasons that rendered it impossible to abandon an ancestral habit, an imposition from without, is easy. Ancient Irish literature abounds with kings who know they are about to die merely because they have unwillingly broken their personal *gessa*. The Hound of Cú knows he is not going to survive precisely because he has broken his *gessa*. We can perceive why Finn sees life as he does, but it is difficult to understand Arthur's attitude to life because it is based on ignorance. This point achieves full force when the reader perceives that Arthur is not with Merlin, with his druid, and this makes all the difference in the world. This Arthur is a purely Christian king, acting on his own, not following the rules of a druid, Merlin. To see Arthur taking this lightly, merely as a game, with somebody enacting a wonder in the fashion of an "enterludez" before he eats is one thing, but to see him there, sitting, waiting for something real to happen is almost intolerable. In Arthur's incapacity to differentiate between myth and his present reality lies the problem. It is easy to appreciate the enormity of his act: an unnecessary act since the court is celebrating a crucial event in the history of mankind, the birth of Christ.

Arthur seems to forget, or ignore, that he is celebrating the episode that has marked the beginning of a new era, and so the rupture with old beliefs and rituals. They are celebrating Christmas, not Beltaine or Samuin. Arthur's words show that he is very conscious of the fact that he is enacting a very old habit, or ritual. It is not for nothing that

when he says he is waiting for something wonderful to happen, he makes an explicit equation between his waiting and the nature of the wonder, a tale of "alderes, of armes, of other auenturus",¹ so he is speaking of his ancestors. His words verbally confirm not only the quality of his ritual but also the indubitable fact that it is he, and only he, who can conjure the apparition of the wonder and so begin to design the geometrical structure of Gawain's pentangle.

Bearing in mind the idea of ritual linked to that of the old concept of a personal geis, or taboo, as well as Arthur's verbalization of his habit, we wish to investigate the system that the poet uses to reveal that Arthur, independently of the way in which he has been idealized in the old romances, is not a suitable king. He may have been so in the past, but according to the New World, the world of Christ, he is not. It is in this point from where not only the didacticism that characterizes this romance stems from, but also its strength and novelty. The poet shows both an uncommon intelligence and equally uncommon knowledge of Arthurian rites. Owing to this he has managed to manipulate elements which in other tales about Arthur seem to be irrelevant, exaggerated, belonging to the realm of faerie land, or purely anecdotic.²

The poet's viewpoint prompts us to reflect on considerations related to what it means to be a king, and therefore to judge the negative effects that the anomalous behaviour of a king could have on the welfare of the community he governs. Consequences which, as

¹.- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, second. ed. by Norman Davis (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1972), I, 95. All quotations from this edition.

².- In Malory's works, this habit becomes the starting point of the quest of the Holy Grail. Arthur has gathered his knights to celebrate Pentecost and therefore he is waiting for something to happen, and what happens is the adventure of the floating stone with a sword stuck on it, that is the prelude to Galahad's apparition in the Court.

we shall be able to show, have little, or nothing to do with the arrival of spring, or the fertility of animals, or the release of imprisoned waters.

In short, and owing to the apparent accessorial, not to say peripheral role that the Gawain-poet seems to have assigned to Arthur, critics tend to see him merely in terms of an indispensable but ancillary figure functioning as some sort of auxiliary character. By placing Arthur in this light the general impression is that of an indispensability which does not stem from what he is, but from what the poet needed him to be in order to formulate the perfect occasion to justify the presence of so many knights at his court: a happening that becomes the leitmotif that renders plausible, not to say coherent, the apparition of the Green Knight within an appropriate frame of reference. This is not however the case. Arthur is more than a trivial target, more than the pivot around which his knights gather during a period of the year dedicated to celebrations, fun, and brotherhood. His indispensability lies in what he does, in what he wants, in what he says, and so it is absolute and unrestricted. There is in Arthur much more than the apparent artistic, not to say aesthetic need to offer a fit occasion to justify the presence of the Green Knight in his Court. When trying to find a harmonious and logical explanation about Gawain's adventure, and so about the possible meaning of the Green Knight, one must not concentrate only on Gawain, or on the Green Knight, but on Arthur as king of Camelot.

Thus the investigation must begin with the king. It must be undertaken without trying to find reasons to exonerate his behaviour¹

¹.- Even if we move back in time, to the heroic world that preceded Arthur, this world can hardly be praised. The behaviour of Vther Pendragon is not all that commendable. His motives for declaring the war to Gorlois were amoral. His love for Igerne does not justify Vther's behaviour, and even less that of Merlin, who makes possible what now-a-days would have been qualified with the term of physical violation. We can however accept this only if we see in Arthur's conception the unusual or peculiar birth of a god

using illusory parameters to justify how he understands the task of governing his people, the youth of the kingdom youth, or that of his courtiers, and therefore their desire to enjoy life at to fullest.

Without Arthur the gathering of all his knights would not have been possible: without Arthur an anomalous petition would not have been formulated; without Arthur the phantasmagoric appearance of the Green Knight would not have taken place. Ergo, to understand the way in which Arthur precipitates the events, thus producing a binary system of oppositeness symbolized by his court and by Gawain, casts much light on the motives that could have prompted the Gawain-poet to write this romance. The way in which Christmas has been celebrated is marked by the factors such as those of abundance, comfort, energy, noise and by the gathering of people around the king. In opposition to this, Gawain, as he roams in the inhospitable land of Virral, is confronted with a situation of extreme deprivations: he is alone suffering a great deal of physical discomfort. He lacks food, feels fear, and tiredness while a dreadful and appalling silence envelops him.¹

The Arthur that the Gawain-poet delineates has nothing in common with the warrior depicted by writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, or Laȝamon, to name just three. When bearing in mind the

orchestrated by a druid, Merlin. See Markale, op. cit. For different reasons we cannot applaud the attitude of Ivain, or that of his wife, the Lady of the Fountain, unless we understand it within a purely mythical frame of reference, e.g. the black knight, as a symbol of the night, and Ivain as a symbol of light, a sort of moon-man, as Markale says, in quest of the light of the sun, his lady. See Chrétien de Troyes *Ivain*, and *Ivain and Gawain*, as well as the version of the Lady of the Fountain that appears in one of the branches of the *Mabinogi*, under the title of "Owen, or the Countess of the Fountain." See also *Of Arthur and of Merlin*, and Wace's *Roman de Brut* and Laȝamon's *Brut*.

¹.- The elements which singularize Gawain's journey to the Green Chapel have been studied by this writer. See "El Viaje de Gawain: a Study of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 13/14 (1987: 35-54).

number of years that divide this Arthur from that of the those writers, changes must be expected. The change however has not been so radical as it should have been. The narrator uses a very old, not to say proverbial, Arthurian custom; a convention that used to characterize two of Arthur's celebrations: Christmas and Pentecost. In old tales about Arthur the narrator uses this habit as the launching board for which he is going to initiate the authentic purpose of his tale, e.g. the quest of the Holy Grail. Here the poet has done the same. Arthur's habit becomes the occasion of the authentic crux of the matter: the Green Knight.

There is in this tale a symbolic lack of the typical deeds which characterize a society of champions. This deficiency serves to show the futility of this custom of Arthur's. So the archaic necessity of narrating exploits oriented to show the worth and value of his institution of the Round Table, does not justify the maintenance of a habit which is both meaningless and ambiguous, especially when the habit is carried to the limits they are. Regardless of the original function of this habit, or *geis*, the poet has not depicted a society of warriors, but a society characterized by idleness, plenty of leisure, and consequently by a strong desire to enjoy itself. When bearing in mind the intention inherent in this lack of dauntless feats, seeing the king maintain such a dated and empty habit, excite uneasy feelings not to say a great deal of mistrust about these ritualistic attitudes towards life. His personal *geis* serves only to emphasize two things. One, the lack of rationality cognate to this habit. Two, the stupidity inherent in moving beyond the level of ritual, since it is enacted to its ultimate consequences, those of severing the head of a man¹ thus placing the

¹.- The fact they think there is no danger in the game, derives from the severing his head. It is not for nothing that in old tales about Finn, the Tuatha dé Danann, or the Irishhero Cuchulinn, the emphasis is placed on the druids' capacity to restore warriors to life if the warriors' heads have not been severed from their bodies, or their brains

life of another man: Gawain, in an unnecessarily and unreasonably hazard.

In this story, unlike that of Malory, there is not a collective phenomenon, and so a collective and communal enterprise: the adventures of the grail. The poet has treated Arthur's habit in such a manner that the consequences are reductive, and so restricted to a very individualized phenomenon. So the aftermath of his protocol does not affect Arthur's court; the departure of Gawain does not change, and does not have to change, the lives of the dwellers of Camelot, and even less that of the king, who does not show much contrition about his inability to ignore the Green Knight's plea. With Arthur's lack of contrition the poet is rendering a king who is not only foolish but unable to recognize the fact that he is responsible for the apparition of the Green Knight. His sightlessness forces his own people to confront a very sad reality, that of his behaviour and so the possible consequences of his thoughtless attitude to life. He functions as a load star that attracts what is not wanted. He seems to be a man endowed with mystical powers, a sort of shaman that lures to his court, with the power that his word confers him, and with the potency inherent in his abstinence, or rite of purification, an obsolete creature;¹ a being that

damaged. Almost anything could be mended, a severed arm, as is the case of king Nuadu, but never a head. Diancecht, the druid, knew this well enough when he killed his child. It is evident that the people at Camelot knew this, and so they could not foresee the danger cognate to the game. A good study on the meaning of the severing of the head, and therefore on the attitude of the court to it, must be undertaken. This would show they knew more than they seem to know. Also that the way in which Gawain takes up the game makes sense. Gawain is a very cautious knight, he is not the type of man who risks his life unnecessarily. If we think of Gawain, in other tales about him, as a knight who knows a great deal about the healing powers of herbs, it is evident that he has been trained by druids, or faeries. Gawain therefore knew better than anybody else the irrevocability inherent in the cutting of Green Knight's head, even if he were a creature from the Sidhe.

¹.- Two things ought to be considered: one: that Arthur is very young and therefore, that according to tradition Merlin should be with him. Two: that due to Merlin's absence

exists only in the minds of primitive and superstitious societies.¹ Therefore the Green Knight is no more than a remembrance patterned by the scissors of time, a shadowy figure that has lasted long but only in the subconscious of the people, as part of a residual process of beliefs that were linked to the idea of the power inherent in the ancient kings, or in the chieftains of clans, and druids ruling over the health of his subjects, over nature, and the cyclical movement of the seasons. When it comes then to the exact understanding of the Green Knight, inevitably he is what the poet says that he is, a huge game, a huge and untimely joke.

Obliquely the Gawain poet is attributing to Arthur faculties that must be examined in order to reach a lucid comprehension of the thematic nucleus of the tale: the authentic meaning of Mumming with all its corollaries. What the Gawain-poet is trying to do is highly rational. In England, as in many other countries, till the reign of Charles II, people attributed to the king powers which entered within

Arthur seems to function as his surrogate and therefore, as a shaman's surrogate, full of power. One of the elements that give power to a druid is that of the correct usage of words, in addition to rites, such as those of abstinence. Much has been written about the relationship between Arthur and Merlin, and about the similarities between a druid and a shaman, and so about the tools that give a druid his power, such as words. See the works of Jean Markale, and in particular, *Druidas, Tradiciones y Dioses de los Celtas* (Madrid: Taurus Humanidades, 1989), trans., Juan Aranzadi.

¹. - Here we are using the word "primitive" with a great deal of care. The medieval man seems to be fascinated with mythology, and consequently he tried to explain mythology in terms of allegorical elements that embodied, at times, positive messages. Many writers of this period saw the dangers inherent in this process, but they could do nothing about it. Many were the ways in which elements pertaining to old myths were justified in Christian terms, and at times, the methods used to prove this justification were clever, not to say highly imaginative. This process is not exclusive to the Middle Ages, but a common one during the Renaissance. What a clever exegete could have done with the Green Knight is an intriguing question: it is almost certain that he could have discovered sufficient allegorical elements in him to render him either perfectly evil, or an example to be followed by good Christians. See Jean Seznec, *Los Dioses de la Antigüedad* (Madrid: Ediciones Taurus, 1987), trans., Juan Aranzadi.

the realm of the supernatural: it was thought that the king could cure scrofulism by means of the imposition of his hands upon the sick. It was a question of attributes which were intimately linked to the concept of monarchy grounded on divine right: a concept which has produced infinite problems. Divine kingship could be a double-edged-weapon for any country ruled by a cruel and incompetent, and hence unwanted, king.

The beginning of the tale is based on the poet's brilliant manipulation of a ritual that Arthur is dramatizing, possibly owing to ignorance, at the wrong time, and on the wrong occasion. Arthur's stimulus is not sufficiently clear. The poet however uses this prerogative to delineate a plausible cause that justifies the apparition of a green portent, and so to censure not the consequence, but the cause of the consequence, the ritual. The poet has managed an ingenious, not to say didactic innovation in the beheading game.¹ The modernization is effective owing to the simplicity of the thematic base of the tale: a king, his behaviour, and the consequences. It is not difficult to see in Celtic literature elements that show the remnants of beliefs in which the power of the king, and in particular that of his druid, was linked to natural phenomena. The focus of attention is of transcendental importance, especially when it comes to the Celtic fictional world: a focus of attention that could still hold the Renaissance reader, or audience, spellbound in stories such as those of Macbeth, or King Lear, to name just two.

¹.- The beheading Game is a Celtic game. However what we do not have in this type of stories is a king waiting for something wonderful to happen. See "Bricriu's Feast," in *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (London: Penguin Books, 1981). In the case of this feast it is not a question of a wonder, but of some sort of test oriented to show, after a heated discussion, who is the best warrior of Ulster. An interesting compilation of the various versions of the beheading game is that of Elizabeth Brewer, *From Cuchulinn to Gawain* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowan and Littlefield, 1984).

In order to prompt the reader to place in correct perspective how Arthur's behaviour affects his world of chivalry, the poet has emphasized one of Arthur's obsessions, that of hearing tales about wondrous adventures. It is an activity, a conception of amusement, a principle that governs the lives of his knights which, with the passing of time, has dulled not only Arthur's sensibility but also that of his courtiers. His concern has become so persistent and pertinacious that, as the Gawain-poet indicates, it cannot be abandoned even when celebrating peace and brotherhood. Owing to his physical inactivity Arthur cannot think about any thing other than marvellous adventures. This is not only applicable to Arthur but to story tellers who, like him, make a living narrating scenes that are full of violence precisely because his readers, like Arthur and his knights, enjoy this type of tales. One attitude is as irrational as the other, and the proof of it is that at Arthur's court they are celebrating the most important and marvellous adventure of the history of mankind: the birth of the Son of God. To expect therefore for something wonderful to happen shows the spiritual blindness of Arthur and his knights, a lack of insight that is not trivial since it has infected all his court.

Arthur is young and a little irrational: also his courtiers are young and a little extravagant. It is possible to presume that, in part, the behaviour of his courtiers is due to the natural propensity that makes human beings emulate their betters. Consequently, it is feasible to conjecture that Arthur's attitude does not constitute a passing and momentary disposition but a permanent obfuscation that controls the tenor of his life and so that of his knights. What the Gawain-poet is doing is criticizing a whole system of literary values. It is not for nothing that the knight that emerges with greatest frequency from the medieval romances is not spiritually speaking linked to a serviceable and thus authentic hero: the type of hero who is a hero when circumstances prompt him to be so, as happens, within certain limits,

with the Homeric hero. This literary knight is characterized by his unproportionate desire for adventure, exploits which very often have no better motivation than that of the ordinary gratification that the exploit offers him, apart from the fame he achieves, and the opportunity of narrating it at Arthur's court.

In the Arthurian tales part of this adventurous hedonism included the approbation of the king, who encouraged the hero, in the presence of ladies and knights, to narrate his feat with the greatest possible detail. When doing so the narrator used to gain the monarch's approval, his admiration, and his respect. One could go beyond this level for the king's encomiums were seasoned with prizes of no little worth, and with the contingent favours of some enthusiastic lady. What surely had little relevance was the motives that brought about the adventure, or if such adventure could justify the physical risks faced by the knight, or if his opponent were dead in some forgotten field, forest, or bridge. Only the passion aroused by the hearing of the tale and by the details of the adventure, was what truly mattered. Nobody was concerned with the way in which such an adventure developed, or with the possibility of avoiding it, or with the useless death of a human being, and this is not a trivial issue at all. It was a question of heroes who should be considered as uncalled-for heroes. Their paramount ambition was no other than that of earning the appellation of hero, so that the measurement of the exact magnitude of their acts, or the consideration of facts that rendered the adventure worthy of taking place in the light of morals or ethics was always beyond the point.

This attitude is not identical to that of the Homeric hero. Although these men fought, and although being a hero was not a trivial incentive, there was an authentic cause justifying their fight. Many of these heroes looked forward to the end of their fight and a return to their homes, to live there in peace with their families. They fought in

front of a backdrop not of a king, even less that of a court that passed its time hearing about war exploits, but horrid battles and their lucid understanding that such struggles conveyed death and much sorrow. At least as far as the Greeks were concerned, their war was not the product of a capricious and gratuitous desire for adventure. These men, unlike many of Arthur's knights, had weighty reasons to fight against the Trojans. The ones who could be however classified as foolish knights were the Trojans, for they were risking their lives to protect the wife of another king merely because one of Priam's sons had fallen in love with her.

The deeds of the Homeric heroes delineated what the Hellenic world expected of them, the defense of their honour. This is applicable also to the Trojans, although to share their understanding of honour is not an easy task. The same must be said of the young Beowulf, for, in spite of feeling deeply the drive inherent in his wish to be acclaimed as a hero, at least his adventures are not gratuitous. He manages to liberate with his effort and valour Hrothgard's people from the oppression of Grendel. It is difficult to say, with the same kind of enthusiasm, the same about Arthur or his knights. This difficulty is applicable not only to Sir Gawain, but to many tales about Arthur, this being a fact that fully justifies the attitude of the Gawain-poet towards Arthur and his courtiers. Consequently it is not illicit, in certain cases, to doubt the moral worth of their acts. Many critics have shown concern about the ethics that govern Arthur's world. On more than one occasion Spearing feels obliged to accept that the adventures of Arthur's knights contradict Christian sentiments, not to say basic human ones.¹

¹.- When Spearing examines the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, he admits the fact that Arthur and his knights lack, at times, human and Christian sentiments. See A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970).

This valorization stems from an undubitable reality: that the acts of these heroes, regardless of how deeply they are rooted in one specific literary tradition, or regardless of the fact that they can be placed within a more or less historical context, do not cease to be marked by a disquieting dehumanization that proclaims the widely existence of irreconcilable dichotomies within a purely Christian milieu. It is not surprising to perceive that works such as *Sir Gawain*, or *Of Arthur and of Merlin*, or *The Death of King Arthur*, provoke the reader's admiration, but it is however an admiration that is inevitably tarnished by disturbing sentiments of moral disapproval.

The motive of this moral distress is born in the recognition of the fact that the measureless egos of Arthur's knights push them to commit deplorable acts, not to say despicable ones. The end result is an ill-contained exasperation that the reader tries to ignore since the world of chivalry runs parallel to his own oneiric one, so that in the end one feels like Don Quixote, fascinated but a little insane.¹ If we take too seriously the message that many story tellers, again and again, reproduce during this period, as well as the preponderance they give to all that sustains the fantasy of their readers, negative sentiments will be aroused: sentiments that become profound when perceiving what the narrators are forcing them to do: to inflate their egos as heroes, forgetting, or rather having to forget their internal world, since both their egos and their internal world have become fully incompatible.

¹.- If we uproot many of the achievements of Arthur's knights from a world of wonder it becomes obvious that some of them are peculiar. This is how the Gawain-poet makes the reader feel for what he has emphasized is a gratuitous violence that leads nowhere. The artificial questing after adventure solves nothing. Thus an ample number of their adventures provoke uneasy feelings, mixed with admiration, approval, tension and finally with an unhappy condemnation. When taken too seriously, their deeds trouble the reader. They cannot be easily understood by the common man; and the more one tries to impose some logical meaning on their acts the more these knights look like Don Quixote, searching phantasmagorical enemies with the purpose of adding more laurel leaves to their be-crowned heads.

Because the Gawain-poet knows that the internal world of any living creature is superior to the external world, he has tried to emphasize both things. In spite of his desire to narrate adventures, unlike other storytellers, he has not lost his moral fibre. He knows that many of the tales about Arthur are the product, or the consequence, of a disproportionate hunger on the reader's part for tales of action. This phenomenon is parallel to what is taking place in our days, for there is a measureless appetite for tales in which sex and crude violence have become the two main protagonists, protagonists which have become obsessively important in the public's mind.

The narrator, in this tale, has depicted Arthur as he really is: a complex young man. His world is recondite and very particular: a world that cannot be severed from that of his court, Gawain, or Lancelot. The macrocosm of Arthur is ruled by his social position: he is a king, and therefore he has power. However, and in view of his acts, it is possible to maintain that according to the narrator, Arthur's dominion goes beyond what can be defined in terms of what is neatly ordinary. The poet has conferred to his natural powers as king, by means of a subtle delineation of characteristics that are rather primitive, other types of prerogatives. They are idiosyncrasies which serve to define with accuracy the way in which this young king behaves, and thus the consequences: corollaries that are reflected in the behaviour of the dwellers of Camelot.

Arthur is a king who craves to either see wonders or to hear about them. It is not a question of harmless, or ordinary adventures, but of exploits that cannot be confined within the boundaries of the commonplace, or the quotidian activities. Therefore, and due to a basic and elementary process of mimicry, it is logical to see his knights spending their time roaming about in deep and dark forests on toilsome quests for all that could be defined in terms of extraordinary.

In showing the way in which Arthur behaves, the narrator has depicted him as a young man of a restless heart:

So bisied him his Yonge blod and his brayn wylde.
And also an oper maner meued him eke
? at he purY nobelay had nomen, he wolde neuer ete
Vpon such a dere day er hym deuise were
Of som auenturus pyng an vncoupe tale
Of sum mayn meruayle, pat he myYt trawe,
Of alderes, of armes, of oper auenturus
Oper sym segg hym bisoYt of sum siker knyYt
To joyne wyth hym in iustying, in jopardea to lay,
Lede, lif for lyf, leue vchon oper,

(Gawain: 89-98)

And both his restlessness and anxiety are anomalous. The consequences of his *brayn wylde* are reflected not only in the clamorous announcement of the arrival of food but in nature, symbolized by birds: creatures that seem to be orchestrating the brainless gaiety that dominates this court. It is not a coincidence that the *wylde werbles* sing without stopping; they are proclaiming what Arthur seems to be: a king with powers over the natural world, forces that ensure the maintenance of tables full of delicious “meats”.

At Arthur's court all is joy, happiness, urgency and vitality. One of the entertainments of his knights is that of *tournayed*. This makes sense because through tournaments they can show that they are full of energy and so ready to undertake adventures. Thus, as the narrator says, the number of jousts is not small: *by time ful mony*. This attitude confers on this celebration an air of vitality that is inevitably dulled by the violence innate in this type of display. Because courtiers are young

and in perfect physical condition, the tournaments are merely a game, a way of amusing themselves for they want to spend these days in *ful jolité*. Giving the motives cognate to the organization of so many tournaments, all that can be expected is a sad trivialization of this activity. There is no textual evidence proving that this activity is, in any way, related to military objectives. Thus it is not possible to speak of a rational and pragmatic physical entertainment, but merely in terms of fun and erotism.

The tournaments, as pure pleasure, lasted fifteen days, and therefore they constituted a dangerous emulation “of Roman art and its order of cultural priorities”.¹ To see the Romans however celebrating, as an integral part of their culture, religious festivities with games involving bloodshed is the norm. Their games were part of a social and political pattern that demanded this simply because the Romans were people who expected violence and bloodshed in their entertainments. Arthur’s court is not Roman but Christian so that the fact they cannot conceive of a less violent form to amuse themselves is not a trivial issue, or at least this is what the poet thinks. Through the way in which they celebrate Christmas something becomes evident: that Camelot’s world is still, linked to both the Greco-roman and Celtic worlds;² to the worlds that the poet mentions first by means of an introductory note to his tale and secondly through the Beheading Game.

¹.- The growth of tournaments both in number and scope during the tenth and eleventh centuries was no matter of chance: it was an aspect of the deliberate antiquarianism of the age that placed the collection, study and imitation of Roman art high in its order of cultural priorities. Glynne Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre* (London: Weinfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 156.

².- See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: “Theory of Myths: Theory of Archetypal Meaning, Demonic Imagery,”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 147.

The world that the beginning of the tale evokes is rather negative. It is not for nothing that the poet strains this world through the sieve of a series of images that are purely demonic, images such as those of a besieged city, desolation, adultery and the total destruction of the Trojans.¹ Bearing in mind the manner in which the narrator begins his tale, it is evident that he has left nothing to chance. He has used a very efficacious comparative system; a system that becomes cumulative with the unfolding of the plot of the tale. He is depicting, on the one hand, jousts that are comparable to a Greco-roman spectacle. On the other, he offers information that must be linked to what he says, as he narrates his tale, with the purpose of reinforcing the thematic nucleus of his story.

There is, juxtaposed to the ludic element inherent in the jousts, the element of Eros: and the erotic load that characterizes this activity, next to its possible consequences, is not a vain issue. The erotic element became an ingrained element in the tournaments due to a gradual transformation of this venture. Slowly the tournaments ceased to be a purely martial activity and became with the passing of time no more than a show: an entertainment oriented to amuse a public putting to the test the valour of its participants. Apart from showing their valour, the knights also wished to attract the attention of ladies, it being something they could achieve easily since the sight of knights fighting carried an emotional load for the ladies.² It was an emotional response that otherwise would have been more serene and therefore more rational, not to say natural. Owing to this type of emotional response Gottfried Von Strasburg uses a joust as the perfect occasion leading to the passionate and unhappy love between Blanche-Flor and Rivalin,

¹.- See Northrop Frye, *idem*, p. 147.

².- It was more or less at the beginning of the XII century that the ladies began to attend tournaments as spectators. Their presence gives rise to expected and logical changes in the attitude of the knights.

parents of the equally unhappy Tristram. The way in which this writer exploits a tournament is both eloquent and suggestive. His description of the joust begins like this, “in the sweet fullness of this springtide they began a charming knightly sport.”¹ The narrator defines the joust as a sport that he qualifies with the adjective *charming*. Among the participants there was Rivalin, and among the audience, Blancheflor.

Given the erotism that singularizes this pastime, the effects on the ladies are devastating. To question this is futile because their own comments exude sensuality, a sensuality that reaches the level of both audacity and indecency:

‘Look!’ they say, ‘what a heavenly young man that is! Everything he does, how divinely it becomes him! What a perfect body he has! How evenly those magnificent legs of his move together! How tightly his shield stays glued in its place! How elegant all his robes! How noble his head and hair! How charming his whole bearing! What a divine figure he makes! O, happy, lucky woman, she that will enjoy him!’²

When examining this quotation it is evident that the excitement of the ladies is not little, a fact that is conveyed with sufficient clarity by the language used: a language that is hardly decorous. The type of adjectives they use, plus their continuous usage of exclamations, serve to show the cynicism with which the narrator treats the effects of tournaments on the ladies’ hearts.

The erotism inherent in the joust becomes a concrete and physical reality in the act of looking at the men. The knight has become an object much coveted by the ladies, who derive a great deal of pleasure

¹.- Gottfried Von Strassburg, *Tristan* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 50.

².- Ibid., pp. 50-1.

from looking at his body, without omitting the smallest detail. They scrutinize Rivalin with impudence; they look at his legs, at his clothing, at the way in which he stands erect on his horse, at way he moves, at his hair, etc.. His physical beauty awakens carnal desires in the ladies, and especially in the sorrowful Blanche-flor, who ends up losing her head because of him:

Now good Blanche-flor was taking in what the ladies were saying,
for whatever any of them did, she prized him, greatly in her
thoughts. Into her thoughts she has received him, he had come
into her heart, and in the kingdom of her heart wore crown and
sceptre with despotic sway.¹

With descriptions of this nature it is easy to perceive why some writers claimed that “the court of chivalry” runs parallel to the court of love.² In essence this is precisely what is taking place in Tristan, and what is happening at Arthur’s court. So the narrator is talking about a king who encourages his knights to celebrate Christmas in a fashion that is hardly suitable, since he is sponsoring attitudes loaded with violence, erotism, not to say the satisfaction of the senses through the *mete*.

When the poet describes Camelot, or what is happening at Bertilak’s castle, he does not only always dedicate an ample number of lines to relate the way in which his heroes eat, but he introduces

¹.- Ibid., p. 51.

².- Wickham writes that the combats “served to stimulate the competitive element in this rough sport, giving the knight that fame which he prized so dearly, a development which the presence of ladies as spectators could only encourage. In this way the arts of war became associated with those of love and courtship; that of self-protection and preservation with that of survival into the future through procreation.” Wickham, op. cit., p. 155.

very few variations, for what occurs at Bertilak's castle is just a replica of what took place -and is taking place- at Arthur's. The truth is that what separates both castles is far less than what unites them. When the poet narrates the Christmas meal at Camelot, he itemizes the paraphernalia that distinguishes the social act of eating, and he does so with pleasure and much detail. To achieve this he uses a narrative system that is common to his period, that of cataloguing those items the writer wishes to emphasize, in this case food and drink. It is possible to argue that the catalogue that the Gawain-poet offers, when compared with other catalogues in tales about Arthur, is not all that ample. However, this catalogue must be examined within the boundaries of the system used by the poet: a system which, often enough, is based on the most strict poetic economy. Thus to note how he enumerates the victuals is almost surprising and it makes no sense unless he wants to prompt his readers into the appreciation not only of the feast's splendour but something else far more important, its ritualization and the irreverent disvirtualization of the rite of abstinence on Arthur's part.

At first the poet begins with the description of the joy that carries away the diners, but soon he mentions how, as they begin to sit at the table, they become calm. This change in attitude is hardly noticeable; it has been achieved with a tremendous economy and subtlety. It may pass unnoticed for this is all the poet says: "Alle pis mipe pay maden to pe mete tyme." (*Gawain*, 71). In view however of the seriousness with which Arthur undertakes his fasting, this change is important because of what Arthur does. As soon as his guests sit at the table the reader must hear all about an irrational process of inversion of values that is being committed by the king. When the "mete" begins to be served the frivolous tone that characterized the lines that preceded this description, has disappeared. The joy of Arthur's guests has been displaced by ostentatious gestures which are loaded with pomp and

show. Gestures that mark the arrival of the food; food that in theory nobody can eat till the king witnesses some sort of wonder. The way in which the apparition of the dishes takes place is like a show, and in the ponderation of concrete objects and edibles there is a suggestive distortion of values that is not all that different from that which characterized their enactment of the tournaments.

The *mete* has acquired a unsafe ceremonious character that blurs the line that divides the sublime from the ridiculous. The “mete” has reached a ritualistic quality because it has been enhanced with visual pageantry,¹ and accompanied with martial acoustic effects that show that at Arthur’s court there is a marked preoccupation with everything that can be appreciated with the senses, such as those of sight and hearing. This meal shows that Arthur places a greater emphasis on what can be externalized than on what belongs to the invisible and serene world of the spirit. To his solicitous interest in the visual arts must be added his preoccupation with what can be heard, because the arrival of food has been accompanied by a set of well calculated acoustic effects, those of the sound of “trumpes” and of “pipes”:

? en pe first cors come with crakking of trumpes,
Wyth mony baner ful bryȝt pat pebi henced;
Nwe nakryn noyse with pe noble pipes,
Wylde werbles and wyȝt wakned lote,
? at mony hert ful hi e hef at her towches.
Daynteȝ dryuen perwyth of ful dere metes,
Foyoun of pe fresche, and on so fele disches

(*Gawain*, 116-22).

¹.- Ibid., p. 155.

In this quotation there is evidence that all of them are effects oriented to celebrate not only the abundance of their food, but its variety.

The poet seems to expect of his readers to intuit that in the act of eating there is much more than mere eating. What they are doing is the prelude to something that goes beyond the level of having a Christmas meal, for so much noise, so much colour, and so much singing of birds inevitably prompts the reader to suspect that his *mete* buries deep a ceremony that perhaps not even Arthur understands: a service that has little or nothing to do with Christmas, since the king, unlike the rest of his diners, cannot eat while he waits for some wondrous event to take place.

Both the ceremony and its ritualistic aspect are important facts seemingly used to hold the attention of Arthur's diners. Their interest is aroused by means of the *nakryn noyse* and the *crakkyng of trumpes*. The visual impressions mixed with the acoustic effects have been enhanced by the loud singing of wild birds. Yet, in this alternation of artificial shrill sounds with visual effects there is a note of discord produced by the birds for they are singing loudly, late at night, when there is no daylight, and therefore they belong to the night. This subtle discord functions as the necessary lack of compatibility that involves Arthur's guests, immersing them in a very discordant harmony which reflects Arthur's immaturity and explains why the poet feels he must qualify him, as he does, with the appellative of *childegere*.

The ceremonial is brilliant. The important aspect is not however its brilliancy but the perturbing ritualization of the *mete*. What there is to this ritualization is none other than a faded drawing of a prelude to hunting, emblemized in the person of Bertilak. A prelude of all that is going to be eaten and drunk by Gawain at Bertilak's castle, reflecting thus both Arthur's youth and irrationality, caricaturized by the excessive joviality of Bertilak, the seductive beauty of his wife, the

Lady of the Castle, and Gawain's foolish acceptance, on two occasions, of his game. It is not for nothing that Arthur is doing now what later Bertilak will do: to solemnize the pleasure inherent in the enjoyment of *ful dere metes*, the food that Bertilak hunts, while Gawain spends his time playing erotic games with his wife, games which constitute an absurd, unnecessary and consistent continuity on both Arthur's and Gawain's part of celebrations dedicated to thank mythical powers for the fertility of the animal world. As far as the celebration is concerned it is evident that there is an unconscious summoning of old and legendary powers; a call that ironically enough culminates with Arthur's abstinence thus crystallizing with the apparition of the Green Knight.¹

This young king cannot understand what he is doing and so he does not only celebrate Christmas with tournaments and ritualized meals, but encourages his guests to dance all night through fifteen days.

Since *caroles* were of a pre-Christian origin, *carole* dancing served to reinforce the preponderance that the element Eros had at Arthur's court. These types of songs were linked to the celebration of the cyclical movement of the seasons so that they used to be sung and danced, generally speaking, during, or after the collection of the fruit, or the harvest. E. K. Chambers offers the testimony of the Dominican John Bromyard who, knowing sufficiently well the origin of *caroles* condemned them with a great deal of energy. The attitude adopted by this Dominican towards *caroles* was hard, and he went so far as to declare that women who dance and sing caroles, adorned with

¹.- The primitive relationship between man and powers beyond the level of man was elemental: "It arises out of an endeavour to procure certain goods, which depend, in part, upon natural processes beyond man's control." E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (1903; rpt, Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 102.

“garlands [were] the devil’s packhorse for sale”.¹ A quick examination of the *Camina Burana*² shows that Father Bromyard was not talking balderdash. Another testimony that is worth considering, offered also by Chambers, is that of M. Jeanroy, who maintains that caroles were erotic songs and therefore songs which had nothing to do with the celebration of the birth of Christ.³ For many Fathers of the Church Christmas had become “a feast of words, with dancing and ditties.”⁴ Their attitude towards caroles was sufficiently well known by the writers of this period and consequently by the readers. Thus they could easily deduce that Arthur should have known better than to celebrate Christmas singing *caroles* in order to avoid giving to his people erroneous behavioural patterns. Arthur was no exception. His way of celebrating Christmas was usual, and hence the existence of so many prohibitions. It is wrong to think that the Fathers of the Church were forbidding what was not practised, but the contrary, otherwise their prohibitions and sanctions would hardly make sense.

What the Gawain-poet describes is not new. At Arthur’s court there is nothing other than, combats, carols, dances, gifts and feasting. It was so then, and it is so nowadays because most people are concerned only with externals, not with the spiritual aspect of this celebration. It is a question of attitudes and of habits that the narrator, as well as many Fathers of the Church, did not like. The testimony of E. K. Chambers,⁵ among others, shows that many Fathers of the Church considered it improper to celebrate Christmas as Arthur does.

¹.- E.K. Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (1945; rpt, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 76.

².- Ibid., pp. 67-8. See *Carmina Burana* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981).

³.- Chambers, op. cit., p. 69.

⁴.- Ibid., p. 76.

⁵.- Ibid., pp. 69 & 71.

They lack nothing, and deprive themselves of nothing. In addition to singing carols they danced incessantly; and the manner in which the poet speaks of these dances suggests that he thinks that the dancers were dedicating themselves to celebrate the physical energy of the new Sun. The fact that they dance during the night, after spending all day long either eating, or jousting, or interchanging gifts,¹ is reminiscent of some ritual dedicated to the night. Young Arthur is full of energy and life. His vitality seems to be contagious: his ladies and his knights, in spite of the fact that the feast lasts full fifteen days, do not seem to need to rest either during the day or during the night.

This event confers to the celebration an air of urgency that is not wholly pleasant. It is the same type of hurry that is going to characterize the Green Knight, who is in such a rush to have his head cut off that he does not waste his time even in the civilized act of saluting those present in the hall, and even less in wishing them a happy Christmas. In the hall of Camelot, as if it were just a physical manifestation of the "brayn wylde" of the king, the sense of urgency, physical energy, and frenzy seem to annul every sentiment related to the peace, tranquillity, and harmony that should prevail during these days. This is how the Green Knights perceives their games: thus without wishing them peace, or commending them to God, he abruptly demands a Christmas game.

¹.- Fertility is associated to, and celebrated by means of exchange of gifts, Ibid., p. 81. J. Leyerle writes that Arthur's ladies and knights dedicate themselves, as Emerson claims, to exchange kisses. See "The Game and Play of Hero," ed. Norman T. Burns & Christopher Reagan, *Concepts of the Hero in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Toronto: Hodder & Sloughton, 1971). It is possible to think that the game of exchanging gifts functions as the prelude to the game that Gawain is going to play at Bertilak's castle. In the exchange of gifts, as Derek Brewer suggests, "there may be a witty if somewhat improper structural pun," that must be, we think, sexual. See Derek Brewer, *Symbolic Stories* (Suffolk: St. Edmund Press, 1989), p. 81. I am very much indebted to Dr. Leyerle not only because of his generous help but also because of his kindness in giving me a copy of this paper before it was published.

Elements such as those of vigour, energy, puissance, activity and restlessness become obvious with their dancing, especially when bearing in mind that they dance during the night. In many cultures a frenzied and incessant dance in the light of the moon was a religious manifestation, a cult that included the physical extenuation of the participants. The thought of reaching a point of extenuation fits in with what so far has been examined, and it achieves full force when perceiving that the “dere dyn” accompanies something more than an innocent and childish exchange of gifts. The poet says that:

And sypen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,
Áeƿed Ƴeres - Ƴiftes on hiƳ, Ƴelde hem bi hond,
Debated busily aboute po giftes;
Ladies laƳed ful loude, poƳ pay lost haden,
And he pat wan watz not wrothe, pat may Ƴe well trawe.

(Gawain, 66-70)

It is needless to point out that they “run”, and that they “debated busily” about the gifts. It could not be different. Thus either when they are dancing, or exchanging gifts, or amusing themselves with tournaments, or eating, or dedicating themselves to games in which the ladies laugh loudly when they lose,¹ and the knights are not displeased with their gains, they are celebrating the erotism, violence and energy inherent in a natural world that offers them food. It should not thus cause much surprise to see the Green Knight appearing at this court.

¹.- Although it is almost unnecessary to comment on this, one must bear in mind the not always healthy connotations inherent in laughing immoderately. The emphasis on their noisy laughter, as is the case with the exchange of gifts, is just another prelude of the Lady of the Castle’s gay laughter, and I dare say this lady laughs a little too much to think that her laughter is totally innocent or harmless.

Arthur with the type of activities that take place at his place, has invoked his presence.

So much activity becomes the sign that shows the type of anxiety that controls this monarch. The poet clearly says that Arthur is restless and anxious, *so bisied him his yonge blod*. Yet he is not talking about spiritual restlessness but surely about earthly worries: concerns that are difficult to comprehend when trying to discover something solid behind so much pomp and show. Deep down there is nothing but ignorance.

It is alarming to think that Arthur's impetuous nature prompts him to hope to see a man demanding a boon involving a dangerous enterprise. It is not a question of a service dedicated to help the ones who need help, but merely of some sort of unusual show. Arthur waits for the appearance of some unknown rider in his hall demanding permission to challenge somebody; and the challenge is unacceptable for it is a challenge that involves the death of the participants. The inversion of values is clear. He wants to see on such a *dere day* a joust in which the life of the combatants is at stake. His motives are banal: an old habit that is not only irrational but sinister since he hopes for something to happen, but appealing to fortune for the result of the context must depend on fortunes's whim.

Arthur trivializes what is serious but aggrandizes and ritualizes what is trivial, simple, basic and quotidian: eating. Let us bear in mind the profound implications inherent in his decision when he declares he will not eat till something wonderful, something beyond the level of normality, occurs. Arthur, unawares, is transforming the important and serious act of fasting into an irrational banality thus giving an irreverent twist to it. He does not seem to know that fasting is a habit that has little, or nothing, to do with bloody combats, and much with religious acts. Arthur is not however talking about a discipline linked to

the celebration of the birth of Christ, but about an act oriented primarily to invoke something that is purely mundane: an amusing and entertaining event that is thus appropriate to his *alderers* for they used to invoke, before the advent of Christianity, mythical principles such as those incarnated in the person of the Green Knight. The behaviour of Arthur implies an unconscious regression to ancestral times. Arthur is thus a monarch who, unaware of it, conjures supernatural powers linked to pre-Christian cults, and therefore linked to the cyclical movement of the seasons.

Owing to what Arthur has unwittingly been invoking, naturally enough he is the initiator of the *pentangle* of Gawain, the talisman painted on his shield with the purpose of protecting him from the lethal axe of the Green Knight. With the purpose of making his readers aware of the fact that the king is the only one who is responsible for the apparition of the Green Knight, the Gawain-poet has used two linguistic stratagems which Longinos, long ago, recommended in chapter XX of his work, *On Literary Excellence*, the anaphora and repetition. Two linguistic stratagems which have been ingeniously combined to prompt the reader to evaluate correctly the role of Arthur within the thematic context of the tale. To see this one needs only to pay the necessary attention to lines 93-5 of the first Fitt. It is here that Arthur invokes the presence, or the happening of some wonder, by means of a linguistic formula, that is through the power of the word. He has formed the two sides of a triangle, or the two elements of a triple system. Thus, one way or other he has began to draw one of the triangles that configure Gawain's pentangle. Let us observe how the poet has managed this:

Of sum aueturus pyng an vncoupe tale,
Of sum mayn meruayle, pat he myȝt trawe,
Of alderes, OF armes, OF oper auenturus.

These two literary stratagems synthesize all that the poet, up to this point, has been trying to say: that the celebration is more pagan than Christian, and so it constitutes the prelude, or initiation, of the geometrical structure of the pentagon.

To visualize the triangle one needs only to isolate the particle OF contained in the above quoted lines. When doing so the two sides of a triangle emerge. One side has been formed by the initial anaphoras constituted by the repetition of the particle OF at the beginning of each line. The other has been formed by the triple repetition of the particle OF in the third line. The anagram that emerges is as follows:

OF

OF

OF OF OF

The two sides of the triangle will be closed in the very moment in which Gawain cuts the head of the Green Knight, since the game is characterized by a triple structure that will not be broken till the adventure is finished. In addition to this one should note the number of words that appear in each line: in the first line there are seven words, not counting the particle OF, composing the line. In the case of the second line the same should be said; seven words have been used to compose the line. However, when it comes to the third line only four words, with the exception, of course of the particle OF form the line; thus three words are missing, the three words that will serve to close the triangle.

The way in which the Gawain poet renders Arthur's role in the light of conjurer and therefore as the initiator of the beheading Game

has been carefully planned, being this a fact that can be easily appreciated once the symbolic numerological system inherent in the pentacle has been correctly understood. To achieve this the reader must detect the number of games which go into the making of the deep structure of the tale. Unveiling first the number of triangles contained within the five pointed star.¹ This aspect of the study has been carefully examined in another paper and therefore it is a question of mentioning only two basic elements: that the pentangle is formed by five interlaced triangles and that each of the triangles embraces one of the games, games which united constitute the thematic nucleus of the tale.

One can, and must affirm that Arthur is the initiator of the structural fundamentals that govern the tale in the role of promoter of a lethal game. A quick glance at the pentangle confirms this. This event is an expected one because the poet has been playing with the powers that used to be attributed, in the past, and partially in the present to kings, with all the obligations and consequences of censurable behaviour. In other words the narrator has been manipulating the possible dichotomies that could exist between the natural body of the king and his divine nature, emphasizing censurable habits in its correct proportion, in the shape of unacceptable conclusions within a purely Christian frame of reference. The poet warned the reader, from the very beginning of the tale, that there was some flaw or defect in the natural body of the king when he mentioned the fact he is irrational, impulsive and immature. This flaw is what pushes Arthur to direct his gaze to a far distant point, to what can no longer be part of his actual present, and thus he has moved

¹.- These aspects of the tale have been analyzed by the present writer. See *Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional de la Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval*, "A Triple Progression in the Pentangle: A Study of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," (Sept, 1988), pp. 48-65.

back in time. His regression has given place to an inversion of values for the sake of what is mythical. The deficiency of Arthur, although obliquely, has been suggested by the narrator from the very moment in which he began to narrate the tale, because he did it by means of demonic images that run parallel to the defence of an erroneous cause, adultery. During the first fifteen lines there is something more than a basic not to say literary convention about the origins of the Bretons, because the poet, deliberately, has been tracing a bridge between Camelot and Troy in order to make his readers perceive that in Troy, as well, as in Camelot, they were celebrating a concept primordially related to the elements of Eros.

It is not a mere coincidence that *Sir Gawain* or *Troilus and Criseyde* begin with demonic images, emblems that have been well delineated with terms such as *sege*, *assaut*, *brittened*, *brent*, *brondez*, *tresoun*, *tricherie*, etc. that constitute by themselves a clear warning about the dangers inherent in Eros, a warning that will not be attended either by Arthur or by his knights.

In view of the disastrous end of Arthur and Camelot, these images must not be considered as part of a set of curious and pseudo-historical data, for, indirectly, they are part of the theme of the story since, as the plot of the tale develops, these images, owing to their backdrop, composed by Guinevere and Lancelot, acquire disheartening proportions thus becoming signs that indicate the existence of dangers that must not be ignored in Camelot.¹

¹.- The element of space framed by Troy, united to the element of time, determined *For sippen pe sege and pe assaut watz sesed at Troye*, is not a nostalgic evocation, but an important event of great transcendence rooted in the rapid transition to *?is kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krysmasse* (I, 3 7), that forces the reader to move, apparently into two different directions. From an actual present, that of the narrator, to that of Camelot forced upon the reader also by the narrator, an actualized present by both narrator and us in the role of readers. At the same time, the narrative voice / narrator, by beginning the

To be able to appreciate the relevance of these images as far as the themas of the tale are concerned, and the role that the poet has assigned to Arthur, we must weigh correctly the corollaries of meaning innate in the Judgement of Paris, the foundation of Rome and of Great Britain:

Hit watz Ennias pe athel, and his highe kynde,
? at sipen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicom
Welne Ye of al pe wele of pe west iles.
Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swype,
(),
And fer ouer pe French flod Felix Brutus
On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez wyth wynne

(*Gawain*, 5-8 & 13-5)

for by means of the recollection of the destruction of Troy and of Aeneas, the narrator incites the consideration of the primordial disaster and its consequences, a fact that should take us not only to the foundation of *prouinces* but to the golden apple and the three goddesses that quarrelled for its possession.¹

tale in the past, brings to life that past and actualizes it through Camelot. Yet, it is a fictitious regression in time: we move at too great speed to Camelot's present; and Camelot is a court which will also be destroyed, as the reader knows, for the same reason as Troy: a woman.

¹.- Ovid narrates how Venus won the golden apple that Discord threw among the guests, during the wedding feast of Peleus and Thetis, "at the marriage feast of Peleus and Thetis, the future parents of Achilles, a golden apple inscribed with the words for the Fairest, was flung among the guests by Iris (Strife), Juno, Minerva and Venus claimed the prize, and it was agreed that they would refer the dispute to Paris, the handsomest of mortal men. And so Paris was invited to judge the three goddesses. He awarded the prize to Venus, and she assisted him in the abduction of Helen, the wife of Menelaus of Sparta." Ovid, *Heroides*, trans. by C.H. Cannon (New York: Dutton and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 107. This event has been narrated also by Apuleius in his work, *The Golden Ass*.

Arthur is a direct descendant of a caste of heroes that fought defending the man who resolved that quarrel by giving the apple to Venus. He is a worthy descendant because, as the poet suggests, in spite of the years that have elapsed since Aeneas left Troy, Arthur still emulates some of the negative attitudes to life that characterized this people.¹ The link can be appreciated not only in the way in which they celebrate Christmas, but in the consequences that have been neatly assembled in the pentangle. The five pointed star is sacred to the Goddess that Paris selected, Venus. Therefore, whether we consider the Green Knight as real or not, or Gawain's adventure as the result of a joke of Morgan's, the truth is that such a buffoonery is possible only because at Camelot they were celebrating Eros, or Venus, if you wish.²

Arthur's responsibility has been emphasized by the narrator when the Green Knight leaves the hall, for he does not describe a king who is genuinely perturbed by the events, but a young man who wants to eat because his wishes have been fulfilled with an apparition that he carelessly defines with the term *enterludez*, (*Gawain*, 472). Arthur does not lose his appetite, on the contrary because the Green Knight functions, ironically enough, as the element that whets his appetite. He is not distressed by the fact that in a year's time Gawain's head is

¹.- The poet has established the necessary links between the pre-Christian world of the Trojans and that of Arthur by manipulating the element of time and space during the first fifteen lines: manipulation that forces the reader to remember that the Bretons are direct descendants of Brutus, that is of the Trojans. "The *De Excidio Troiae Historia* of the suppositious Dares is like the *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* of the suppositious Dictys, a Latin romance of the late period. Both lay claim to an historical truth from which Homer departed. Dares is on the Trojan side against the Greeks, since both Franks and Bretons claimed, like the Romans, to descend from Troy. Dares enjoyed great prestige in the Middle Ages." E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1953; rpt, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 50. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966).

².- Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977) p. 143.

going to be severed, for what concerns him most is to avoid dulling the brilliancy of his feast with sad thoughts so that he rests importance to the event.

Even a not very sagacious reader would feel uncomfortable with the words that Arthur pronounces. The "interludes" as synonymous of Mumming were forbidden by the Fathers of the Church. At first interludes were tolerated but already in the XV century they were completely forbidden.¹ Apparently it was merely a question of innocent manifestations of joy that used to mark the celebration of Christmas, but deep down they were not as innocuous as they seem to be mainly because of their pagan substratum. For the Fathers of the Church the most exasperating aspect of the situation lay in the fact that such entertainments were not the product of negative attitudes towards Christianity but the end-result of ignorance, and at times of a lack of commonsense,² the latter being Arthur's case.

Facts such as those of ignorance, or a lack of commonsense were the ones that the Gawain-poet wanted to emphasize; and to do this the best way was to write a Christmas tale based on an ancient tradition which lay hidden in the celebration of this festivity.

This romance was not written in the twelfth century but in Chaucer's time, and Chaucer was using themes taken from the romances with a didactic purpose. His way of accomplishing this may have been at times unconstrained, at times dramatic, but effective as the tale of the Wife of Bath, or that of *Troilus and Criseyde* show.

¹.- Wickham, op. cit., pp.120-21. See Richard Southern, *The Seven Ages of the Theatre* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), pp.142-45.

².- E. K. Chambers writes that the celebrants "would not stick upon the explicit consciousness that they drank or danced in the might of Eostre or Freyr. And in time, as the Christian interpretation of life became an everyday thing, it passed out of sight that the customs had been ritual at all." Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, op. cit., p. 99.

Although the *finale* of the story shows the unreality of the Green Knight, for the Gawain-poet Arthur's irrationality is not a trivial matter. In order to prove his point a supernatural being appears in answer to Arthur's wishes. Given the beliefs of this period, not fully dead during the Renaissance, the Green Knight's appearance says a great deal about Arthur and about the moralizing tone of the tale. It is important to remember that according to tradition all that was magical, or supernatural had no power when the birth of Christ is celebrated.

Marcellus in *Hamlet* thinks so when he declares that "Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated, / the bird of dawn singeth all night long / And then they say, no spirit dare stir abroad;" (*Hamlet*, I, 1, 159-61) and he is probably right. Arthur manages the opposite, the appearance of a portent, thus managing unintentionally to bring about a senseless amalgamation of Christian elements with pagan ones. The poet does not say that this happens due to mischievous intentions, but because of Arthur's inconsideration: he is young and wants to have fun. His craving for recreation is out of proportion, since even when the inevitable has taken place he does not want to think that the life of his nephew is at stake. And he does not because to do so would spoil his feast. According to Arthur nothing truly anomalous has happened but the expected owing to the time of the year:

Wel bycommes such craft vpon Cristmasse
Laykyng of enterludez, to leȝe and to sing
Among pise kynde caroles of knyȝtez and ladyez.

(*Gawain*, 471-2),

and he is wrong. With this attitude he is transforming the Green Knight into a conventional and innocuous "enterludez" proper to the

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Season, the irony of the case being that Arthur, as the end of the story shows, was not fully mistaken.

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* * *

MORGAIN THE FAY AND THE LADY OF THE LAKE IN A BROADER MYTHOLOGICAL CONTEXT

A great affective chasm separates Morgain as she appears in the beginning of English Arthurian literature, in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Layamon, and her nature in the later medieval tradition, as seen in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the former she appears as the leading lady in one of the best known scenes of medieval English literature, a beautiful young fairy, all sweetness, coming on stage after Arthur has been fatally wounded in battle to take him to the Edenlike island of Avalon. There she will heal him to live on after death in a heavenly existence from which it is hoped he will one day return again to bring his heroic help to the problem-beset world his once and future subjects still inhabit. In the latter she is Arthur's wily, old rival and secret ennemy, the force of wildness and evil that opposes the Christian morality and civilization that Arthur's court stands for. It is not the Green Knight himself who wants to cut off Sir Gawain's head, we learn in the surprise ending, but the ominous Morgain, a figure whose name alone seems to conjure up the realm of evil.

Laura Hibbard Loomis observes that "the might of Morgan le Fay (vs. 2446) was, for Gawain himself, a sufficient explanation and exculpation for all that he had endured and made him able to part from the Green Knight "on most friendly terms."¹ How can such a radical change be explained? Where did such a sweet, young goddess go

¹.- See Laura Hibbard Loomis, "Gawain and the Green Knight," in R.S. Loomis, *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 535.

wrong? In France, of course, and not long ago Alexandre Micha wondered in print about why before the French prose romances she was a “feé et guérisseuse” while in them and thereafter she is a “magicienne et une ensorceleuse”.¹ The present study addresses the same question.

Prof. Micha proposes that Morgain’s thorough schooling, a later addition to the fairy’s traditional character, offended the medieval sense of women’s proper role. The idea is similar to the explanation offered for the creation of the archetypal *femme fatale* in the character of Vivianne/Niviane, destroyer of Merlin, by reference to the Medieval topos of the scholar made a fool of by a comparatively ignorant yet clever young woman of whom he is enamoured, as was commonly believed to have happened to Virgil and Aristotle.²

Still, this explanation for the change in Morgain is not entirely satisfying, as one is left with the question of how and why such a totally attractive figure, at least to a male hero like Arthur and, one supposes, to a male audience in general, could have been a candidate for such a switch to a woman who not only uses her power to accomplish the hero’s destruction but is also a rival to Arthur’s kingship. Something must be, one feels, behind the topos, something that triggers the topos, something derived from traditional attitudes toward women, some image rooted in the forest primeval - oh, perilous hunt - of myth and psychology. Dame Prudence urges us to stop here, rather than plunge into the murky depths of mythologically oriented criticism.

¹.- Alexandre Micha, *Étude sur le “Merlin” de Robert de Boron: Roman du XIII siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1980), p. 55.

².- See Carlos García Gual’s introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vida de Merlin* (Madrid: Siruela, 1984).

And yet, somewhat like the irresistibly tempting Ring of Power guarded by the Rhine Maidens, the suggestive possibilities of myth call to us. If one could only use it judiciously, not letting it destroy us by leading us to jump to conclusions or to select out from the bewildering cornucopia of fables it offers what will fit our pre-conceived ideas, if we only knew better what it meant and how much of it survives in some significant way in the hard texts we have in our hand, we might better understand the amazingly persistent appeal of Arthurian literature -which even its Renaissance aficionados berated for being “far from reason and sense”,¹- and more specifically, why its delicious maidens often turn into loathly ladies and viceversa.²

The case against the mythological approach has been summed up by Carlos García Gual. While “romanistas” stick to written texts, which provide something resembling a secure base, “celtistas” make extensive use of oral tradition, which is difficult to date and “no siempre bien comprendida de los escritores, doctos clérigos que toman sus noticias de un trasfondo mítico celta y que transforman los «cuentos de aventura» en relatos cortesés para ofrecerlos así a su público refinado.”³ The most intrepid reply, albeit undeniably quixotic, to the objections raised by this school of criticism has been succinctly expressed in this inaugural issue of the *SELIM* journal by Prof. María Luisa Dañobeitia: “Some events hardly make sense unless an

¹.- The phrase was used by Elis Gruffydd in commenting on the birth of Taliesin. See Patrick Ford, *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 165.

².- See Patricia Shaw, “Loathly Ladies, Lither Ladies and Leading Ladies: The Older Woman in Middle English Literature,” *Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional de la Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval (S.E.L.I.M.)* (Universidad de Oviedo, 1988), pp. 209-243.

³.- See García Gual, pp. xvii-xviii.

exhaustive analysis is done of the underlying philosophy of life and religion of the ancient Celtic races..."¹

Audeamus igitur, calling for strength on our Lady Condwiramurs, or Dulcinea, and ask the question: could the topos of the scholar outsmarted and pushed onto the next boat to humiliation and death by the woman he lusts for, as well as the remarkable change in Morgain that occurs in the evolution of Arthurian literature, have grown out of a tradition familiar to author and reader alike because derived from pagan mythology and surviving in folklore? Might the sort of problematic relationship between a hero and a powerful woman that emerges have been suggested, or reinforced, or shaped, by a pre-existing pattern that, when recognized, would put it in a new light?

It has been a long time since another lady, Lucy Paton, published in 1903 her study that became this century's standard reference on the subject of Morgain's and the Lady of the Lake's Celtic mythological origins. R.S. Loomis, as part of his monumental contribution to Arthurian studies, continued and enriched her research, but followed, as he always did, a norm of focusing on the Breton tradition, complemented by the Welsh and Irish mythologies closely tied to it.²

However, just two years ago Hilda Ellis Davidson has finally given us a more comprehensive study of the myths and symbols of all of pagan Europe.³ It is a solidly-grounded book that, at last, puts aside a fear of taking a broader view of European mythology, a fear provoked by the earlier overgeneralizations made by the dazzled pioneers in the

¹.- María Luisa Dañobeitia, "Two Sides of a Triangle: The Beginning of Gawain's Pentangle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," elsewhere in this volume, note 3.

².- See the references in R.S. Loomis, "The Legend of Arthur's Survival," in Loomis, pp. 64-71.

³.- H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988).

field, and makes wide-ranging comparisons that establish connections among Scandinavian, Germanic and Celtic religion and folklore. It was the Norman French, after all, who transformed Morgain and created Vivianne.

On digesting the information Prof. Ellis Davidson has gathered and organized, one comes to the conclusion that the early Morgain, in the form with which she enters the Arthurian world created by Geoffrey of Monmouth and Layamon, while still thoroughly Celtic and undeniably present in the Irish and Welsh tales, offers a dimension that is more prominent in Germanic and Scandinavian traditions. The difference in the lady's character is simple, apparently unimportant, but it points in a different direction. In Ellis Davidson's words, Morgain is an Otherworldly Being, and when heroes are with her or with similar ladies they are not subject to the frustrations of this world, including that of not getting along with one's woman. Still, to be blunt about it, although in happy circumstances and with charming ladies, they are dead (the fact that the Celts were fond of the idea of the dead returning for visits notwithstanding). I would stress, though, that Morgain did not kill them, that her primary function is to "heal", not of course for a continuing life in this world but for a new life in the other, and in general to make them feel better there.

In Scandinavian and Germanic myths, too, these fair maidens exist, and we are familiar with them under the name of valkyries. Ellis Davidson's description is similar to the Wagnerian conception: "battle-goddesses ... attendant on the god Odin ... sent to carry out the will of the god in apportioning victory in battle and deciding which warriors must fall.... Her duty was to conduct dead kings and heroes to Odin. In the *Edda* poems we find another aspect portrayed. She appears here as the spirit wife of the hero, appearing to announce his future greatness as a leader, to urge him to heroic deeds, perhaps to present him with his sword, and finally to receive him as husband and lover

after he dies in battle.”¹ They often are encountered in groups, having been compared to bees by the Anglo-Saxons, and there are several lists of their names.²

I would like to underscore three of these maidens’ traits. First, they escort heroes, that is warriors, to a heavenly home after death in battle and personally administer the pleasurable rewards for their valor and strength; the men stay on there forever in a sort of unending bachelor party where worrying about anything is unthinkable. Secondly, valkyries are attendants on the god of battle, and although they themselves as goddesses wear armor and provide weapons, they are part of the world of men and warfare.

A third quality of valkyries that seems particularly relevant to the Arthurian tradition is that they, like Tinkerbell and the boys who haven’t grown up whom she takes to Never-Never Land, get around by flying. As Ellis Davidson points out, valkyries are related (in some way I wish we could define more thoroughly) to ravens, who eat the dead on the battle field, and to the wise spirit wives of the shamans³ who in pre-historic Gaul, as to this day in Siberia, went into trances and sent out their spirits to roam the world beyond the normal human limits of time and space in order to bring back powerful knowledge to set things right in the here and now. The shape-shifting druids, as has often been recognized of late, believed they gained knowledge in a very similar way, as “The Song of Taliesen” makes clear. The valkyries, too, have hidden knowledge, though it is limited to foretelling the hero’s life and then bringing him to healing once and for all when he enters Valhalla. Their supernatural powers, like the early Morgain’s, are beneficent.

¹.- Ellis Davidson, p. 92.

².- See Ellis Davidson, p. 96.

³.- See Ellis Davidson, p. 96.

A comparison with the description of Morgan as drawn by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Vita Merlini* in the scene of Arthur's death reveals that for him her shamanistic and healing nature was paramount: "Morgana es su nombre, y conoce la utilidad de todas las hierbas para la curación de los cuerpos enfermos. También conoce el arte de mudar su figura, y como Dédalo sabe cortar los aires con plumas nuevas. Cuando quiere, en Bristo, Carnoto o Papias se deja caer del cielo en nuestras playas, y esta ciencia dicen que han aprendido sus hermanas: Morónoe, Mázoë, Gliten, Glitonea, Gliton, Tirónoe, Titen y Titon, famosísima por su cítara."¹ A similar concept of Morgain is visible in the *Bataille Loquifer* (c. 1180), in which Morgain and two of her sisters, also fairies, take the hero through the air to a luxurious Avalon, where he encounters the greatest Arthurian knights: Arthur, Gawain, and Yvain.²

The Morrígan, whose name immediately recalls the Arthurian character, presents several similarities to valkyries. "In Irish tradition also we find female spirits associated with battle and death. They appear in the tales under the collective name of *Morrígan*, which may be used either of a single goddess or of a group of three. There is a strong erotic element in the Morrígan, as in the Scandinavian valkyries who offer themselves to warriors. The name has been interpreted as Great Queen, or Demon Queen; other names given to the battle goddesses are *Nemain* (Frenzy), *Badb* and *Macha* (both probably meaning Crow)."³ The grouping of Geoffrey's nine heavenly hostesses in three groups of three, each of which begins with a distinctive letter, seems to recall this goddess's triple nature. One

¹.- Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vida de Merlin*, ed. García Gual, p. 33.

².- See R.S. Loomis, "The Legend of Arthur's Survival," in Loomis, p. 65.

³.- Ellis Davidson, p. 97.

notable difference is that she does not always fly, but then one of her alter egos, Badb, is associated with birds.¹

In Layamon's account of Arthur's death the name for the Morgainlike goddess is Argante. Jean Markale informs us that Budicca, the British woman warrior who leads a revolt against the Romans, was Breton and offered sacrifices and thanks to a war goddess called Andrasta or Andarta. He goes on to say, "Pues bien, hay una diosa Andarte cuyo culto está atestiguado entre los voconces de la Drôme."² I find the comparatively short phonetic distance from Andarte to Argante suggestive.

In the *Mabinogian* the name of the god Bran, whose head presides over an otherworldly feast after the battle in which he is killed, means "crow," the same valkyrie-related bird in whose shape Arthur was popularly believed to live on.³ In establishing connections that point toward the goddesses who in several versions accompany Morgain when she comes to heal Arthur, Idris Llewelyn Foster calls attention to the link between Morrigan and crows. In the *Didot Perceval* ravens are revealed to be Urbain's mistress and her maidens, while in other contexts they are his mother: "If, therefore, the correspondence of Morrigan, Modron, and Morgain la Feé is established, then Owain's (= Urbain's) ravens in *Rhonabwy's Dream* can be recognized as the helpful forms of his mother Modron and her sisters (or companions)."⁴

¹.- Since a conflation of Badb and Macha would yield Mab, Shakespeare's inheritance of this tradition seems a reasonable hypothesis.

².- See Jean Markale, *Druidas (Tradiciones y Dioses de los Celtas)* (Madrid: Taurus, 1989), p.126.

³.- On Arthur's survival as a crow see the references in R.S. Loomis, "The Legend of Arthur's Survival," in Loomis, p. 65, n. 6.

⁴.- Idris Llewelyn Foster, "*Culhwch and Olwen and Rhonabwy's Dream*," in Loomis, p. 43.

A final observation on valkyries, by way of a possible objection, might be that they were not sisters, but helpers and eventually lovers, of the men they nurtured, while Morgain came to be considered Arthur's sister or half-sister. Still, in myth divine syblings sometimes mate. In any case, as Owain's story shows, help from an affectionate sister or mother, even if she is not a lover, could still be a comforting, valkyrielike prospect. Geoffrey, in his *Historia*, does not mention Morgain in his account of Arthur's death, saying merely that he was "carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to."¹ In the *Vita Merlini*, as we have seen, Morgain appears, but she is not presented as a relative of Arthur's: "Allí nueve hermanas gobiernan según ley que no está escrita a los que a ellas de nuestras partes llegan. La mayor de ellas es sabia"² Layamon's Arthur does not refer to Argante as a relative: "And I will fare to Avalun, to the fairest of all maidens, to Argante the queen, an elf most fair, and she shall make my wounds all sound, make me all whole with healing draughts."³

If we hypothesize, then, that there is a healthy dose of valkyrie in the initial Arthurian Morgain, do we encounter an anti-valkyrie, an alternative image of woman, that might explain Morgain's later aberration? Ellis rejects Dumézil's often cited three-part division of Indo-European divinities, a scheme that assumes that myth reflected a social structure of warriors, priests and producers, and maintains that, while its social orientation does reflect what we now know about

¹.- Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, transl. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 261.

².- Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vida de Merlín*, p. 32.

³.- Wace and Layamon: *Arthurian Chronicles*, trans. Eugene Mason (London: Everyman's Library, 1962), p. 264.

European mythology, a two-part one fits the data better. “The difficulty in applying Dumézil’s theories to Scandinavian evidence, however, is that the Norse deities refuse to fit satisfactorily into the niches which he has provided for them, and the same is true of the Celtic gods.... On the other hand, the dichotomy between the ruling and war gods on one hand and those associated with fertility and the land on the other appears to be an essential part of the structure, and helps to explain the distinction between the two groups of Scandinavian deities, Aesir and Vanir.”¹

From this perspective it seems logical, as we pursue the broader question of Morgain in Arthurian tradition, to ask whether, then, there are two basic sorts of Western European goddesses that become sexually involved with men. Ellis Davidson seems to say as much when she affirms that Irish heroes marry either battle goddesses or rivers.² The Vanir, earth spirits and fertility goddesses, were associated more with women, who were active in their cult, while the much more commonly male gods responsible for imposing order on the world and war-making, the Aesir, reflect predominantly male social roles. The Vanir were concerned with bringing forth life and not surprisingly had a particular dislike for violence.

As far as the availability of this worldview to storytellers in the Middle Ages, the evidence is clear that the male gods faded sooner and more completely than the Vanir, while the later were transformed and long remained alive in popular culture. And it is not beside the point to add parenthetically that the Vanir included both a male god, Freyr, as well as a goddess, Frejya, and it has been the latter that survived more strongly.

¹.- Ellis Davidson, pp. 200-201.

².- See Ellis Davidson, p. 203.

The fertility goddesses, let me hasten to add, are not unrelated to the battle goddesses, and in attempting to differentiate them I find that, especially in surviving literary works, the two categories overlap in some important regards. For example, both sometimes appear at a man's birth or entrance into puberty, predicting his future and making him gifts.¹ One is reminded of the *alven* that appear in Layamon at Arthur's birth. Similarly, even if we return to myth, there are fair maidens, again particularly well known in the Scandinavian tradition and seemingly corroborated by archeological remains of ship graves, who recall valkyries in that they take the dead to heaven, but whom Ellis Davidson identifies with fertility goddesses and who come for the dead in ships.² The circumstance that it is by ship that Morgain arrives at the sea shore and then departs with the expiring Arthur would seem clearly derived from Celtic myths, identified by Lucy Paton, derived, in turn, from this broader tradition.

Ultimately the two probably come, one can dare to suggest in 1991, from the same pre-historic goddess that is currently the subject of so much study and discussion, i.e., from one centrally important earth mother, now thought to have split into more than one personality to produce several goddesses. In a study related to the more general discussion of the theme of the creation of patriarchy, in which this figure has been traced back to the ancient Near East, María Luisa Dañobeitia has argued that the pentangle in SGGK, and so the sinister Morgain whose power it ostensibly combats, is related to ancient rites in honor of a goddess who combined fertility, Eros and Thanatos.³

¹.- See Ellis Davidson, pp. 92 and 123.

².- See Ellis Davidson, p. 118.

³.- See María Luisa Dañobeitia, "A Triple Progression in the Pentangle: A Study of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," in *Actas del primer congreso internacional de la Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval (S.E.L.I.M.)*, (Universidad de Oviedo, 1988).

Jean Markale has pursued the idea of such an ur-divinity with real *élan*: “Rodeada de terribles y eficaces dioses auxiliares, revestida de múltiples nombres, partícipe de las tres funciones indoeuropeas, maestra de poesía, de magia y de profecía, sabia en técnicas diversas, madre de todos los dioses, un poco ninfómana y animada de furor guerrero, triple diosa pero siempre mujer única, probablemente heredera de la Gran Diosa de los tiempos prehistóricos, así se presenta la Minerva céltica. Su complejidad es tan grande como la del Dagda.”¹

Closer in time and space to Arthur, descriptions of the Irish Other World show Lug, the god of war, sitting in state accompanied by the goddess who represents the sovereignty of Ireland, just as Odin is attended by the valkyries. But as Patrick Ford and likeminded critics have sought to demonstrate, this goddess is essentially the same as Rhiannon of the *Mabinogian*, the Continental Epona, the horse goddess of fertility.²

If we follow this line of thought, supposing that fertility goddesses were not originally separate from battle goddesses, it becomes apparent that, at least in their role as escorts for the dead, they may be thought of as the non-warrior’s version of the valkyrie. In a period when the gods and goddesses had split into distinct and even opposed personalities and functions, at the hour of death they would have provided the protection of maternal divinities who were especially comforting in that they formed part of the woman’s or the farmer’s world.

But the subject at hand is not caste differences between these two, essentially similar and nurturing images of women, but rather more

¹.- See Markale, p. 130.

².- See Ford, p. 9.

fundamental distinctions that bring us closer to the threatening Morgain of SGGK. Many myths and tales from folklore involving fertility goddesses, particularly prominent in Gaul and Britain, do not stress the escorting of the dead to the next world and the joys of existence there. On the contrary, such figures are very much part of the vexations of living in this world, attracting men with the alluring possibilities of sexual pleasure and the wealth of fertility but at the same time taking away control over their own fates and often destroying them. While they may at the end take them to the Other World, the focus is on the shock experienced when pleasure is followed by the anxieties and horror of being done in by the desired woman herself, not on the comfort of being carried off to be healed afterwards.

The *Lai of Graelent*, whose widespread basis in folklore has been thoroughly documented,¹ can serve as a good example. The lady, who turns up in a pool and says she loves the surrounding land, obviously has immense, supernatural powers, which include both the attraction of her face and body and her cornucopialike wealth, with which she outfits and supports her man until he fails to honor the one requirement she lays upon him. Thereupon she lets him, like a lovesick fool, drown himself while trying to recover her, only resuscitating him and taking him off to fairyland at the insistent request of her horrified servants. Connections to fertility goddesses are not hard to find in such a story.

Just as valkyries move through the air, these goddesses, known in Roman Europe as “mother earth,” or “the mothers,” inhabited water and were worshiped at shrines near it.² There, sacrifices of gold, as well as fruits of the earth, were thrown into the water in the hope of receiving in return the multiplied wealth and fruitfulness magically

¹.- See the references in Ernest Hoepffner, “The Breton Lais,” in Loomis, pp. 112-21.

².- On the earth mothers and their cult see Ellis Davidson, pp. 110-111.

brought about by the combination of earth and water. This is the source of Graelent's rent money. But the sexual pleasure and wealth are dependent on the goodwill of the lady and so part of the nerve-wrackingly perishable while maddeningly desirable good things of this world, not the perfect and enduring ones provided by one's valkyrie in Valhalla.

Examples of this sort of powerful water goddess can be adduced from many European cultures, but let us consider another one, less widely known but still Celtic. In northwestern Spain there is a robust folklore surrounding, in Galicia, *donas*, and in Asturias, *xanas*, whose similarities to nymphs in other western European myths were pointed out early in this century.¹ These attractive young women live outdoors, usually in water or caves, where they can be spotted on the summer solstice or at other magical moments combing their red hair with a golden comb or hanging out their washing. They can be recognized as preternatural by both the fact that they are said to be enchanted and their magical powers. Like Irish fairies, they steal human babies and raise them out of society, substituting their own infants to be raised by women. Like Rhine maidens, they guard golden treasures. These they offer, along with their fair hand, to men of their choosing who have come across them and are willing to try to disenchant them, though they come with strings attached. The man must pass a test - the answer to a riddle or the faithful observance of a single prohibition - and if he fails, as he almost invariably does, the girl either is not freed from or returns to her enchanted, i.e., magical, state. At the same time all the gold she has given the man turns into something worthless or repulsive.

¹.- See Eliseo Marías Pinto, *Correspondencies entre les lleendes gallegues y asturianas. El so estudiu comparativu so los motivos del folclor celta* (Oviedo: Lliga Celta d'Asturies, 1987), pp. 29-32; and Aurelio de Llano Roza de Ampudia, *Del Folklore Asturiano: Mitos, Supersticiones, Costumbres* (Oviedo: Instituto de Estudios Asturianos, 1983), pp. 29-50.

Some tales stress that the couple was living happily together until the man could no longer avoid breaking the one rule, whereupon the fairy mercilessly abandoned him.¹ Donas have the additional trait of setting a date for the disenchantment, but then turning into a frightening, dragonlike snake which on the appointed day the man must dare not only to approach but even to kiss three times in order to return the lady to her more beautiful, alternative form.² The men are usually not up to it and so lose everything the woman so tantalisingly offers. Similarly, Chrétien de Troyes's Yvain fights for and wins the lady of a fountain, who comes with the wealth of a kingdom, but she breaks with him when he proves himself unable to meet the one condition she sets upon him.

The word 'xana,' often pronounced 'xiana,' was shown by Menéndez Pidal to derive from the Latin 'Diana.'³ It appears that the pre-Roman xanas were assimilated to that classical goddess. The similarity, I would argue, is both real and germane to our larger subject.

The story of Diana, Artemis in Greek, and Actaeon, has long been one of the better known plots of classical mythology. A hunter, Actaeon comes across Artemis in the woods, where she is bathing in a pool. Avoiding being seen himself, he watches her and becomes filled with desire. She, virgin goddess of the hunt who does not submit to men, becomes angry when she discovers the presence of her unwanted admirer. Turning him into a stag, she watches with satisfaction as his own hounds tear him to pieces.

¹.- For example, "El viudo y la Xana," "El pastor y la Xana," and "La Xania del Castiellu de Aguilar," Llano Roza de Ampudia, pp. 42-47.

².- On such goddesses' dual aspects see Ellis Davidson, p. 111. On fairy ladies in Irish popular tradition who both seduce and resist see p. 112.

³.- Cited in Llano Roza de Ampudia, p. 30.

While it might be objected that Artemis does not manifest any interest in a sexual relationship with the man who encounters her, it should be remembered, first, that she was also the goddess of childbirth and at a school consecrated to her in Athens adolescent girls learned how to become wives and mothers. While Artemis seems to represent the attitude of young girls fearful of men, society assumed that those fears should and would be overcome. Secondly, even though she may actively reject the man's desire for her, she has provoked it. From the male perspective, illustrated by Renaissance love poetry in which men accuse women of cruelty because they refuse to quench the passion their beauty has kindled, she has created the man's need and then fails to meet it. The implied attitude is explicit in *Graelent*, where we learn later that the lady has intentionally bathed naked near where the hero would pass in order to attract him.

I began by joking that Morgain went wrong in France. Laura Hibbard Loomis has pointed out the time and place more specifically. Just as in SGGK Morgain is an old witch who seeks to have the hero's head cut off and to that end sends a young woman to try to seduce him, similarly in the prose *Lancelot* she uses her magic charms with the purpose of destroying the hero and, once again, sends a young woman to seduce him. Morgain is the lurking power of wild and deadly impulses that always threaten to, and eventually do, devour the measured joys of Camelot, and her portrait is already drawn in the much earlier French work.¹

The parallels, indeed are close and numerous. Just as the Green Knight goes hunting to arrange for Gawain and his seductive wife to be alone in the mornings prior to the grisly appointment at the Green Chapel, in the French model Morgain sends her most beautiful maiden to travel cross-country alone with Lancelot as his guide to the

¹.- See Laura Hibbard Loomis, in Loomis, p. 535.

Dolerose Tor. Both young women are provocative dressers and skillful, non-stop talkers; Morgain's maid even sings lays to him: "beles paroles et rit et gabe et joe en chevalchant. De totes les choses le semont de quoi ele le cuide eschauffer, si se deslie sovent por moster son vis et son chief qui de tres grant bialté estoit et chante lais bretons et autres notes plaisans et envoisies, et ele avoit la vois et haute et clere et la langue bien parlant et breton et francois et mains autres langages."¹

In both cases there are three assaults on the hero's chastity, mainly set in bed, and for reasons of duty he can neither accept the offer nor refuse it with blunt discourtesy. We sympathize with these two famous lovers at the same time we laugh at their predicament. And if the proposition by the Green Knight's wife is notoriously brazen, her French counterpart is even more self-assured and direct: "Et por ce que vos estes buens chevaliers et je suis bele damoisele, por ce vos requier je et pri que vos gisés a moi orendroit..."²

The negative version of Morgain had been sketched out in some detail a few years earlier than even the prose *Lancelot*, about 1190 in Hartmann von Aue's *Erek*, and he clearly did not invent it. Paton's and Roger Loomis's studies on Morgain show what contradictory figures she could represent, and one comes to the time-honored conclusion that fairies and witches are two sides of a coin that is women's power. But the question a study directed toward her origin as she appears in SGGK calls for us to ask is whether or not the specific image of the dangerous water fairy was an essential element in the prose *Lancelot*, whether a sinister lady of a stream, or a fountain, or a lake was part of the author's picture of women and

¹.- *Lancelot: roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha, 4 vols. (Paris, Droz, 1978), I: 317.

².- *Lancelot*, I: 318.

contributed to his decision to opt for and develop the frightening instead of the comforting version of Morgain, both of which traditions he knew. It now turns out, as everyone knows, that Lancelot is associated with a certain Lady of the Lake. He did not appear in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* along with Gawain and Keu and the rest of the boys; instead, as Jean Frappier has shown, he had separate roots in folklore: “the most primitive feature of his biography was his childhood in the palace of a fay, who stole him from his mother and reared him on an island of the sea or at the bottom of a lake.”¹ In Chrétien de Troye’s *Lancelot of the Lake*, written ten years before Hartmann von Aue’s *Erek*, the fay adheres to the traditional xanalike pattern, steals him from his mother when he is a baby and raises him outside of society. This unconventional upbringing in a woman’s world makes him what he is, the devoted servant of ladies. Chrétien insisted that the story was not his, that its form and content were dictated by the Countess of Champagne,² and certainly it represents much more of a woman’s love fantasy than a man’s. Charles Foulon also suggests a move away from inherited attitudes when he observes that, “Chrétien lighted his torch at the flame of Wace, ... but that, beginning with *Lancelot*, his indebtedness steadily waned.”³

The Lady of the Lake, however, is not herself the *femme fatale*, that role being turned over to Guenevere. In fact, she is a strangely benevolent and socialized water goddess, in her actions more a valkyrie than a dragon lady, for after selflessly raising her adopted son she herself takes him away to court, the world of warriors, and there asks that he be made a knight to serve his lord. We know there was a

¹.- Jean Frappier, “The Vulgate Cycle,” in Loomis, p. 296.

².- Jean Frappier remarks that, “It is the current opinion that Chretien followed the countess’s instructions with reluctance: after all, the *Lancelot* is a sort of palinode, a recantation of *Cligés*.” See “Chrétien de Troyes,” in Loomis, p. 175.

³.- Charles Foulon, “Wace,” in Loomis, p. 102.

reaction against the book's over-all tone of exaggerated deference to women, but was there also a reaction against its defanged portrayal of a water goddess?

Before looking in more detail at the magical ladies in the prose *Lancelot* let us turn to another romance written not long after *Lancelot of the Lake* and which is closely tied to the prose *Lancelot* in plot, characters and the presence of similar anti-feminine sentiments. I am referring to the *Suite du Merlin*, in which Morgain, as in the prose *Lancelot*, is a wicked sorceress who directs her powerful arts toward Arthur's destruction. Micha's focus on her extensive education, somehow tied up with her evil nature, is easy to justify in the text. She is Arthur's sister, and when she was young, "on the recommendation of the whole family, the king sent the daughter named Morgan to school at a convent. She was so gifted that she learned the seven arts and quite early acquired remarkable knowledge of an art called astronomy, which she used all the time. She also studied nature and medicine, and it was through that study that she came to be called Morgan the Fay."¹ Merlin shows his susceptibility to dangerous women by falling in love with first her and then, as the amorous side of his character evolves, with a woman who unmistakably recalls a water fairy, Vivianne. Jean Markale proposes that the latter's name derives from Boinn-Bé Finn, a Gaulish water goddess.²

In the *Suite* the name is Niviane, and her ties to Artemis are explicit. Merlin tells her the story of a young woman from Roman times named Diana, an independent spirit who likes to hunt. An ardent admirer named Faunus convinces her to live with him by a lake she

¹.- *The Prose Merlin and Suite du Merlin*, trans. Samuel N. Rosenberg, in *Romance of Arthur II*, ed. James J. Wilhelm (New York: Garland, 1986), p. 248.

².- See Markale, p. 129.

likes, but she is fickle and after two years she tires of him, cruelly liquidating him to make way for another lover by pouring molten lead on his body while he is beneath the waters of her lake. That she is the lady of the lake is stressed by Merlin's paternalistic ending to the story, in which she is killed in punishment and the lake, into which her body is thrown, given her name. Niviane is not deterred and proceeds to imitate Merlin's metafictional heroine, with the important difference that she succeeds where her role model failed, cleverly doing in Merlin and getting away with it, too. Now that, one can imagine the anonymous author wishing Chrétien were still around to be told, is a *real* Lady of the Lake. As Niviane, using magical spells symbolic of the power her sexual attractiveness gives her, seals up Merlin to be buried alive she gloats in the best *fabliau* style: "Look how the enchanter is enchanted."¹ Merlin cries out from his tomb: "His cry came from the sharp pain he felt when he realized that he was being killed by a woman's cunning and that a woman's craft had defeated his own."²

The prose *Lancelot* echoes the myth of the water fairy just as explicitly and, in relation to Morgain, more insistently. The narrator introduces her with the information that she was Arthur's sister and the woman who knew the most about enchantments, so much, in fact, that many foolish people said she was not a woman at all, but a goddess.³ We learn later that it is not learning that corrupted her, but rather lust, for as soon as she came of age she was "si chaude et luxuriose que plus chaude feme ne convint a querre."⁴ While serving as one of Guenevere's ladies in waiting she has an affair with a

¹.- *Suite du Merlin*, p. 265.

².- *Suite du Merlin*, p. 265.

³.- See *Lancelot*, I: 275.

⁴.- *Lancelot*, I: 300.

nephew of the queen, who royally threatens and cajols the young man to break off what is really just a lark. Finding herself pregnant and abandoned, Morgain misguidedly - if, indeed, showing real pluck - searches the whole country until she finds Merlin, whom she seduces - as though she were Rhiannon - with not only her fair person but also "molt grant avoir et molt bele chevalcheure."¹ In return he teaches her powerful magic, which she uses vindictively against Guenevere whenever possible. Learning, then, is only a means in this view of Morgain, there being other base origins and ignoble ends to her actions.

A woman badly wounded in love, reminiscent of Orgellose in Wolfram's *Parzival*, she creates a magical Valley of No Return, also known as the Valley of the False Lovers. In it become trapped all knights who undertake the adventure, since any who has ever been unfaithful to his lady in thought, word, or deed faces the prospect of living out his days and dying there, unless someday, of course, some perfect lover should choose to enter the valley and release all the captives. It is rather like Valhalla, with walls of air, plenty of food, drink and men's sports, a celestial prison where fallen knights, killed by Morgain for their perverse male falseness, are living on in the afterlife. The knights' sweethearts, however, are at liberty to come and go as they like, acting the role of mobile valkyries, but with no Odin to obey or any mandatory attentions to their lovers. It is a woman's remodeling of Valhalla, with women in charge, when they choose to be, of men who cannot leave or misbehave, a fantasy very much along the lines of the feminist *fin amour* that characterizes Chrétien's *Lancelot*.

Yet in the palace at the center of the valley lies on her luxurious bed a Morgain who is unquestionably as much a water fairy as a

¹.- *Lancelot*, I: 301.

valkyrie. At the entrance to the enchanted region there are two dragons, as well as a deadly, cliff-lined pool to be crossed; the latter's frightening nature is stressed. In going across it on a plank Lancelot is preceded by some days by the duke and by Yvain. The former overcomes the two dragons but, reeling with fear, is knocked into the dark and roiled waters by his three opponents. He feels himself drowning and on being pulled out and opening his eyes cannot tell if he is alive or dead. He fails, as it were, to kiss the snake three times, but like Graellent is brought out to a post-drowning land of love. Yvain, too, falls in, and the sergeant-at-arms escorts him to the enchanted jail.

Lancelot slays the two dragons, then, like Yvain in Chrétien's romance bearing his name, defeats the guardian - in this case the three guardians - who protect the pool and keep anyone else from gaining access to the lady of the land. This test of bravery and prowess passed, the pool and its defenders vanish, and the purely symbolic nature of the episode is revealed. Then it is a wall of fire with two guardians that block his way. He kills one, while the other flees, throws himself from its high banks into a pool, and miraculously emerges on the other side, taunting him to follow. Begged by an accompanying damsel to desist so as not to drown, he replies that he was raised in the water and so has an advantage over other men, an aside that calls the reader's attention to his feminine upbringing and consequent skill in matters of love. He plunges in fully armed, pursues his enemy to a pavillion, turns over Morgain's bed to get at him, and finally presents her with the severed head, a feat emblematic of how it is Gawain finds himself in bed with the Green Knight's wife, Yvain with Escalados the Red's, and of wooing in general in many Celtic tales.

Several pages later, after leaving the valley and having successfully just said no to Morgain's beautiful substitute, he comes to another pool in a steep ravine, in which lie the bodies of two courtly lovers, he

dispatched by her husband and she by despair. No one has been able to retrieve them, but Lancelot is such a perfect lover that he can and does, thus making it possible for them to have a decent burial. The Valley of the False Lovers, it is apparent, is tied up in an essential way with pools that the sorceress uses to kill practically anyone who plunges into love.

In sum, the Morgain of the prose *Lancelot*, who represents a very closely followed model for her counterpart in SGGK, takes the heavenly, essentially valkyrielike qualities of Geoffrey and Layamon's Morgains and gives them a different value, equating them with the characteristics of a water goddess, desirable and desirous but dangerously powerful, smart, devious, and vengeful. The sweetly mothering, or sistering, virgin has become the man-eating siren.

If I have successfully made the case that this image of women is in part responsible for the late Morgain, then the question arises of why this tradition was less important in the early period of Arthurian literature. Two plausible explanations come to mind. First, the Vanir were associated not with the nobles, about and for whom most narrators wrote, but with non-warriors, whose fears and fantasies were less commonly recorded in "high" literature. Secondly, tales of *femmes fatales* let a nightmarish version of unpleasant realities, i.e., that women have always had real power in the realm of love and children, intrude on a heroic male fantasy in which, in spite of an unfaithful wife and a treacherous son-surrogate, the fallen hero gets a golden parachute and a more tender woman than his ex-wife ever was. This rosy view of how a man's life may well turn out strikes me as appropriate in the context of the twelfth-century creation of the ideal of chivalry. By the different time of SGGK, and in the different place of the French prose romances, a more tragic sense of chivalry rang truer.

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SOME OBSERVATIONS
ON THE DATES AND CIRCUMSTANCES
OF THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY
PORTUGUESE AND CASTILIAN TRANSLATIONS
OF JOHN GOWER'S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

In his Introduction to the standard edition of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, G. C. Macaulay states that this literary work was "the earliest English book that made its way beyond the limits of its own language".¹ This reference is to Juan de Cuenca's *Confisyon del amante*, a Castilian prose translation which, according to Cuenca himself, was based on a previous Portuguese version by Robert Payn, an English canon of Lisbon Cathedral:

(E)ste libro es llamado Confisyon del amante, el qual conpuso Juan Goer, natural del rreyno de Ynglaterra. E fue tornado en lenguaje portogues por Rroberto Paym, natural de dicho rreyno, e canonjgo de la çibdad de Lixboa. E despues fue sacado en Lenguaje castellano por Juan de Cuenca, vesjno de la çibdad de Huete...²

¹.- G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The Complete works of John Gower* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901) vol. II, *The English Works*, p. vii. Subsequent quotations of Gower's poem are made to this edition.

².- Juan de Cuenca, trans., *Confisyon del amante*, manuscript g-ii-19 of the Library of the Royal Monastery of El Escorial. Succeeding references to *Confisyon del amante* are from this manuscript.

Moreover, in the prologue to the 'Leal conselheiro' (c.1438), the Portuguese king D. Duarte mentions a *Livro do amante*,¹ and in a catalogue of King Duarte's library there is a book listed under the title of *O Amante*.² Some critics maintain that both titles refer to one book which they identify as the lost Portuguese version of *Confessio Amantis*.³ However, up to now no manuscript of this version has been found, and its very existence has been questioned by other scholars.⁴

The Castilian translation of the poem survives in a single manuscript (g-ii-19) kept in the Library of the Monastery of El Escorial. Unfortunately there is only one edition of the text, today a bibliographical rarity, published in Germany in 1909 under the title of *Confision del amante por Joan Goer*.⁵ This edition is far from reliable because of the many errors it contains. It was based on a draft transcription of the Escorial manuscript begun by the German Hispanist Herman Knust, who died in 1889 before finishing his work, and later completed by another German Hispanist, Adolf Birch-Hirschfeld. Its unreliability not only derives from the considerable difficulties that the process of transcription of this particular MS

¹.- See Joseph M. Piel, ed., *Leal conselheiro* (Lisboa: Bertrand, 1942), p. 7.

².- Ibidem, p. 415; see also João José Alves Dias, ed., *Livro dos conselhos de El-Rei D. Duarte (Livro da Cartuxa)* (Lisboa: ed. Estampa, 1982), pp. 206-8.

³.- Cf. J.M. Piel, op. cit., pp. xii and 7; see also F. Costa Marques, ed., *Leal conselheiro e Livro da ensinança de bem cavalgar toda sela* (Coimbra: Colecção literaria Atlantida), pp. 27 and 40.

⁴.- Cf. Lilia Granillo Vázquez, "Anglo-Hispanic Relations in the Late Middle Ages, with Some Special Attention to the Spanish Translation of *Confesio Amantis*", Unp. M. A. diss., University of York, 1980, p. 41.

⁵.- Adolf Birch-Hirschfeld, ed., *Confision del Amante por Joan Goer* (Leipzig: Dr. Seele & Co., 1909).

entails, but also from these German scholars' limited knowledge of medieval Spanish.¹

Since the publication of Macaulay's *The complete Works of John Gower*, where there are some observations on both the English MS used for the translation and the Escorial MS, the Spanish version of Gower's poem has been the subject of some research.² The main issues are related to the circumstances of the presence of *Confessio Amantis* in the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the actual date of the translation.

One of the most extensive analyses of the Castilian text is Robert W. Hamm's unpublished Ph. D. dissertation.³ This is a serious attempt to solve many of the questions that arise from the study of Juan de Cuenca's text, Gower's poem and Adolf Birch-Hirschfeld's edition. However, in my opinion Hamm does not find satisfactory answers. He states that the German edition of *Confisyon del amante* contains more than 17,500 errors⁴ and that he had to make a new

¹.- I have made some comments on this point in "Estudio y edición anotada de la traducción medieval al castellano del 'Libro II' de *Confessio Amantis* de John Gower". Unp. M. A. diss., Universidad de Extremadura, 1985.

².- See Robert F. Yeager, *John Gower Material. A Bibliography through 1979* (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1981); see also Emilio Lorenzo "Una traducción histórica", *ABC*, Sept. 20th, 1984, p. 1.; "Sobre las malas traducciones", *Actas de las Jornadas de Traducción* (Ciudad Real: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1986), pp. 9-18; "La primera traducción del inglés", in *Fidus Interpres. Actas de las Primeras Jornadas de Historia de la Traducción*, ed. Julio-César Santoyo (León: Universidad de León, 1987), pp. 354-66; I have also dealt with this aspect in "Análisis diferencial de *Confessio Amantis* de John Gower y su traducción, *Confisyon del amante* de Juan de Cuenca", unp. Ph. D. diss., Universidad de Extremadura, 1989.

³.- Robert Wayne Hamm, "An Analysis of the *Confisyon del Amante*, the Castilian Translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*", unp. Ph. D. diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1975.

⁴.- Ibidem, p. 208.

transcription of the Escorial MS.¹ Since this transcription has never been published it can only be judged by the textual references he uses in his thesis. But even from these quotations it is obvious that his transcription is far from being a faithful one. Hamm offers two lists of *variants* which go along with the study of the Escorial MS and Birch-Hirschfeld's edition. One of the lists² consists of some errors he found in Birch-Hirschfeld's text; however, when he tries to improve this edition he shows that his interpretation of the Castilian MS is not always correct.³ The other list⁴ includes some passages from the Castilian text which are obviously different in content from Gower's original poem. But Hamm's analysis of these deviations from the original -often clearly deliberate on the part of the translators-⁵ is rather superficial.

It is obvious that the Castilian MS is not a holograph. The overt presence of at least two different hands, in addition to the numerous corrections and emendations, as well as the existence of some textual lacunae, show that the Escorial MS is not the original of Juan de Cuenca's translation. It is a copy. Moreover, according to C.P. Wagner, "there is some evidence of the influence of an Aragonese scribe".⁶

¹.- See Robert Wayne Hamm, "A Critical Evaluation of the *Confisyon del Amante*, the Castilian Translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*", *Medium Ævum*, vol. 47, 1 (1978), p. 105, note 6.

².- See R. W. Hamm, "An Analysis of the *Confisyon del Amante* ..." op. cit. , p. 208.

³.- See "Análisis diferencial de *Confessio Amantis* de John Gower y su traducción, *Confisyon del amante* de Juan de Cuenca", op. cit., p. 19.

⁴.- Cf. "List of Substantive Variants", in R. W. Hamm, "An Analysis of the *Confisyon del Amante* por Joan Goer (Leipsig, 1909)", *Romanic Review*, vol. 2 (January-March, 1911), p. 460.

⁵.- See "Análisis diferencial de *Confessio Amantis* ..." , op. cit.

⁶.- Charles Philip Wagner, "Review of A. Birch-Hirschfeld, ed., *Confisyon del Amante* por Joan Goer (Leipzig, 1909)", *Romanic Review*, vol. 2 (January-March, 1911), p. 460.

As for the date of the Escorial MS, José Amador de los Ríos thinks that the text was written towards 1400.¹ His opinion is based on the 1858 catalogue of the Escorial MSS where it is specified that, judging by the characteristics of the handwriting, the text was probably written at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Adolf Birch-Hirschfeld, who also bases his hypothesis on the same catalogue, suggests the same date.² Later, another well-known scholar, Julian Zarco Cuevas, in his catalogue of the Castilian MSS of El Escorial, states that it is a mid-fifteenth century text.³

Robert W. Hamm also deals with this aspect and makes some interesting observations on the watermarks of MS g-ii-19. In his opinion, these watermarks could be the same as those found in paper manufactured between 1437 and 1542.⁴ However, a word of caution is necessary as regards the watermarks found during this period. It is true that around 1437 there was a type of watermark with a motif that vaguely resembles those in MS g-ii-19 -a hand with some kind of flower or star above the third finger. Yet, the design of the watermarks in the Escorial MS is much more elaborate and elegant. They are very much the same as those found in paper manufactured towards 1487 and later. Therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that the paper of MS g-ii-19 was made around the last decades of the fifteenth century. The MS also has six blank folios, three at the beginning and three at the end. There is no doubt that these were added at a much later date -probably when repairing the binding- since, as Hamm says, the quality of this paper differs considerably

¹.- José Amador de los Ríos, *Historia crítica de la literatura Española* (Madrid, 1865), vol. VI, p. 46.

².- See A. Birch-Hirschfeld, *op. cit.*, p. iii.

³.- Cf. Julián Zarco Cuevas, *Catálogo de los manuscritos castellanos de la Real Biblioteca de El Escorial* (Madrid: 1924), p. 169.

⁴.- R. W. Hamm, "An Analysis of the *Confisyon del amante ...*" *op. cit.*, p. 26.

from that of the rest of the MS, and judging from its watermarks, it could be paper of Jesuit manufacture.¹ In keeping with this, Hamm thinks that the date of the Escorial MS could be fixed between 1400 and 1450, because the watermarks that appear around 1437 “create no obstacle to early dating of the manuscript.”² Hamm finds further support for this idea in J.E. Keller’s comments on the Escorial MS in a letter addressed to John H. Fisher on September 5th, 1974:

I have reached the conclusion that it is probably a fifteenth century script or one from the late fourteenth century. Beyond that I cannot go... A scribe writing in the late 1300 [’s] probably did not change his handwriting just because he lived on into another century. This particular text resembles several I know that were penned as late as 1450, and the best I can do is state that I think it was written at that time.³

On the other hand, the 1977 volume of *Bibliography of Old Spanish Texts*, edited by the Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Spanish, indicates that the Escorial MS is a mid-fifteenth century text;⁴ and in the 1984 volume of this *Bibliography* the date of the MS is set somewhat more precisely between 1440 and 1460.⁵

Nevertheless, a careful analysis of the type of handwriting in the Escorial MS reveals that it is the same cursive in use towards the end of the fifteenth century. Therefore, the dates given by the 1984

¹.- Ibidem, p. 23.

².- Ibidem, p. 11.

³.- See R. W. Hamm, “An Analysis of the *Confisyon del amante ...*”, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

⁴.- Antonio Cárdenas, Jean Gilkinson, et al., *Bibliography of Old Spanish Texts* (the Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Spanish, 1984), No. 251, p. 18.

⁵.- Charles B. Faulhaber, Angel Gómez Moreno, et al., *Bibliography of Old Spanish Texts* (The Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Spanish, 1984), No. 251, p. 18.

volume of the *Bibliography of Old Spanish Texts* seem the most approximate ones; but the year 1460 cannot be considered as a limit, for it is true that there are early sixteenth-century documents written in the same cursive characters as the Escorial MS. This is also corroborated by most of the watermarks analysed by Hamm, even though he did not draw the right conclusions. In addition to all this, in some late fifteenth-century records of the City Council of Huete, I found identical watermarks to those in MS gii-19, and the type of writing was also similar. In consequence, it is reasonable to believe that the date of production of the Escorial MS could be fixed within the last decades of the fifteenth century.

After these observations on the extant manuscript of the Castilian version of *Confessio Amantis*, the next step is to determine the date of the translation with as much precision as possible. It is important to know this particular fact because of its relevance when undertaking a thorough comparative analysis of the source language text and the Castilian version. So far most of the information we have about Juan de Cuenca is contained in the preface to *Confisyon del amante*. On the other hand, as has been pointed out, there is no reference to the date or the purpose of the translation in the Escorial MS. Therefore, only a close textual analysis, together with an examination of the possible historical circumstances related to the transmission of Gower's poem to the Iberian Peninsula, could shed some light on these issues.

In taking up the question of the transmission of *Confessio Amantis* to the Iberian Peninsula, all the hypotheses refer to the relationships of the English, Portuguese and Castilian royal families during the last decades of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth.

H. R. Patch¹ thinks that *Confessio Amantis* could have arrived in Castile through Catherine of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's daughter and wife of Enrique III of Castile. He also suggests that Chaucer, whose friendship with Gower is well known, could have had something to do with the transmission of Gower's book to the Castilian Court. Patch draws attention to that possibility because of the marriage of the Duke of Lancaster to Katharine Swynford, Chaucer's sister-in-law. Yet, as this scholar also notes, it is difficult to find out whether Lancaster had any interest in literature.² In any case, the fact is that *Confessio Amantis* was addressed to one of the members of the Lancaster family, the Earl of Derby, later Henry IV:

Explicit iste liber, qui transeat, obsecro liber
Ut sine liuore vigeat lectoris in ore.
Qui sedet in scannis celi det ut ista Iohannis
Perpetuis annis stet pagina grata Britannis.
Derbi Comiti, recolumn quem laude periti,
Vade liber purus, sub eo requiesce futurus.³

Another critic, J. M. Manly,⁴ considers that *Confessio Amantis* could have been brought to the Iberian Peninsula through Portugal, since John of Gaunt's other daughter, Philippa of Lancaster, was married to the Portuguese king João I.

R. W. Hamm puts forward a hypothesis which attempts to explain not only the way Gower's poem reached the Iberian Peninsula, but

¹.- Howard Rollin Patch, *On Reading Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), p. 35.

².- Ibidem.

³.- See G. C. Macaulay, op. cit., vol. II, p. 478.

⁴.- John Matthews Manly, "On the Question of the Portuguese Translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*", *Modern Philology*, vol. 27 (1930), p. 472.

also the reason for a double translation. He assumes that *Confessio Amantis* was probably sent to both Catherine and Philippa of Lancaster, who would have ordered a translation as a present for their husbands. Therefore “João would have needed a Portuguese book [and] Henry a Castilian”.¹

In my opinion, Hamm’s explanation of the presence of Gower’s poem in Portugal and Castile, its translation and purpose, though convincing, is nevertheless misleading. According to him, it would be justifiable to think that both translations were finished by the beginning of the fifteenth century, and that the source text was a copy of the 1390 recension of *Confessio Amantis*. The fact that the Spanish version includes the original reference to Richard II and the eulogy to Chaucer, eliminated from the 1393 recension,² would seem to corroborate Patch, Manly or Hamm’s hypotheses.

Most critical opinions, therefore, agree on fixing the date of the translation towards 1400. This has been the traditionally accepted date, despite the fact that all the scholars mentioned in this paper have not accounted for the earliest critical reference to *Confisyon del amante* that I have been able to find. In 1788, Francisco Pérez Bayer, in his edition of Nicolás Antonio’s *Bibliotheca Hispana Vetus* (first published in 1672), categorically states that *Confisyon del amante* was completed *circa 1404*:

Ioannem de Cuenca Optensem (de Huete) auctorem versionis
Hispanicae operis Ioannis Goer Angli cui titulus: *La Confession*

¹.- R. W. Hamm, “An Analysis of the *Confisyon del amante* ...” op. cit., p. 20.

².- See G. C. Macaulay, op. cit., p. clxviii.

del amante, circa annum MCCCCIV. Habetur versio in Bibliotheca
Escorialensi Lit G. plut. ii. n. 19 [sic].¹

However, despite the apparent coherence of the hypotheses already mentioned, there are grounds for questioning their validity, as has been recently pointed out by Emilio Lorenzo, member of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española.² In my opinion, it is within the text of the Castilian version, and not only in its external circumstances, where the answers are to be found.

In the first paragraph of the preface to his translation, Juan de Cuenca makes a statement that has been completely overlooked up to now, though it contains an invaluable key for establishing a time limit before which the Castilian translation could never have been made: Cuenca identifies himself as “vesjno de la çibdad de Huete” -“an inhabitant of the city of Huete”-. But Huete, today a small town in the province of Cuenca, was granted the privilege of *çibdad* (city) by the Castilian king Juan II (son of Enrique III and Catherine of Lancaster) at the request of his falconer, Pero Carrillo, also from Huete, on the 26th of July, 1428.³ Therefore, Juan de Cuenca could not have

¹.- Nicolás Antonio, *Bibliotheca Hispana Vetus*, ed. Francisco Pérez Bayer (Madrid: 1788), p. 203. There is an earlier reference to *Confisyon del amante*, it appears in MS K. I. 23, fol. 134, the 1576 inventory of books transferred by King Felipe II to the Escorial library. In this inventory, the royal compiler simply wrote: “Confession del amante, compuesto por Iuan Gozi Ingles Traducido en portugues, y después en castellano por Iuan de Cuenca vezino de Huete”.

².- Emilio Lorenzo, “La primera traducción del inglés”, op. cit., p. 356.

³.- The charter containing the royal privilege conferred to Huete is kept in very good condition in the local archives of this town. This is the transcription I have made of this document signed by king Juan II of Castile on 26th July, 1428: “Don Iohan, por la graçia de Dios Rey de Castilla, de Leon, de toledo, de Galisia, de Seuilla, de Cordoua, de Murçia, de Iahen, del Algarbe, de Algezira; et sennor de Visscaya e de Molina. Porque muy propia cosa es a los [rreyes e]* principes fazer graçias e merçedes a las villas e lugares de sus rregnos e sennorios, e a los sus subditos e naturales dellas, mayormente quando entienden que son dignos e bien mereçientes de las dichas merçedes. Por ende, yo entiendo esto, e

referred to Huete as a *çibdad* (city) before the date when this document was issued, that is, 1428. This of course rules out the hypotheses which maintain that Juan de Cuenca's translation had been completed by 1400. For the same reason, Hamm's thesis can no longer be sustained, since it was mainly based on the traditionally

otrosi por faser bien e merçed a la mi villa de Huepte, el al[caide]* del castillo, alguasiles, rregidores, caualleros, escuderos e omnes buenos, e vesinos e moradores de la dicha villa e de su tierra. et por quanto me lo suplico e pidio por merçed Pero Carrillo de Huepte, mi falconero mayor et mi guarda mayor de la dicha villa e de su tierra, et mi alcall mayor de las alçadas de la dicha villa. Et entendiendo que cunple asi a mi seruiçio, por çiertas e ligitimas causas que a ello [me mouieron, commo] de mi çierta çiencia e poderio Real e deliberada voluntad, es mi merçed de faser e constituyr e estableçer, et por esta mi carta, e con ella, fago e constituyo e establesco çibdat la dicha villa de Huepte; et quiero e mando que de aqui adelante para sienpre jamas sea llamada la çibdat de Huepte, et que non sea llamada villa. Et que aya e gose en quanto çibdat, et asi commo çibdat, de todas las onrras, e libertades que han e de que gosar e deuen auer e gosar qualquier o qualesquier de las otras çibdades de los mis rregnos e sennorios por ser çibdades commo dicho es. Sobre lo qual mando a los infantes, duques, condes, rricos omnes, maestros de las ordenes, priores, e a los del mi Consejo e oydores de la mi Audiencia, et al mi justiçia mayor, et a los alcalles e alguasiles, e notarios, e otros justiçias e ofiçiales qualesquier de la mi Casa, e Corte, e Chançilleria; et a los a los otros alcalles e alguasiles, rregidores, caualleros, escuderos e omnes buenos de todas las çibdades e villas e lugares de los mis rregnos e sennorios, et a qualquier o qualesquier dellos que guarden e fagan guardar a la dicha mi çibdad de Huepte todas las cosas susodichas, e cadi una dellas, segund que mejor e mas conplidamente; e guarden e deuen guardar a cada vna de las otras çibdades de los mis rregnos e sennorios en quanto çibdades commo dicho es. Et que les non vayan, nin pasen, nin consientan yr nin pasar contra ello, nin contra parte dello por gelo quebrantar, nin menguar en todo nin en parte, nin en cosa alguna dello; sobre lo qual mando al mi chançeller e notarios, et a los otros is ofiçiales que estan a la tabla de los mis sellos, que den, e libren, e pasen, e sellen a la dicha mi çibdad de Huepte mi carta e preuillejo lo mas firme e bastante que les conpliere e menester ouiere en esta rrason. Por tal manera que ella sea çibdad en agora e de aqui adelante para sienpre jamas. Et asi llamada et auida, gose e pueda gosar de dichas preheminençias, e prerrogativas, e honrras, e libertades, et de todas las otras cosas susodichas et de cadi vna dellas, bien e conplidamente commo dicho es. Et los vnos et los otros non fagan ende de por alguna manera so pena de la mi merçed, et de dies mill maravedis a cada vno para la mi Camara. Et esto mande dar esta mi carta firmada de mi nonbre e sellada con mi sello. Dada en Tordesillas, Salvador JhesuChristo de mill e quatroçientos e veynte e ocho annos. Yo el dottor Fernando Dias de Toledo, oydor e referendario del Rey, e su relator e secretario, la fise escreuir por su mandado. Yo el Rey”

*Illegible in the original.

accepted dates for the translation; and obviously, the Castilian text could never have been written as a present for Enrique III, who died in 1406. However, on the question of the possible arrival of *Confessio Amantis* in Portugal through Philippa of Lancaster, Manly or Hamm's hypotheses could be perfectly acceptable.

As for the date of Robert Payn's Portuguese version, most critics tend to believe that it could be fixed during João I's reign and in Philippa of Lancaster's lifetime. This is also J. M. Piel's opinion, based on some statements by King Duarte in the prologue to his *Leal conselheiro*.¹ In it, the Portuguese king says that he "ordered the translation of certain chapters from other books, for they would help him in his writings".² He also expresses his intention to cite his literary authorities, following the example of the author of the *Livro do amante* (the book of the lover), where as D. Duarte says, "truthful stories and good advice could be found". These are his words:

filhando em esto exemplo daquel autor do *Livro do Amante* que certas estorias em el screveo de que se filham grandes boos conselhos e avisamentos.³

J. M. Piel, in his edition of the *Leal conselheiro*, affirms that the book mentioned by D. Duarte is in fact *Confessio Amantis*, and that it was translated into Portuguese at the request of king João I:

Livro do Amante. Trata-se da "Confessio Amantis", do inglês John Gower (+ 1408), célebre poema alegórico traduzido para português a instancias de D. João I pelo cónego da igreja de Lisboa Roberto

¹.- See Joseph M. Piel, ed., op. cit., note 1, p. 7.

².- "fiz tralladar en el alguus certos capitolllos doutros livros, por me parecer que faziam decaraçom e ajuda no que screvia" (Joseph M. Piel, ed., op. cit., p. 6.).

³.- Ibidem, p. 7.

Payn. A versão portuguesa, que parece estar perdida, figura no catálogo dos livros de D. Duarte sob o título de “O Amante”. Desta versão fez-se uma tradução castelhana, conservada no manuscrito g-ii-19 do Escorial, cf. Amador de los Ríos, VI, 46.¹

From D. Duarte’s brief description of the subject matter of this *Livro do amante* -no doubt a book of didactic and moral content-, and his overt intention to cite the sources of his inspiration -a common practice in John Gower at a time when such an attitude was not the norm-, it seems likely that the book alluded to may well be *Confessio Amantis*. Nevertheless, Piel does not bring forward any evidence to support the idea that the translation was made during King João I’s reign.

In an attempt to assign an approximate date to the Portuguese translation, P. E. Russell considers two possibilities: “either *before* 1399 or *after* 1415”; and he adds:

I incline, if only tentatively, towards the latter hypothesis [...] it is rather unlikely that Robert Payn, in view of his nationality and his close contacts with Philippa herself, would have translated Gower’s favourable remarks about Richard II between 1399 and Philippa’s own death in 1415 [...] Certainly after Henry V’s rehabilitation of Richard II’s memory (1413) there was no reason for an Englishman living in Portugal to be embarrassed about reproducing Gower’s favorable references to the deposed English king.²

¹.- Ibidem.

².- P. E. Russell, “Robert Payn and Juan de Cuenca, Translators of the *Confessio Amantis*”, *Medium Ævum*, vol. 30, 1 (1961), pp. 31-32.

There is no doubt that Russell's reasoning is more convincing than Piel's and the previous critics, but it still remains only conjectural.

The Castilian text, however, provides some key information which, in my opinion, is decisive in order to fix the date of the Portuguese translation within a reasonable period of time. I refer to a very exact monetary parity between the currencies of two different countries, and it can be found in the "Tale of the King and his Steward's Wife" (Vv. 2643-2858). In this *exemplum* Gower writes:

The king him bad upon the nede
That take an hundred pounds he scholde,
And yive it where that he wolde
(v. 2718-20)

But in the Castilian version, these lines are translated as

el rrey le dixo que tomase seys çientas coronas e las diese donde
quisiese ... (f. 216 v. b.)

In this brief fragment, an exclusive element of the society in which *Confessio Amantis* was conceived is replaced by another element belonging to one of the recipient cultures. It is the equivalence given by the translator between the English *an hundred pounds* and the *seys çientas coronas* (six hundred *coronas*) in the Castilian version. Nevertheless, as far as the *coronas* (crowns) mentioned in Juan de Cuenca's text are concerned, a careful study is necessary.

From the Castilian passage quoted above, it would be easy to assume that the *coronas* mentioned by Cuenca are either a Castilian monetary unit of his time or some kind of fractional currency. But it is well known that towards the end of the Middle Ages there were no Castilian coins of such a denomination.

On the contrary, the term *corôa* (*corona*, crown) was used in Portugal, but it did not designate any specific type of coinage;¹ either *corôa* or *dobra* were terms used to express the amount of 120 Portuguese *reaes* during D. Duarte's reign (1433-1438). The *corôa*, therefore, was a Portuguese monetary concept conceived to facilitate monetary equivalences in mercantile activities with foreign countries, including of course with England. Since during the Middle Ages foreign gold and silver coins circulated as freely as the national ones, it became necessary to determine some form of exchange rate which, at the same time, would protect the national currency.² Accordingly, and in view of the devaluation of the Portuguese monetary unit, João I tried to elaborate a series of regulations; but these ordinances were never enforced.³

This was the reason why D. Duarte had to assign an invariable value to the foreign gold and silver coins that were in circulation in Portugal.

From these observations on the Portuguese *corôas* (*coronas*), the first obvious conclusion that can be drawn is that the monetary equivalence given in Cuenca's text can only be explained by the fact that the Castilian translator literally followed Robert Payn's Portuguese version.

However, this explanation is also the key to another important conclusion in relation to the date of the Portuguese translation. From D. Duarte's ordinances on the value of foreign currency,⁴ we know

¹.- See Antonio de Sousa Silva Costa Lobo, *Historia da sociedade em Portugal no século XV e outros estudos históricos* (Lisboa: Cooperativa Editora, Historia Critica, 1979), note 1, p. 367.

².- Ibidem, p. 362.

³.- Ibidem, pp. 362-3.

⁴.- Ibidem, p. 420; see also João José Alves Dias, op. cit.

that in 1433, the Portuguese king fixed a value of 245 Portuguese *reaes* for the English *gold noble*. Since this coin was 1/3 of an English pound, one pound was worth 735 *reaes*. At the same time, the Portuguese monetary concept used in commercial transactions, the *corôa*, had been assigned a value of 120 *reaes* by D. Duarte. Therefore, the value of one English pound was 6'125 *corôas*, or, in other words, 100 pounds were worth 612'5 *corôas*.

The monetary equivalence transmitted through Juan de Cuenca's text (*an hundred pounds = seys çientas coronas*) is so close to these calculations that, in my opinion, there is no doubt that Robert Payn's translation was written after 1433 and before 1438, the years of D. Duarte's short reign and most intense literary activity.

Similarly, there is no contradiction between these dates and the years in which it is known that Robert Payn lived in Portugal. P. E. Russell first found the name of the Anglo-Portuguese translator on a list of the personnel in Philippa of Lancaster's service (c. 1402),¹ with an indication that his salary was 1650 Portuguese *lljbras*. Although Payn's occupation was not specified on the list, it is clear that at that time he was not a member of the clergy, for these were included in different group. Russell also found Robert Payn's name in a document of the lease of a house dated in Lisbon on the 25th of November, 1430.² No other reference has been found to Robert Payn, but as Russell demonstrates in his article, it is obvious that Payn stayed in Portugal after Philippa of Lancaster's death, settled there, and probably remained in close contact with the royal family. Thus, it is very likely that D. Duarte, in view of Payn's position as a canon -no doubt a man of some learning with knowledge of both English and

¹.- Cf. P. E. Russell, op. cit., p. 28; see also *Monumenta Henricina* (Coimbra: 1960), vol. 1, pp. 280-93

².- P. E. Russell, op. cit., p. 29. P. E. Russell, op. cit., p. 29.

Portuguese-, decided to ask him to translate *Confessio Amantis*, a book that had probably been part of the royal library since the time of Queen Philippa.

There is one point which still remains unsolved; the transmission of Gower's poem to Castile and its translation into Castilian. In order to find an answer, it would be necessary to take into consideration the relationships between Juan II of Castile and D. Duarte. From the chronicles of the Castilian king¹ and also from some of the extant letters D. Duarte sent to Juan II,² it is clear that their friendship was not only based on their family ties (they were cousins), but that they also shared a common interest in literature and in translation, and no doubt there was an exchange of opinions and of books between the two kings. There is some evidence in this respect. Such evidence I take to be, for example, the translations that Bishop Alfonso de Cartagena (1384-1456) made for both D. Duarte and the Castilian king. Alfonso de Cartagena translated the five books of Seneca for Juan II,³ and Cicero's book of Rhetoric for D. Duarte.⁴ In the same way, there is a strong probability that Juan de Cuenca translated *Confessio amantis* from the Portuguese version at the request of Juan II. Since Cuenca's version was written after 1428, it is plausible to assume that this translation was also the result of the cultural activities carried out by D. Duarte and Juan II, and therefore, it is very likely that it was written at some time between 1433 and 1438.

¹.- Cf. Juan Mata Carriazo, ed., *Crónicas del halconero de Juan II, Pedro Carrillo de Huete* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1946).

².- See João Alves Dias, op. cit., pp. 90-1.

³.- This translation was published in Antwerp in 1548.

⁴.- This is the *incipit* to this translation: "Libro de marchio tulio çiferon q se llama de la Retorica. trasladado de latin en romance por el muy reuerendo don alfonso de cartajena obpo de burgos a ynstançia del muy esclareçido prinçipe don eduarte de portugal".

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At a time when most translations were of works of the Latin and Greek cultural traditions, it is a remarkable fact that John Gower's English poem was translated into two different languages almost simultaneously. It is clear evidence of the recognition Gower had received beyond the borders of his own country and his own language.

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NOTES

THE VIRGIN MARY AND ROMANCE

From its very start, the Middle English poem *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1300) is a work written to deny the best tunes to the Devil. Its unknown author begins it with a catalogue of heroes from romance, including Alexander, Brut, King Arthur, Gawain, Kay, Tristan, Yonec and Ysumbras; but then goes on to reject these fabled knights for the higher argument of religious poetry, and sets about this by praising the Blessed Virgin as a romance heroine. He calls her his “paramour” who saves him from sin, who has been faithful to him even when he has not been faithful to her, and whose love is sweeter than wild honey.

Qua truly loues this lemman,
This es the lue bes neuer gan;
For in this loue scho failes neuer,
And in that tother scho lastes euer.
Of suilk an suld ye mater take,
Crafty that can rimes make,
Of hir to malk bath rim and sang
And luue hir suette sun amang!¹

The present article has the aim of bringing together recent discussion of those *rimes* and *sanges* whose authors, as it were, took the *Cursor*

¹.- *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1968), 188.

poet, used romance modes to coax their listeners from secular verse onto the more wholesome fare of religious instruction. Others used romance modes because these had come to permeate their religious imagination; it was natural for them, like the author of *Ancrene Wisse* with his fable of Christ the lover-knight, to express religious truths in the language of romance. Some poems of great beauty result from this. Other poets used romance idiom because they were low-grade hacks, unwilling or unable to discard the way they told secular tales when they composed religious verse, which, characterized by the tone of the literary huckster, is of scant merit.

Each of these three kinds of verse should be distinguished from the religious poetry which is more closely related to secular lyric rather than romance, whether as sacred parody, or by appropriating the language and motifs (epistolary form, eulogy, inexpressibility topoi) of love lyric.¹

One of the most subtle of the religious lyrics influenced by romance is a verse (late 14C) from Oxford, Magdalen College, MS 60.

At a sprynge-wel under a thorn
Ther was bote of bale
A lytel here afor;
Ther bysyde stant a mayde,
Fulle of love ybounde.
Hoso wol seche trwe love,

¹.- On parody and the use of secular motifs in religious verse see *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. Theodore Silverstein (London, 1971), 110, and Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London, 1972), 58. One such topos (the world as paper) in English secular and religious verse is discussed in the present writer's 'Bepai'r ddaear yn bapir', *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic studies*, xxx (1982-83), 274-77.

Yn hyr hyt schal be founde.¹

Few Middle English poems are more pregnant in allusion than this one. It occurs in a Latin exemplum on penance, which tells how an impoverished nobleman was hindered by shame and his enemies from coming to court to receive grace. In the exemplum, the spring by the thorn is explained as Christ's wound that flowed blood and water, and the maiden as the Blessed Virgin, help of sinners; one may note, too, the ideas (found in other lyrics) of the wound in Christ's side as a healing and cleansing well, and the maiden beside the thornbush as the Virgin at Christ's Cross, counter to Eve at the tree of death. In addition, Peter Dronke has noted how in certain apocryphal Christian writings the Annunciation takes place at a fountain beside a thornbush; the fountain appears as early as the second-century *Protoevangelium* of St James and the *Gospel of pseudo-Matthew* based upon it. This linking of the Blessed Virgin with a spring by a thorn also appears in another English lyric (early 15C) on the Epiphany.²

But the poem contains in addition parallels from secular narrative. Professor Gray has referred to romances in which springs and thorn-trees are things of magic: Yvain encounters the gateway to the Other World at a swirling spring shadowed by a beautiful tree; Viviane enchants Merlin in the forest of Broceliande under a flowering thorn; Sir Cawline meets the fairy king at the thorn of Eldridge Hill; and

¹.- *A selection of Religious Lyrics*, ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford, 1975), 57. Cf. *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. R. T. Davies (London, 1963), 212, and Silverstein, 72. The poem is 420 in Carleton Brown and R. H. Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York, 1943) and its *Supplement* by R. H. Robbins and J. L. Cutler (Lexington, Kentucky, 1966).

².- Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric* (London, 1968), 69-70; Gray, *Themes*, 92-93e. Cf. *The Apocryphal New Testament*, tr. M. R. James (Oxford, 1924), 42, 74. The Epiphany lyric mentioned (*Index* 27330, 3527) is edited in Silverstein, 100-02 and (both versions) *The Early English Carols*, ed. R. L. Greene (Oxford, 1977), 68-69.

Graelent encounters his mistress, an otherworld *fée*, by a spring of clear sweet water. This may (or may not) be a sign of Celtic influence, since Celtic tradition commonly linked springs and fairy mistresses. In one Irish saga (9C) the fairy Édaín, for example, is found at the edge of a spring, 'washing her hair in a silver bowl with four golden birds on it, and little flashing jewels of purple carbuncle on the rims of the bowl.'¹

The poem also reflects the poetry of profane love in the phrase *bote of bale*, 'remedy of sorrow', and the image of being bound by love. This second Professor Gray has related to the *Carmina Burana*, the Middle English *Destruction of Troy* (c. 1400), and even the image on a Limoges casket, where the girl holds her lover with a chain round his neck. Other references to love's 'bridle' or 'noose' (*A womman thee hath in her laas!*) occur in *Kyng Alisaunder* (c. 1290), *Amis and Amiloune*, and Chaucer, a point underlined by the other religious examples of them in John of Grimestone's preaching book (1372). The image plainly came into vogue in late 14C England; and John of Grimestone's book shows that the author of 'At a wel-sprynge' was not the only religious writer to exploit it.²

Sophistication of a different kind appears in a balade of 15 stanzas rhyme royal, complete with acrostic, from a Bodleian manuscript containing various ME poems, including *Sir Degaré*. The courtly ambience of this poem, 'Away, feynt lufe, full of varyaunce!', an elaborate love-lyric to the Virgin, is more than usually obvious. Since the poem addresses the Virgin as heavenly mistress, there is a certain

¹.- Kenneth Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany* (Harmondsworth, 1971), 1811-82, and cf. M. W. Annear, 'Some Healing and Holy Wells of Wales' in *Wales and Medicine*, ed John Cule ([London,] 1975), 185-89.

².- Gray, *Themes*, 92-94; Bennett and Smithers, 34, 37, 281, 282.

logic in its introduction of a classic boy-meets-girl scenario of Middle English romance:

Par case sche be off hygh degre,
And I off lowe and pouer estate,
Yyit if fortune my frend wyll be,
I may her wyn, other erly or late.
I have knowyn sum so fortunate,
Wych though they were ful lowe of kyn,
Kyngys doghtyrs by grace dyd wyn.

The opening lines of the romance *The Squire of Low Degre* (c. 1450) put such situations in nutshell.

It was a squer of lowe degre
That loved the kings doughter of Hungre...¹

Another love poem to the Virgin, 'Edi beo thu heuene quene' (mid-13C), may be mentioned here as containing features perhaps as much due to romance as secular love lyric: the way the speaker renders homage to the BVM in feudal terms as her 'man' ('have mercy of thine knight', 'ic am thy mon'); and in the mention, once again, of the 'bond' of a love ('Ic em in thine lovebende') here called 'derne'. In *Floris and Blauncheflour* (? c. 1250) Clarice attends the lovers in bed 'dernelich and stille'; while the downwardly mobile romance links of the cliché 'derne love' are suggested by that anti-romance *The Miller's Tale*, where it describes Nicholas's brisk mode of dalliance.²

¹.- Grau. Selection, 59, 133; cf. Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*, 2279-80; Index 456.

².- Davies, 64-67, 313; Silverstein, 24-26; *The Oxford Book of Medieval English Verse*, ed. Kenneth and Celia Sisam (Oxford, 1970), 42-44; Index 708. The poem is also edited

Themes and language which certainly belong to the relation of lover and mistress in romance appear in the lyric 'Haile be thu, mari maiden bright!' (earlier 14C), on the BVM's five Joys, from the Göttingen manuscript of *Cursor Mundi*. Of the Annuciation the poet says,

Ther thouy lay in thy bright bowr,
Levedy, quite as lily-flour,
An angel com fra hevene-towr,
Sant Gabriel,
And said: 'Levedy ful of blis, ay worth thee wel!'¹

This stanza has been discussed by Professor Gray, who has pointed out the influence of romance on it. 'Lily-white' and 'bright in bour' are clichés for the heroines of popular romance and lyric, duly pilloried in Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*, where the knight, beloved of 'many a mayde, bright in bour', has lily-white armour and a lily on his helmet.² But by talking of Gabriel, like a knight from his 'towr', entering the 'bour' where the Virgin 'lay', the poet goes further, by introducing romance associations somehow slightly shocking, with a *frisson* of the erotic. Professor Gray compares the Latin sequence (13C ?English), *Angelus ad Virginem*:

Angelus ad Virginem
Subintrans in conclave,

in *Medieval English Songs*, ed. E. J. Dobson and F. L. Harrison (London, 1979). Woolf, 127-128 and Gray, *Themes*, 56-57, provide comment on its motifs, while E. Talbot Donaldson, 'Idiom of Popular Poetry in the Miller's tale', in his *Speaking of Chaucer* (London, 1970), 19-20, comments on *derne love*.

¹.- Sisam, 190; *Index* 1029.

².- Bennett and Smithers, 321-22; *The Canterbury Tales*, VII 742m 866-67, 907.

Virgineis formidimem
Demulcens inquit 'Ave',

i.e., 'the angel, secretly entering her chamber, softly overcoming the virgin's fear, says to her "Hail".' How to take these verses is not entirely easy. One can refer to medieval traditions in which Christ is portrayed as the lover-knight, with the BVM as his beloved, as when Guillaume De Guilleville describes the Son of God seeing the Virgin from heaven and being charmed by her beauty. But one also see suggestions in both poems of a collapse of taste. The musical preferences of Chaucer's *hende* Nicholas (Who sang 'Angelus ad Virginem') do not inspire confidence.¹

Such fears are absent from another lyric discussed by Professor Gray, 'I sing of a maiden' (earlier 15C).

I syng of a mayden that is makeles,
Kyng of alle kynges to here sone che ches.

He cam also styлле ther his moder was
As dew in Aprylle that fallyt on the gras.

He cam also styлле to his moderes bowr
As dew in Aprille that fallyt on the flour.

He cam also styлле ther his moder lay
As dew in Aprille that fallyt on the spray.

Moder and maydyn was never non but che--
Wel may swych a lady Godes moder be!²

¹.- Yrjö Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine* (London, 1958), 208, 373; *Themes*, 104. Cf. *The Penguin Book of Latin Verse*, ed. Frederick Brittain (Harmondsworth, 1962), 275-77.

².- Gray, *Selection*, 4-5; cf. Davies, 155, Silverstein, 99, and Sisam, 432-33; *Index* 1367.

Once again we have words and concepts familiar from romance: this maiden is 'makeles', just as Criseyde herself was, 'In beaute first so stood she, makeless'; and, like a secular heroine, the 'lady' (significant word) of this lyric 'chose' the royal one who came to her 'bower'. But in this poem any hint of the worldly has vanished, in contrast to the English poem previous. One can only praise the art of its author in the way he transmuted his material.¹

For a contrast one may turn to a lament of the Virgin Mary (15C) which begins,

Listyns, lordyngus, to my tale
And ye shall here of on story,
Is bettur then outhur wyne or ale
That euer was made in this cuntry,
How iewys demyd my son to dye.
yohan a deth to hym thei drest.
'Alas!' seyde Mary that is so fre,
'That chylde is ded that soke my brest.'

The poem has been curtly judged, especially this stanza. It starts like any popular minstrel romance (compare first lines 1876 to 1910 and 1984 to 1996 in *The Index of Middle English Verse*), its mention of 'wyne or ale' at the same uncourtly level as Sir Thopas's oath 'on ale and breed'. It then introduces the Blessed Virgin in the first person, and then switches this to third person; confusion apart, it is in any case

¹.- *Troilus and Criseyde*, i. 172; Gray, *Themes*, 1011-06. In the 13C poem which supposedly gives the hint for the above 15C poem roles are reversed. It is Christ who chooses the Virgin (Woolf, 1433).

highly incongruous that the Blessed Virgin should address a company of seated and convivial nobility, as Rosemary Woolf pointed out; though a modern film director might dissent. However, it is more likely that the author of this poem is an incompetent hack rather than some fifteenth-century proponent of radical artistic progress. Another Marian production of similar style and audience may be mentioned here, *Miracles of Our Lady*, if only for Derek Pearsall's comment on its 'appeal to the most degraded taste for pious titillation.'¹

A different romance symptom appears in the hymn to the Virgin, 'Marye, maide milde and free' (c. 1325), perhaps by William of Shoreham, which addresses the Virgin thus:

Thou art the bushe of sinay,
Thou art the righte Sarray,
Thou hast y-brought us out of cry,
Of calenge, of the fende.
Thou art Cristes owne drury,
And of Davyes kende.

Few words are more part of popular romance idiom than 'drury', as is shown (backhandedly) by the fact that, except in his early translation *The Romaunt of the Rose*, Chaucer uses it precisely once, in (need one say?) *The Tale of Sir Thopas*, the second fit of which

¹.- Woolf, 259-60; *Index* 1899. On the *Miracles* cf. Gray, *Themes*, 255, Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977), 140, and *Index* 1984, etc. For a similar familiar attitude to the BVM, cf. my 'The Girdle of Prato and its Rivals', *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, xxxiii (1986), 96.

promises a *spelle* ‘of bataille and of chivalry, / And of ladyes *love-drury*.’ In *Floris and Blaunche flour*, Clarice speaks to Blaunche flour words full of *fin amour*, ‘That hele Ich wille youre bother *druri*’, whereupon she brings the happy lovers to the bedroom.

More edifying is *Ancrene Wisse*, which says of Christ’s words, *Pacem relinquo uobis: pacem meam do uobis*, ‘this wes his *druerie* thet he leafde ant yef ham in his departunge.’ The range of usage here demonstrates the extraordinary way ‘drury’ came to penetrate spirituality at the highest levels, especially remarkable since the root, related to Celtic words for ‘valour’ and ‘madness’ appears first (in St Aldhelm) with the medieval Latin *indruticare*, ‘flaunt, behave wantonly’. Chaucer’s use of it -or failure to use it- shows how drably *demodé* it had become in his time.¹

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¹.- Sisam, 164-65; cf. Davies, 103, *Index* 2107. On the word *drury* see Bennett and Smithers, 51, 229, 280 and Gray, *Themes*, 104.

DESTINY, FORTUNE AND PREDESTINATION
IN *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

In order to discuss our subject, we must take into account the cosmological beliefs and ideas that the Middle Ages shared in respect of Fortune, of Fate, and Predestination, so that we can apply them to Chaucer's works.

To the medieval mind, divine intelligence was divided into several manifestations, Providence among them; but it revealed itself through Destiny, in different ways and at different times. We thus find that Destiny is the ordering and the rules inherent in mutable things through which Providence relates one thing to another and establishes their proper order.¹

Destiny is carried out by divine spirits (who are the servants of Providence), by a soul ("anima mundi"), by Nature, by the heavenly movement of stars, by the virtue of the angels, the machinations of the devils, or by all these together.

Destiny is highly divided and its influence reaches very far from its main function, although above everything there is Fortune, a blind, whimsical force sometimes personified by a goddess, who determines the course followed by the various human beings in this world. The main characteristics of Fortune are mutability, instability and

¹.- Walter Clyde Curry, 1971, "Destiny in Troilus & Criseyde" II. In Richard J. Shoenck, ed. *Chaucer Criticism*, Indiana Univ. Press: 34-5.

irrationality - all of which tantamount to saying that, within the realms of Fortune, we can find the events a man may go through in his life.

This force, chaotic and illogical, can be either common or personal, depending on whether we deal with the universal experience of mankind or with the combination of two or more forces of destiny which affect specific events in the life of a person, such as birth, wealth or poverty, happiness or unhappiness, friendship, love and many others.

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer shows us how the common fate of the protagonists is caused by "Nature as Destiny"¹, that is to say, by the union of the various elements of the universe and the keeping of their own status as a result of the universal bond of love. The resulting fate is the work of Destiny, which is inherent in the movements of the stars and other planets. Thus we find in other works by the same author, "The Knight's Tale", for example, how the fate of Palamon and Arcite is presided over by the planets Mars and Saturn. At the end of "The Nun's Priest's Tale", Fortune, personified as the goddess Venus, changes the destiny of Chanteclair:

How, goode men, I prey yow hokneth alle
Lo, haw Fortune turneth sodeynly
the hope and pride eek hir enemy².

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer sometimes presents Fortune referring to some planet, with mysterious hints, about the tragic end of Troy in oracles, dreams and divinations.

¹.- Ibi.: 36-39.

².- Chaucer, "The Nun's Priest's Tale". In *The Canterbury Tales*: Lines 470-472.

In Book I, the author¹ begins with the double sorrow of Troilus, who loved Criseyde and whose love was rejected by her; but, imitating the tragedies of old, he develops this love story in the context of the long and cruel war of Troy, which will eventually end in the total destruction of the city.

Calchas, astrologer and magician, receives, in this work, several signs from different sources that strange powers are going to converge on Troy. The movements of the stars also agree with the forebodings of disaster, and, finally, Apollo, through an oracle, tells him of the triumph of the Greeks -and that is why Calchas looks for shelter among the vanquishers:

10 - Now fell it so that in the town there was
Dwelling a lord of great anthovities
A great dewign that cleped was Calchas,
that in science so expert was that he
knew well that Troye Sholde destroyed be
by answer of his god that hights thus:
Dan Phoebus or Apollo Delphicus.² (Book I)

This “Nature as Destiny” appears again when the love-story starts, with the prophecy that a powerful force of destiny will rule over the life and the actions of Troilus; it is love’s force, which will subdue the proud heart of Troilus, since no man can escape the blind power of love:

¹.- Walter Clyde Curry, op. cit.,: 40-41.

².- All the quotations which will, gradually, appear in the present essay and refer to *Troilus and Criseyde* are from the following edition by John Warrington, ed. 1966, *Troilus & Criseyde*, London: Everyman’s Library.

30 - And with that word he gan cast up the browe,
Ascaunces, Lo, is this not wysly spoken?
At which the god of love gan looken rowe
Richt for despyt, and shoop for to be wroken,
He kidde anoon his bowe nas not broken;
For suddenly he hit him at the fulle;
And yet as proud a peacock can he pulle.

31 - O blinde world! O blind entencicum!
How ofte fallet all th' efect contraire
of surquidry and foul presumpcioun;
for caught is proud, and caught is debonnaire.
This Troilus is clomben on the stairs;
And little weeneth that he must descenden,
But alday falleth thing that fools ne wenden. (Book I)

Afterwards, in love with Criseyde, he bemoans the fact that "Nature as Destiny" has put him in chains and that it should be precisely Criseyde, and not another Trojan woman, his particular Fortune made him fall in love with. Troilus does not understand the path followed by his fortune, cannot see why Destiny led him into this; therefore, when Pandarus offers him his help, he rejects it, but he is comforted by Pandarus's words on the equitableness of Fortune towards all men, now favourable, now unfavourable; but for ever turning its wheel and never giving it a rest.

In Book II, the movements of the stars, the Moon and Venus - above all- have a powerful influence on character; thus, Pandarus, before talking to his niece about Troilus's love for her, considers it necessary to ascertain whether the stars will be propitious on those days:

11 - And gen to call and dress him up to ryse,
Remenb'ing him his errand was done
From Troilus, and eke his great emprise;
And cast , and knew in good plight was the mone
to do viage, and took his way full sone
Unto his niece's palace there besyde.
Now Janus, god od entry, thou him gyde! (Book II)

When at last Troilus wins Criseyde's love, Venus is in the perfect position in the sky¹ to further the cause of love; this planet is favourable when it occupies the seventh house in the sky. Chaucer mentions that the other planets were also in the adequate position to help Troilus, although he only specifies clearly the position of Venus in its seventh house.

With this example, the author tells us that Criseyde, at the time when she bestows her love, is under the influence of "Nature as Destiny" and the position of planets which helps to bring about the special fortunes of character, different from the general power of Destiny.

In Book IV of the narrative there is a change of mood: personal fortune becomes adverse and tragedy begins to loom. So far the lovers had been happy, but "Nature as Destiny" has decreed their love and all the power of the movement of the stars had determined the conditions of their happiness; but now, as Chaucer says, following Boethius, a happy station is short-lived, since Fortune takes Criseyde from Troilus's arms and brings into its fateful wheel the Greek Diomedes:

¹.- Walter Clyde Curry, op. cit., : 44-47.

1 - But all too little (welaway the whye!)
Lasteth such joy, Y - thanked be Fortune
By sort, and by augury eke, trewely,
I dare well say the time is faste by
That fyr and flame on all the yown shall spread;
And thus shall Toye turn in ashen dead,

18 - For certain, Phoebus and Neptunus bothe,
That makeden the walles of the town,
Ben with the folk of Troy alwal so wrothe,
That they will bring it to confusioun
Right in despyt of King Laomedoun:
Because he nolde payen theme their hyre
The town of Troye shall ben set on fyre. (Book IV)

Chaucer,¹ having written Book IV, in which the forces of Destiny pushed the characters towards the final catastrophe, realized that the overall effect was not as precise or as complete as he had intended, and therefore, when Fortune turns against the protagonist, he introduced Troilus's famous monologue about predestination and free-will in relationship to God.

Critics are rather reluctant to accept this insertion. For example, Professor Kean,² thinks that the monologue is more important as a description of Troilus's character than because of the philosophy it contains. Professor Root³ considers that it is longer than it should

¹.- Ibid., : 52-53.

².- Patricia Margaret Kean, 1972, "The Philosophy of *Troilus & Criseyde*" In *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 175.

³.- R.K. Root, 1922. *The Poetry of Chaucer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 122.

really be, but that Hamlet's soliloquy is as much of a digression, and that it totally agrees with Troilus's character as seen by Chaucer.

Professor Rollin Patch¹ tries to find, first of all, the relationship between the monologue and the events in the rest of the story; for example, Troilus obtains ideas about these topics from clerks he talks to, and afterwards draws his own conclusions about God's foreknowledge of everything and about man's choice of action. In his story, Chaucer follows Boethius, with whom he is well acquainted, since the speaker in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* asks Lady Philosophy whether freedom of action exists; she answers it does, but he, after Lady Philosophy's intervention, states his own ideas, which like Troilus's, are of an opposed nature. Troilus thinks that man is not responsible for his actions, his merits or his shortcomings, since his reward or his punishment has been decided *a priori*.

On the other hand, there are passages where Chaucer tends to depart from his source. Thus, at the beginning of the monologue, he uses a text from Boethius different from what would seem adequate, in view of the fact that the sin of mankind would be almost perfect as an ending, but he uses it for the beginning in order to avoid any misinterpretation. At the end of the monologue in Boethius, Lady Philosophy also answers the young man in a surprising manner:

16 - I axe why thou wenest that thilke resouns
of hem that assoilen this questioun ne ben hat
speedful y-nough ne sufficient: the which "solicoun,
or the whiche risoun", for that it demeth that the
prescience his nat cause of necessitee to thinges to
comen, that he weneth it nat that freedorn of

¹.- Howard Rollin Patch, 1969. "Troilus on Predestination". In Edward Wagenknecht, ed *Chaucer, Modern Essays of Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 369-371.

will be destorbed or y-let by prescience,
(*De consolacione philosophiae*, Book II - Prose IV)

After this speech by Lady Philosophy, the speaker admits his error; Troilus, however, maintains his fatalistic points of view and does not offer any sort of possible solution to the problem.

Troilus's monologue on Predestination is really adequate to his dramatic character, but we cannot think that it contains Chaucer's views in this subject. Professor Rollin Patch¹ considers that Chaucer's sympathies are fully with his hero and that he went wholeheartedly into the difficulties of the lovers, but that he never set his values at this sentimental level or wanted, for a moment, to turn his work into a moral treatise.

At the end, we do not know Chaucer's views on Predestination, but we cannot enter into this because it would require a profound study of Destiny, Fortune and Predestination in all his works². What we can assert is Chaucer's great interest in these subjects, probably under the influence of Boethius.

Professor Kean³ considers that, notwithstanding all the circumstances involved in this work, this is really a love-story, allowing for the forms of philosophy it contains.

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¹.- Ibid.,: 374-375.

².- See, for example in "The Nun's Priest's Tale" the following lines "Witnesse on him that any parfit clerk is, / That in scole ...": 480-490.

³.- Patricia Margaret Kean, op. cit., : 177.

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INTERVIEW: "ON OLD ENGLISH STUDIES TODAY"

A. BRAVO GARCIA & FRED C. ROBINSON

BRAVO: I know you are associate editor of *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile*. Tell us about the importance and aim of the series.

ROBINSON: When it was founded under the patronage of Sir Winston Churchill a few years after World War II, the series was intended in part as a means of preserving the contents and appearance of precious English manuscripts which, it was feared, might be destroyed in subsequent nuclear wars. The idea was to have exact facsimiles of these manuscripts dispersed throughout the world so that if the library containing the manuscript were vaporized, the other libraries in other parts of the world would have copies and the text and format would be saved. Over the years this rather apocalyptic rationale for *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile* has given way to a more practical one. The editors of the series seek to make available to scholars the world over the primary evidence for the study of Anglo-Saxon culture. The importance of the series has perhaps been perceived more clearly than ever in recent years when we have witnessed an increasing awareness of the need to study Old English texts within their manuscript contexts.

BRAVO: Professor E. G. Stanley and you are the editors of the forthcoming volume in the series, volume 23. Can you give us some information about the texts comprised in this volume?

ROBINSON: Yes, gladly. In this volume we seek to present facsimiles of all poetic texts which have not previously been published in facsimile. This includes some major poems like *Meters* from the Old English version of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* and the poem *Solomon and Saturn* as well as *The Battle of Maldon* and poems from the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* and the numerous shorter poems included in volume 6 of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. We also include all verse texts found in Anglo-Saxon inscriptions, both runic and non-runic. In addition to providing readers with copies of all these texts, the volume displays dramatically the variety of different forms in which Old English poetry is preserved: in vellum manuscripts, in seventeenth-century transcriptions of manuscripts which no longer survive, in inscriptions, and in a few cases in modern printed books (e. g. *The Fight at Finnsburg*).

BRAVO: You are one of the International Advisers to the *Dictionary of Old English*, the other three advisers being Professor E. G. Stanley of Oxford, Professor Helmut Gneuss of Munich, and Professor Roberta Frank of Toronto. Can you tell us something about the present state of that project?

ROBINSON: Yes, the *DOE* is making impressive progress. I have just finished reading proof on one of the last sections of entries for the letter *B*. The letters *C* and *D* have already been published in microfiche. The staff and apparatus (including extensive electronic equipment) which have been put in place at the University of Toronto and are producing this work are very impressive indeed. I believe this dictionary will be one of the twentieth century's greatest scholarly achievements and will certainly be a landmark in the history of Old English scholarship. As you probably know, this project has suffered three tragic deaths of three young scholars who were crucial to the success of the *DOE* -Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, and Sharon Butler. And yet the dedicated and hard-working scholars there

have regrouped each time and gotten the project on track again. The present Chief Editor of the *DOE*, Antonette di Paolo Healy, who has just been named Angus Cameron Professor of English, has the project firmly in hand and is working with her excellent colleagues at a high level of quality and efficiency. But financial support for the project is a constant problem.

BRAVO: Turning to Old English literary scholarship today, I think you insist in your writings on the priority of “close reading” over historical or allegorical interpretations. Is that not so?

ROBINSON: Yes, I believe in close reading supported by solid philological evidence. Knowledge of the language -both synchronic and diachronic- is essential.

BRAVO: In this case you disagree with the arguments of Robertson, Huppé, etc., who defend allegorical readings based on the use of patristic sources.

ROBINSON: I believe that allegorical readings of medieval secular literature have been excessive. I do not deny the existence of allegory in medieval literature, but believe that when writers then intended that something should be understood allegorically they made this clear. Modern scholars don’t have to search for it.

BRAVO: Which critical method is most frequently used today in the analysis of Old English literary texts in America?

ROBINSON: I would say close reading and interpretations based upon textual criticism. A new interpretation will often begin with a new solution to an old textual crux; there are also some allegorizing interpretations, of course, and in Old English studies there has been a recent effort to resuscitate the oral-formulaic theory, although there does not seem to be much new to be added there. Here and there one begins to see attempts to apply some of the currently fashionable

critical ideologies to Old English studies -semiotics, feminism, deconstruction and all that. I suspect there will be a flurry of this but that it will not come to much.

BRAVO: In my opinion your “philosophy” of Old English literary study can be found in your “thoughtful and thought-provoking” book *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*. Is that correct?

ROBINSON: I would like to thank you for the adjectives you attach to my book. Yes, I attempted to read the poem closely and philologically and in the context of its cultural history, and this is the approach that seems to me most appropriate when reading Old English poetic texts.

BRAVO: In the journal *English Studies* we read the statement “... he who has not read Robinson has not read *Beowulf*.” Do you agree with the reviewer?

ROBINSON: I am very grateful to the reviewer for saying that, and I am very grateful to you for quoting it. If it is true, I rejoice.

BRAVO: As far as I know, *The Guide to Old English* by you and Bruce Mitchell is the most popular introductory text for Old English students. Why?

ROBINSON: Well, we have certainly been pleased by its reception. On the one hand, I suspect that students of Old English are confident that any book that Bruce Mitchell has a hand in has got to have something going for it. But also, I think it is significant that Bruce Mitchell says of the *Guide*, “It is the book that I would like to have had when I was first learning Old English.” We tried to write it from the point of view of the student. If we have a formula, that is it.

BRAVO: Quite recently Alvin Kernan published a fascinating and provocative book called *The Death of Literature*. We will probably agree that there is still vitality in literature, but don’t you think that Old

English literature is endangered by faculty politics and by literary criticism itself?

ROBINSON: I think that the study of all literature is endangered by these recently fashionable poses which are called “theories.” René Wellek’s *The Attack on Literature* (University of North Carolina Press, 1982) and Roger Kimball’s *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (Harper & Row, 1990) leave no doubt that the “literary scholars” who have claimed center stage in the eighties are undermining the study of literature; they encourage neglect of literary texts in favor of indulging in theoretical claims that literature is an illusion, that language is a game of deception and that no expression through human language is possible. The one branch of English literature which is least vulnerable to this attack, however, is, I believe, Old English, because scholars and students of Old English literature have never been persuaded to abandon the primary texts and go over to “theory.” If we medievalists continue to put literature in the center and to explore what the great writers of the past have had to say, then I believe we can be a light unto other literary scholars, showing them the way to recover from this malaise of nihilistic “theory” which has poisoned literary study in the past decade.

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REVIEWS

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NOTICES

ROWLAND, Jenny, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: a study and edition of the 'Englynion'*. Pp. x + 688. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990. £ 75.

Dr. ROWLAND'S book is an edition with exhaustive commentary of the 'Englynion', the series of verses dating from the ninth and tenth centuries which make up some of the earliest poetry in Welsh. These poems, some of the finest ever written in a Celtic language, seem to come from sagas (now lost) set in the eighth and ninth centuries, when there was fierce fighting between English and Welsh along the present border of Wales, and the Welsh were losing the last of their lowland territory to the English and being driven up into the hills for ever.

The background to these poems, once described as 'the nearest thing to great drama that Wales ever produced', is thus one of tragedy. One remembers above all the protagonist, Llywarch Hen or 'Llywarch the Old', the irritable chieftain who taunts his sons again and again into hopeless battle against the English. When all his sons have been killed, he remains in solitary desolation to grieve for them and for himself, a foolish old man.

Neither sleep nor happiness comes to me
since the killing of Llawr and Gwên.
I am a cantankerous carcass - I am old.

Other poems describe the tragedy of the princess Heledd, who sees the body of her brother Cynddylan lying dead after battle with the English, a grey-crested eagle feeding upon his breast. This happened

at the unidentified locality of 'Pengwern', somewhere near Shrewsbury.

The grey-crested eagle of Pengwern -tonight
his screech is very high,
greedy for the flesh which I loved.

While Cynddylan lies dead, Heledd sees his hall, plundered and abandoned.

The hall of Cynddylan is dark tonight,
without a fire, without songs.
Tears wear away the cheeks.

The hall of Cynddylan is silent tonight
after losing its lord.
Great merciful God, what shall I do?

These poems might lead one to think that, after defeat by the English onslaught, the Welsh lost everything except their genius for poetry.

Early Welsh Saga Poetry provides the most thorough piece of work on these poems since the researches of Sir Ifor Williams at the University of Wales in the 1930s. Dr. Rowland's book contains over 400 pages of annotations. Clearly it will be the best edition of these archaic Welsh poems for a very long time.

Anglicists will find the book of special importance for its comments on the links between Welsh poetry and Old English poetry, especially the so-called elegies *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Here Dr. Rowland discusses various passages in these poems and also *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and *Beowulf*, noting how English and Welsh verse together use gnomic material and references to nature to make their effect. She thereby advances research on the account of this subject in P. L. Henry's *The Early English and*

Celtic Lyric (London, 1966). Heledd, for example, reflects in her sorrow on the Eagle of Ely.

The eagle of Ely watches over the seas:
Fish do not penetrate into the estuaries.
He calls, he feasts on the blood of warriors.

Similarly, *The Seafarer* opens with the speaker uttering his sadness in a bleak seascape with the eagle as a rare companion.

There storms beat against the rocky cliffs,
There the tern with icy feathers answered them.
Often did the eagle with dewy wings circle round, screaming.

Thanks are due, therefore, to Dr. Rowland for providing an accurate translation and study of the corpus of the Welsh material. Anglo-Saxonists will now easily be able to include the Welsh englynion in their comparative discussions of Old English elegy. Dr Rowland's important book should be consulted by anyone hoping to shed new light on the background to Old English verse, although another account of this subject, Nicolas Jacobs's 'Celtic Saga and the Contexts of Old English Elegiac Poetry', *Études celtiques*, XXVI (1989), 95-142, must also be read as a corrective to many of Dr Rowland's views.

More positively, one hopes that Spanish readers of *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* will be stimulated to make their own contributions from points discussed in it. On p. 597, for example, Dr Rowland mentions bloody tears and seems to suggest this is a particularly Celtic phenomenon. Concerning this, however, see my 'The Virgin's Tears of Blood', *Celtica*, xx (1988), 110-22, which shows this to be an international topos, of which Spanish examples may await investigation.

Again, on p. 601, Dr Rowland quotes the Shropshire place-name *Ercall* as deriving from Old English *Ercol*, 'Hercules', plus an Old

English word for ‘burial mound’. However, *Ercol* is not an English form of ‘Hercules’ at all. It is a British form used by the Cornishman or Breton who, it seems, translated the Old English Orosius for King Alfred, as I argue in a forthcoming paper for the Oxford journal *Notes and Queries*. Since Orosius was an Iberian writer, coming from the vicinity of Braga in modern Portugal, this point may interest Anglicists in the Peninsula. It may be worth pointing out, incidentally, that because the Old English Orosius is one of the few books in medieval English known to have been read on the Continent, and Cornwall and Brittany had strong links with the monasteries of northern France, as shown in Dom Louis Gougaud, OSB, ‘Les Relations de l’Abbaye de Fleury-sur-Loire avec la Bretagne armoricaine et les îles Britanniques’, *Mémoires de la Société d’Histoire et d’Archéologie de Bretagne*, iv/2 (1923), research on how the Old English Orosius as the work of a Cornishman or Breton fits into the pattern of cross-Channel learning described by Gougaud would be especially worth doing.

Early Welsh Saga Poetry is, therefore, one of those large works of scholarship important not only in the information they contain, but also in suggesting further paths of investigation. One wishes this major work of learning the widest circulation amongst medievalists in Britain and abroad.

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Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition, ed. by A. J. MINNIS and A. B. SCOTT, with the assistance of David Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). xvi + 538 pp. £ 65.00.

It is impossible to do justice to this remarkable anthology in one short review. Each section deserves careful reflection and discussion, but it is an essential tool for anyone trying to gain a full understanding of Middle English literary theory and criticism.

The “prescriptive” branches of medieval literary theory -*artes poeticae*, *artes praedicandi*, and *artes dictaminis*- have received the attention of some modern scholars and most of the important texts have been translated into English. But in this book, the authors focus their commentaries and translations on “descriptive” and evaluative texts from c. 1100 until around c. 1375, undoubtedly one of the most significant periods for the development of the commentary tradition. All translated treatises and commentaries reflect a tradition of commentary on writers both sacred and profane, Latin and vernacular, ancient and modern.

The purposes of this anthology are three: to offer at once a “reader” of medieval literary discourse, a “sampler” which may encourage the reader to go back to the original documents themselves, and to show a collection of essays about the history of medieval literary theory and criticism.

The book consists of ten sections and a general introduction in which is analysed the significance of the medieval commentary-tradition. In the first section an anthology of literary prefaces is introduced: *Introduction to the Authors*, those writers who were becoming established in medieval grammar-schools. In the second chapter we can read some extracts of the *Accessus ad auctores*, “Dialogue on the Authors”, written by Conrad of Hirsau, an interesting work based on Bernard of Utrecht’s commentary on Theodulus, who had drawn on Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae* either directly or through some medieval intermediary. Reading this dialogue between a master and his pupil we can understand the notion of hierarchy, how classical literature must be subordinated to Christian doctrine, a basic principle in Middle English literature well conveyed by the common metaphor of “despoliation of the Egyptians”, here cited in St. Augustine’s formulation:

... what they (i. e. the pagans) have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use. For, just as the Egyptians had not only idols and heavy burdens for the people of Israel to abominate and eschew, but also vessels and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing for that people, departing from Egypt, secretly to rescue for itself, as if to put them to a better use, not on its own authority but at God’s command, while the Egyptians unwittingly supplied them with things which they themselves did not use well, so all the doctrines of the pagans contain not only simulated and superstitious imaginings and grave burdens of unnecessary labour, which each one of us leaving the society of pagans under the leadership of Christ ought to abominate and avoid, but also liberal disciplines more suited to the uses of truth, and some most useful precepts concerning morals.

Section III and IV deal with dominant figures in the 12th. century such as the spiritual allegorists Hugh of Saint-Victor, Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard, and the more philosophical such as Bernard Silvestri, William of Conches and Ralph of Longchamps; the unifying element in their work is their common engagement with the Platonism of the School of Chartres. All these writers are keenly sensitive to new modes of thought and expression, and they observe the interrelation between secular and biblical hermeneutics; a comparison of Hugh with Alain may serve as an index to the effect of these developments in the course of the 12th. c. and 13th. c. These allegorists who wrote in prose and poetry stand at opposite ends of a period of debate and experimentation which saw the rise and decline of a great movement of humanistic and scientific thought, a movement whose signs are still visible everywhere in Europe. This humanist enterprise was uniquely and profoundly important for the subsequent development of medieval poetry. The contrast of Chartrian rationalism with the ultimately traditionalist position of Hugh also serves to explain the gradual discrediting of Chartrian thought and the redirection of the School's influence into channels of literary study and poetic expression.

Section V: *The Dionysian Imagination: Thomas Gallus and Robert Grosseteste* presents the Platonic models of this period while section VI focuses on the Aristotelian influence on the literary theory; this topic is also analysed in sections VII and VIII with commentaries and translations. Such topics as the nature and structure of the universe and the relation of ancient philosophy to Christian doctrine are expressed in these chapters as the great concerns of medieval thought.

In the last two sections we are presented the transformation of critical tradition and the new ideas and theories expressed by Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio in their writings.

After reading this anthology we can understand that medieval theory and criticism have many things in common with modern criticism, in particular formalism, structuralism, semiotics and reception-theory, and that no criticism is free of ideology, as every approach to a text reflects and depends on a particular world-view.

It is a weakness of the book that, while the authors are extremely interested in the development of dominant figures in which the unifying element in their work is their common engagement with allegorism, they are less concerned with such writers as Adelhard of Bath and Bacon, to mention just a few authors among many others more concerned with a rational philosophy. Against this weakness, however, many strengths must be set which will make the book a valuable introduction to the reader and scholar of Middle English literature.

The book is almost impeccably edited, it also has a full bibliography and index, and many notes to explain the complexities of the texts and of the historical and literary issues arising from it. This anthology can be recommended to all students and is a most welcome aid to more advanced medievalists.

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Bruce MITCHELL, *On Old English: Selected Papers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) xiii + 363 pp. £ 35.00.

It is a real pleasure for students and scholars of Old English language and literature to read this collection of essays. Most teachers and students of Anglo-Saxon know Professor B. Mitchell thanks to his popular and well-known introduction to the language and literature of the Anglo-Saxons, *A Guide to Old English* (with Fred Robinson), and everyone with a love of English philology knows his authoritative *Old English Syntax*. But Professor Mitchell is less well-known for his essays, articles and reviews, most of which involve interpreting Anglo-Saxon literary texts. This book is a selection of those essays.

The book is divided into five sections; the first four bring together the majority of his “lesser works”, while the fifth section provides a review of Anglo-Saxon studies since 1947. In the first part a selection has been made of articles, notes and reviews about *Beowulf*, the most outstanding being *Until the Dragon Comes...*, *Some Thoughts on Beowulf*, *An Introduction to Beowulf*, and *1987: Postscript on Beowulf*.

The second part is made up of five short works on the poet Cædmon, and among the most important of these is *Postscript on Bede’s “mihi cantare habes”*.

The third part examines, basically from a syntactic perspective, some lyric poems, such as *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer* and *The Wife’s Lament*, the most significant on the basis of its length and depth being *Linguistic Facts and the Interpretation of Old English Poetry*.

In the fourth section there is an assortment of studies of a linguistic nature, such as *Syntax and Word-Order in the Peterborough Chronicle 1123-1154*, and *The Origin of Old English Conjunctions: Some problems*. In addition there have been gathered together several reviews in which Mitchell shows himself to be a wise and judicious critic, little inclined to superficial, laudatory remarks if the piece of work under consideration is not praiseworthy, at least in some respects. At the same time, however, he knows how to see the positive aspects and encourages the author to strive to do better.

The last part of the book focuses on the evolution of Anglo-Saxon studies in the last forty years, *Conclusion: Forty years On*. But alongside this short and well-documented summary Professor Mitchell voices his hopes and fears about future work on Anglo-Saxon literature. On the one hand he approves of the interesting study by D. Donoghue, *Style in Old English Poetry*, and Paul Szarmach's *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*; but on the other he censures the superficiality of many publications and the unmerited interest in overly allegorical interpretations. His conclusion on this point is summed up in a quote from Professor Robinson, another of our modern distinguished teachers of Old English and the most cited in the book, who has written the following about the interpretation of Old English poems:

A knowledge of philology and history would do more than anything else (except perhaps good judgment) to discourage the proliferation of bizarre and arbitrary "critical readings".

Bruce Mitchell has been not only an insightful researcher of Anglo-Saxon language and literature, but also a great teacher, and those of us who have had the good luck to have attended his classes will always remember him for his gifts as a scholar and a teacher; it is

hardly surprising to find the same quality in this collection of studies. Mitchell almost always suggests rather than being dogmatic, especially when dealing with literary texts. For instance, in his *Introduction to Beowulf* he writes:

Whether the reader chooses to adopt one of the interpretations outlined above... or to find one for himself must be a matter of personal response.

He also teaches us with his profoundly religious point of view what can be read between the lines and that not everyone is able to detect, that in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and specifically in *Beowulf*, there exists a triumph of good over evil, whether Germanic or Christian (p. 29):

Today in this nuclear age, with man's inhumanity to man daily more apparent on all levels and the powers of darkness in seeming ascendancy throughout the world, we may see *Beowulf* as a triumphant affirmation of the value of a good life: as the poet himself says "Bruc ealles well" - Make good use of everything.

But Professor Mitchell does not let himself become tangled up in simplistic religious and allegorical interpretations. On the contrary, he frequently warns against the unwarranted reading of allegory.

In this regard I am reminded of one of his papers given at the University of Oviedo in the first SELIM conference, in which he compared Anglo-Saxon literature to a flowering garden in which the rankest smelling blossom is allegorisis.

To sum up this review I would like to make use of an idea that all of us students of English literature should keep in mind and that is well expressed by B. Mitchell in the book:

Reviews

I firmly believe that some knowledge of Old English is an essential tool for anyone trying to gain an understanding and appreciation of English literature.

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CALDER, D.C. & CHRISTY, T.V. (eds.): *Germania: Comparative Studies in the Old Germanic Languages and Literatures*. Wolfeboro: D.S. Brewer, 1988 (ix + 209 pp.)

This book consists of a number of papers presented at a conference held at the University of Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1985. The contributions aimed mainly at reviving “an integrated approach to the study of the various Germanic languages and literatures” (p. vii). According to this, they tried to recover in this way that comprehensive orientation of the first philological studies (taking, therefore, into account some of the related disciplines such as mythology, religion, the history of civilization, etc.), which began to break off and specialize already in the late 19th century. In this connection, and as another important feature, the works included in the book show a comparative character. The underlying general goal is to get to the common core of Germania through its varied manifestations in different aspects.

The essays fall into two sections, the first including what might be considered purely linguistic studies, the second, more neatly literary ones. Before this latter section, there is a study (I. Rauch: "How do Germanic linguistic data react to purely literary methods?"), which undertakes a twofold approach into the Germanic material.

The articles of a linguistic character are the following: "Can Proto-Germanic be reconstructed as a natural language?" (H. Penzl); "Mutual intelligibility among speakers of early Germanic dialects" (W.G. Moulton); "On the origin of the dental preterit of the verba pura" (K. Matzel); "Systems and changes in Early Germanic phonology: search for hidden identities" (T. Vennemann); "Old English mæþl and sæþl in the all-Germanic environment: comparative study" (K.R. Jankowsky); "Sentence connectives in ancient Germanic texts" (T.H. Wilbur). Those in the literary section are: "Oral-formulaic tradition and the affective interpretation of Early Germanic verse" (A. Renoir); "Walter Haug's *Heldensagenmode*" (T.M. Andersson); "Eddic poetry and continental heroic legend: the case of the Third Lay of Guðrún (*Guðrúnarqviða*)" (M. Curschmann); "Woden as 'Ninth Father': numerical patterning in some Old English royal genealogies" (T.D. Hill); "The drink of death in Old English and Germanic literature" (G. Russom); "What kind of poetry is *Exodus*" (R. Frank).

From the titles in the list above it becomes clear that, generally speaking, it is the collecting of diverse articles into a single volume and not the content of each of these articles individually considered what permits the editors to achieve their main goal of an "integrated approach".

Most essays can be regarded as fully modern. In many cases, an attempt is made to apply updated theoretical models in order to reformulate explanations and laws traditionally settled in the field. As an illustrative example one can mention "Systems and changes in

Early Germanic phonology: search for hidden identities”, in which T. Vennemann suggests a profound revision of Grimm’s and Verner’s famous laws. Other contributions show a serious attempt to fill in gaps and systematize traditionally neglected data (cf., for instance, the works by T.H. Wilbur and R. Frank).

The comparative character of the theses put forward is specially reflected in papers such as those by H. Penzl, W.G. Moulton, A. Renoir and G. Russom, all of which show a painstaking effort to combine data from different Germanic languages and literatures in order to draw the appropriate conclusions.

As far as the edition is concerned, this book is beautifully printed and bound. However, an effort to impose a coordinate criterion on the bibliographical selection is lacking. This is left to each author’s discretion and there appears no global list at the end of the volume.

Finally, we must add that this book, although not exactly what undergraduates need, will prove to be extremely interesting for scholars and teachers of the subject, since it offers a remarkable overview of the research being carried out at the moment on Old Germanic languages and literatures.

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GÓMEZ BEDATE, P. (1990): *Boccaccio: Decamerón*. 2 vols. Selección de Lecturas Medievales, Siruela, Madrid. (Ptas. 5,000)

In the mind of a fourteen-year-old girl, the *Decameron* was something attractive since it was something forbidden, something unknown. She had entered the cinema secretly to see the film with the same title by the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini. This meant two hours of frustration and disenchantment: adults were right, that was a pornographic film based on a medieval novel which she believed equally pornographic.

In the mind of an apprentice medievalist, the great plague that invaded Europe in the 14th century represents the starting point, the context for the most popular of the works by Giovanni Boccaccio: *Il Decamerone*, the evident heir of the medieval story-telling tradition in Arabia (*Arabian Nights*) and Europe (above all, that of the French 'fabliaux'). Seven women and three men with their respective servants try, by means of some tales, to mark time before the dreadful 'black death' can reach them: they have left Florence, the birth-place of the culture of the Italian 'trecento' -forerunner of the Renaissance period-, behind them. They have abandoned houses, possessions and the tombs of their dead to flee from death which is now the owner of palaces, towns, cities and even entire countries. For ten days and in 'courtois milieux', these ten characters will narrate stories to each other, some of them imaginary and exaggerated, others real, which they had been told previously by their fellow citizens.

The *Decameron* has been considered for ages one of the 'bêtes noires' in Medieval Literature. Authors of miraculous legends and lives of saints, courtier poets, historians, have been consecrated by the traditional literary critics, but only a few fabulists have been given

these honours: Boccaccio has been one of those but not always in a positive way. Reviewers have always wanted to see in the *Decameron* its erotic part dominating over the stories or songs following the courtois fashion or pattern. Sex, promiscuity, adultery, all kinds of tricks..., all these have their place in the novel but they do not monopolize it as Pasolini wanted to show us in his adaptation of the brilliant work by Boccaccio. Their design and structure are analogous to those in the *Canterbury Tales* by the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer, though their situations are different: the *Decameron* mixes up stories about achieved aims, impossible passions, tales to laugh and others to cry, sometimes sprinkled with irony, sometimes with delicious erotic touches. There are not so many explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse as we have been told. The novel has been mystified too much by many people and almost everyone, at one moment or another, has been misled into including it in an *Index* of books forbidden because of their sexual content that even verges on pornography. This has nothing to do with the real world, anyway.

Pilar Gómez Bedate and the Siruela editors offer us the possibility to undo the injustice. This new translation into Spanish of the Italian classic allows the Spanish reader to come nearer the European society and culture of the 14th century through the diverse social types that the author described in his mother language: medieval Tuscan (a direct translation from the medieval original is claimed). Perhaps the style used by the translator for her purpose turns out to be excessively pompous or too formal. But it has been an effort, a satisfactory one, to adequate as much as possible to the Rhetorics of the period, coming from Latin *oratores* and highly influenced by the style of the Provençal troubadours and an incipient Humanism.

Is there an abuse of the word 'incontinenti'? Maybe, but also maybe this is a mere reflection of the first written steps of a language subject to a complex process of evolution, subjected to pressures

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coming from other neighbouring cultures. The style, very repetitive and with structures hardly ever renewed, gives us a complete account of the difficulties of a young language entering the literary world through the main door.

Just in between the 'Dark Ages' and the light of the Renaissance, who would deny saying that the *Decameron* is one of the first flames in the History of the European vernacular literatures?

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GODDEN, Malcolm: *The Making of Piers Plowman*. Longman: London & New York, 1990. (£ 12.95).

The reader of Dr Godden's essay is confronted with a very interesting and complete review of the poem and the critical approaches to it, both ancient and modern which make it a most useful first approach to *Piers Plowman* and its tradition. *The Making of Piers Plowman* is a book of general reference for this particular poem, and a wholesome introduction directed not just to

undergraduates but also for serious students who would approach *Piers Plowman* for the first time with real and sound interest.

What may be considered a handicap is that the texts adopted for criticism and quotation are not uniform, neither are the criteria used by the author in his selections.

One might assume that Godden's choice of the textual editions of the versions of the poem seems to derive from their accessibility rather than from their scholarly quality. Thus he chose A.V.C. Schmidt's partly-modernized edition for Text B quotations, and Derek Pearsall's C-Text edition, whereas he relies on Kane & Donaldson's critical A-Text, and on Rigg & Brewer's sole edition of their Z-Text.

The Making of Piers Plowman has an appropriate discussion of the topic setting apart in the first chapter all external matters: discussion on the poem's creation in which Godden defends single authorship against the traditional multiple authorship hypothesis, identity of the poet, and the literary and intellectual background of the work and Langland.

Internal discussion of the poem using Text A starts from chapter two onwards, a chapter usually being devoted to each section of *Piers Plowman*, and the account of the plot of the vision is currently spiced with adequate and illustrative quotations. Godden continues discussing Text A in chapters three and four, as he deals with Langland's second and third visions.

The discussion on the seven deadly sins, and the idea of the Church which seems to emerge from the text lead to a debate concerning Langland and the Lollard movement. Dr. Godden points out the importance of the Wycliffite *Of feigned contemplative Life* for the Pardon episode. Particularly interesting is what we see on page 57 concerning the passages omitted or changed in versions Z and A. The author appears to suggest that Langland may have followed

Wyclif in the Spiritual reformation, though not in the Social Reformation, or at least adherence to the latter is not clearly specified. Then Godden incardicates very cleverly the problem of the A version in connection with the subsequent re-writings of the poem. Topics like the Friars and thought, and the dispute about the offices of Friars and the secular clergy are examined and on page 70 we find the following remark:

The plowman who in the second vision had come to stand as an image of man's productive labour which wins him Heaven now reappears to prove the irrelevance of striving...

that helps the reader to attain what he calls "the true end of the A version", and thus closes this first section of his essay.

Chapter five starts with a survey of the problem of dating Text B. It is the passage called "The Parliament of mice" which in the first instance places the poem in ± 1380 , but Godden expands his very convincing arguments by explaining that there has been a full revision of the first two visions, especially in those points traditionally connected with Wycliffite concepts: the theory of kingship, the use and abuse of pardons, and the confession of sins and the aims of repentance. Godden suggests that the revision of the third vision and its completion in a new inner dream instead of the awakening of the narrator imply a new conception of the rôle of the poet. On page 89 we read:

The opposition between the role of satirist which Langland plays and the ideal of charity which he preaches is one of the sources of tension in the passus.

and as it has happened previously, this section ends with further discussion about clerks and the current debates concerning faith versus knowledge, and “kynde wit” versus “clergie”.

The fourth vision is analysed in chapter six by means of an examination of the rôle of Haukyn, the active man, and then by discussing the allegory of the different lives of man in full with special reference to the features of Patience, Poverty and Penitence. Godden reviews these carefully as we read (p. 102):

Patience thus represents one of the great ideals of Langland’s time,
the cult of poverty.

This is the virtue represented in the poem by a hermit or a pilgrim, and it seems to me remarkable here that Godden did not mention clearly that the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman* was clothed as a Hermit at the beginning of the poem, and no further detailed mention of his clothing has the relevance of his first appearance. What Godden does in this section is to reinterpret the figure of Piers. “Clergie” is rejected in favour of Patience, who is also a hermit, and hence the earlier Piers builds on the authority and anti-intellectualisms he has acquired so far throughout the dream:

Patience, being a hermit, is what Piers chose to be. (p. 109).

It is then that Piers Plowman stops being the representative of the active life, and Haukyn intervenes, as the inherent sinfulness of active life leads into a discussion in which the author finally rejects the values associated with the active life (p. 114):

The qualities of austerity, simplicity and dedication which the Prologue had seen in both plowmen and hermits are now firmly located in the latter.

In chapter seven there is a new dream in which Anima is the central topic; there follows a very interesting examination of the sermon on the Tree of Charity as the dreamer undergoes a new change in the fifth vision as the dreamer dreams within his dream, and Piers is apparently identified with God. Godden makes a very clever point in his discussion, as he states the dual nature of Anima, being a feminine “soul” and a masculine “mind”. A discussion of previous interpretations of this passage centred on the works of Coghill and Wells, concludes in Godden’s theory on how the different levels of society are used in the poem and how virtuous life is enacted in them. Purity is confronted with Death and Piers, previously identified with God is now interpreted as Christ. And then the dreamer wakes from the dream within a dream and meets Abraham (Faith), Moses (Hope) and the Samaritan (Charity). The poem has developed into an increasingly complicated mess, and Godden actually understates it (p. 136):

The vision as a whole is one of the most complex in the poem, but also one of the richest in significance.

Christ’s Passion and the Harrowing of Hell appear in chapter eight. The new dream of Palm Sunday in Jerusalem allows the author to review the traditional English accounts of the passion by commenting, namely, on The Northern Passion, Ælfric, the *Cursor Mundi*, Grosseteste, the *Ancrene Riwle*, and *The Dream of the Rood*. The love-theme of salvation is also extended by Godden to references found in *Piers Plowman* which may ultimately derive from the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, in the passage dealing with the Harrowing of Hell as the problem of Redemption and the second coming of Christ seem to have a very important relevance for the interpretation of this section of the poem.

In chapter nine the author examines the dreamer when asleep in Church as he sees Christ in the form of Piers, thus providing evidence for the earlier identification and starting with a discussion about Conscience and Grace and including in the debate the Battle of Pride and Conscience. The idea of redemption surveyed in the previous chapter is finally completed as the Church becomes heir to Christ's work of redemption. As Godden puts it (p. 156):

Conscience explains that the Holy Spirit is Grace and the dreamer joins in the singing of a hymn to him.

and thus he leads his readers into the interpreting of the Castle of Unity as Holy Church, and the argument in which the problem of Need and the justification of Justice become controversial, because the corruption of the Church will ultimately cause the coming of Antichrist at the end of the poem. As the Church has not followed the ways of Poverty, the enemies of Life, led by Elde, deprive the dreamer of his hair and sexual powers hence introducing the end of times both for the world and the dreamer.

Text-B is now finished, and Godden offers the reader the following conclusions (pp. 168-169):

As we have seen before, Piers' essential role in the poem is as the organiser of man's salvation and a nexus of the current ideals and aspirations of the visions in which he appears... The poem ends with no answers, only an enrichment of experience and understanding [is achieved].

Chapter ten is devoted to exploring the C-Text of *Piers Plowman*, and Godden has very carefully rejected the dates offered by Skeat and Devlin on internal evidence: he concludes that the late 1380s or

the 1390s are the most probable period for its completion. He comments in great detail the alterations or revisions found in the fourth and fifth visions, which in version C are merged into one. The inner dream of the fifth vision disappears as well, and Godden infers that there is a general recasting of the Poem but for the last two Passus. He also considers the reasons which might account for that: the death of Langland, demands of a patron, or even the lack of interest on the part of the author. Godden also reviews in this section the theories of E. T. Donaldson and G. Russell on the process of rewriting the C-Text.

What I have found particularly rewarding is his comparison of the opening of the poem in the A, B, and C texts, and the “weariness” and “matter of fact” expressions found in version C are remarkably well explained. The prologues of the three versions are contrasted, and this results in Godden’s opinion about the radicalization of the last text of the poem. He insists on the social criticism of the second vision and the intellectual crisis of the third as evidence for the abundance of more radical arguments. But he also points out the changes: Patience in Text-B is a hermit, but in Text-C only resembles a pilgrim and Piers as well; and moreover, Patience becomes an ordinary pauper instead of being a voluntary one. In Text-C Piers is a palmer, and Piers is no longer identified with Christ as in B, though the rejection of learning for austerity is maintained. Godden finally remarks (p. 200), that *Piers Plowman* is a poem that “in its own way it tells the story of its poet”.

An Epilogue closes *The Making of Piers Plowman*. The possible connections of Langland with *Winner and Waster* that Godden provides are quite interesting and fairly convincing, though I assume that further discussion and research is needed. The list of references and suggestions for further reading is very well selected for the audience of the book, although I have not found in it two items which

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could well be there: Elizabeth Salter's (1962): *Piers Plowman: An Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford); and J. A. W. Bennet's article on the dating of the A-Text (1943a: "The Date of the A-Text of *Piers Plowman*." *P.M.L.A.* 58: 566-572), which is especially remarkable, as Godden quotes his other paper on the B-Text (1943b: "The Date of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*." *Medium Ævum* 12: 55-64).

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Charles JONES: *A History of English Phonology*. London & New York: Longman. 1989. x + 318 pp. (£10.95).

Professor Jones's book is included in Longman's Linguistics Library, first edited by R. H. Robbins and G. N. Leech, and later by Robbins and Martin Harris. Since J. M. Anderson's *Structural Aspects of Language Change* appeared in 1973, no other specific book on diachronic linguistics had been published in the series. In the meanwhile, both authors had published a seminal study for the students of English historical phonology: *Phonological Structure and the History of English* (Amsterdam: North Holland). This latter,

together with a book by Anderson and R. Lass: *Old English Phonology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), and with Lass's *English Phonology and Phonological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), *On Explaining Language Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and *The Shape of English* (London: Dent & Sons, 1987); constitute a bibliographical resource that no serious course on the History of English can ignore. I must acknowledge, though, that Professor Jones's recent manual can be exploited as a most comprehensive textbook for a thorough and updated review of the History of English Phonology and Phonological Changes on its own. That is no mean merit for a book whose extension is just slightly over three hundred pages.

I think it must be made clear that although Professor Jones claims in his preface that the book "does not attempt to produce any major rethink on phonological change, far less does it claim to provide anything like an exhaustive coverage of all recorded types of sound change dealt with in the handbooks" (p. X), it is a major rethink on English Phonological Changes, as it enhances the idea of recurrence in a language and the need for using linguistic data instead of social, cultural or historical ones, as the primary source for explaining language change. It does provide as well a very exhaustive coverage of English sound changes, and a coverage that all but exhausts all interesting recorded types of language change dealt with in the traditional handbooks. *A History of English Phonology* is also a remarkable practical study in the issues of that branch of theoretical Phonology which little by little sprung from the joint venture that Jones and Anderson started in 1974.

A History of English Phonology is an extremely well organised book: a statement of the aims, methods and models (pp. 1-8), prepares the reader for the dual nature of the data and the treatment of those

data to be developed in the four sections (or chapters) that make up the presentation of the different phenomena discussed. It is quite difficult to demolish Jones's method and model from the point of view of traditional structural linguistics, but one is tempted to wonder whether James Foley's ideas concerning phonological strength set out in *Foundations of Theoretical Phonology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) might not help to the better understanding of certain aspects of the Jones-Anderson-Ewen's *Dependency Phonology* model, with special reference to the revised theory of sonority hierarchy appearing on pp. 6-7. However, Jones's model proves extremely well grounded and fruitful for many sound change instances: his exposition of the Old English Vowel Harmony processes (pp. 73-93), and the Middle English Vowel Shift (pp. 127-141) are mastery.

After the methodological aims have been stated in chapter 1, the book discusses English diachronic processes in succession from the period named by Jones the Early Origins to the 12th century (chapter 2, pp. 9-93), to the section concerning the period from the 18th century to the present day (chapter 5, pp. 279-304). In between, two more chapters on Middle English: 13th-15th centuries (chapter 3, pp. 94-195), and 16th to 18th centuries (chapter 4, pp. 196-278), link the temporal sequence. One might criticise the study division that Professor Jones uses: for example in chapter 2, terms such as Old English, Late Old English and Middle English are constantly used, and I have been unable to decide the sort of reference, either linguistic or temporal, they respectively cover. The author has warned us at the very beginning of the book that the establishing of 'periods' or epochs has very little meaning for linguistic study, and that "the tradition of English and other historical linguistics is often bedevilled by the proliferation of descriptive nomenclature and by failure to relate phenomena in one often ad hoc delimited period with others" (p. 2),

and I think he is quite right, but I also think that there must be some points of reference. And Professor Jones does use those referential points in certain instances such as those when he talks about Old English and Late Old English, for example.

There is also the structuring itself of the book in sections dealing with periods of time: chapter 2 handles no less than six centuries; chapter 3 studies three centuries; and chapters 4 and 5 deal with two centuries each. There is a rather evident lack of balance, and I would ask him to make some concessions in this respect. Everyone knows that temporal nomenclature is just a convenient label, a common reference. It means that when Professor Jones says that “the highly compartmentalized nature of the scholarly tradition... which, for cultural and often idiosyncratic reasons, produced a territory of separate scholars and schools where there was little or no inclination to enquire into the chosen realm of other workers”, we might immediately think of Dickens and Wilson’s *Early Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1964), or in Bennet and Smithers’s *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), as a territory in secession from the vaster domains of Middle English. In the *history* of a language there ought to be temporal divisions, and although these are quite whimsical on many occasions, as Professor Jones points out, there are others in which there seems to exist a wide and well established consensus. And J. W. Clark’s *Early English* (London: A. Deutsch, 1957) appears to underlie, somewhat partially though, some of Jones’s conceptions as expressed in chapter 2.

My second remark concerns chapter 5: twenty-five pages are devoted to the modern period, and that is further proof of the uneven nature and evolution of linguistic changes. For Professor Jones demonstrates that changes are recurrent and similar language developments seem to be active throughout the history of English

phonology: but they do not emerge with the same predictability upon occasion. And there is the problem of data as well. These are either too many or too disperse to obtain a proper selection that may provide a comprehensive interpretation. Jones argues that “There are many reasons why these two centuries are the Cinderellas of English historical linguistic study,” (p. 279), and he offers many to his readers, to conclude that “Against such a simplistic one to one, period to innovation mapping we have, of course, been arguing throughout this book, and we shall again attempt to show how the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries manifest the same types of phonological processes we have met at earlier historical ‘moments’.” (p. 280). However a sense of doom is haunting the author because he decides to limit his study: “It would, of course, take all of a book of this size and more even to review the exciting and increasingly productive research being carried out at present into contemporary language change along a temporal axis: we shall have space to examine but a few present-day ongoing innovations in this chapter, selecting in particular those which relate to some of the central historical processes which have been our recurrent concern thus far.” (p. 281). I hope that Professor Jones will delight us in the near future with such a book on Modern English phonological history.

It is virtually impossible that a book on Phonology be free of errata: these are uncommonly absent from *A History of English Phonology*: the publishers should be congratulated for their careful work. There are some, though, and it must be noticed that although an erratum example such as that found on p. 306: a font-size change as *denOs*, -which should read *DenOS* instead on the evidence of DeCHENE, just before it-, is a very easy one to detect and correct even by the inexperienced reader, such errata as *[c]* -correct to *[ç]*- on p. 239, or the alpha symbol which does not appear with the stress mark in the first quotation (p. 239 as well), though there is an explicit

reference to it in the following paragraph, take for granted important previous linguistic training.

And finally the reader cannot decide whether in the case of the *more/More* pair on p. 245 it should be emended to *more/moor*, as the next pair is *pore/poor*. However all these are but toys, as Bacon said, and enough of them: because after reading *A History of English Phonology* there is little need to go anywhere else to find a convenient advanced university textbook for the phonology of the Old, Middle and Early Modern English periods. It is also time to mention here Jones's *An Introduction to Middle English* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972) to complement some aspects of Middle English sound changes treated in the work we are discussing.

I am afraid that Professor Jones may now, indeed, look after his Soay sheep with fewer distractions: whole flocks of patient undergraduates and graduates will graze in the happy fields of his fertile *A History of English Phonology*. But we will be waiting for more.

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The 4th SELIM Conference will be held at the
University of Santiago de Compostela
on September, 24th-28th, 1991.