

HIGH STYLE IN SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT:

A STUDY IN MEDIEVAL RHETORIC

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## PREFACE

The fourteenth-century romance, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, has long since prompted questions among English scholars as to its authorship, the occasion of its composition, its meaning, and, most recently, its structure. This study is devoted to analyzing the style of this poem. One cannot read Sir Gawain without pondering its anomalous combination of conventional characteristics with an unusual prolixity and dramatic quality that dwarfs other works of the same period. Consequently, further identification of the traditional and non-traditional elements in the poem is necessary to recognize fully the consummate skill of this anonymous writer of the fourteenth-century alliterative revival.

The author of this study has attempted to analyze Sir Gawain by determining the extent to which conventional medieval rhetoric was employed by its author. Any discernible repository of literary criticism in the Middle Ages lay within the many textbooks of the rhetoricians who prescribed the schemes by which a writer could achieve the lower, medium, or higher styles. The primary purpose, then, of this investigation is to determine to what extent Sir Gawain was rendered in the traditional "high style" of poetry.

The sources that have been most helpful to the author

are Larry Benson's Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and J. M. Manly's lecture "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians." The writer sincerely expresses his appreciation to Dr. Charles E. Walton, whose dedicated teaching actually motivated this study, and to Mr. Richard L. Roahen of the English faculty at the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, for his help in the preparation of this paper.

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## CHAPTER I

### MEDIEVAL RHETORICAL CONVENTIONS

An attempt to survey and analyze the styles of medieval poetry, by necessity, thrusts one into the systems and the schemata of the rhetoricians. One of the first scholars to realize this problem, Professor Manly, purveyed forgotten avenues to Chaucerian students by delving into the rhetorical manuals.<sup>1</sup> Following Manly's example, the medieval student can discover a rich tradition of composition that must have been available to the early English poets. That medieval writers were, themselves, cognizant of this vast rhetorical tradition and, therefore, followed formalized precepts in their composition is the thesis by which Manly proceeds in citing numerous references to the levels of style in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.<sup>2</sup> One must be aware, if his understanding of medieval poetry is to be complete, that, in fact, in almost every area of literary theory, ". . . the Greek rhetorician was the intellectual father of the Oxford schoolman."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. M. Manly, "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," Warton Lecture on English Poetry, delivered on June 2, 1962.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 2. Manly points out one particularly direct reference to style that occurs in "The Clerk's Prologue."

<sup>3</sup>A. F. Leach, The Schools of Medieval England, p. 18.

During the earlier centuries when Latin predominated, many English rhetoricians were satisfied with the antiquated rhetoric; thus, from the eighth to the end of the eleventh century, little attempt was made to modify the theories of the later Latin schools.<sup>4</sup> Not until the inception of humanism were scholars introduced to greater numbers of theretofore neglected classical writers. With this reacquaintance came some changes in precepts; i.e., some of the highly formalized tenets of Latin writers were deemed impractical, and scholars began to be more selective with their theories.<sup>5</sup> However, the tendency to comprehend rhetoric as simply mechanical exercises prevailed throughout much of the Middle Ages in the schools.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Rand notes that medievalists had only the heritage of the ancients to rely upon and saw nothing wrong with using this knowledge as if their own.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, medieval writers tended to use these classical rhetorical schemes in their arts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries without considering whether or not some of these

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<sup>4</sup>J. W. H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Abelson, The Seven Liberal Arts, pp. 52-53.

<sup>6</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Edward Kennard Rand, "Medieval Gloom and Medieval Uniformity," Speculum, I (July, 1926), 262.

theories were appropriate.<sup>8</sup> Ostensibly, the rhetorical heritage from the classical schools influenced nearly every institution and its respective arts in the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup>

Medieval schools relied upon a number of influential texts for the educating of their students. The trends and precepts of the rhetorical tradition, therefore, may be best illustrated by referring to the more eminent textbook writers whose works must have influenced all medieval students. Particularly important to the rhetorical doctrine of the Middle Ages were the books attributed to Cicero--De Inventione, De Rhetorica, and Ad Herennium--which were transmitted to the Middle Ages by Capella, Cassiodorus, and Isidore, fourth-century rhetoricians.<sup>10</sup> The Ad Herennium, possibly the most widely read of all texts, provided the medieval rhetor with a detailed guide of schemes.<sup>11</sup> This book appealed to the medievalists for several reasons--it held the theory that poetry was a branch of rhetoric, it was thought to be written by Cicero,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>9</sup>Richard McKeon, "Rhetoric in the Middle Ages," Speculum, XVII (January, 1942), 32.

<sup>10</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Donald Lemen Clark, "Rhetoric and the Literature of the English Middle Ages," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XIV (February, 1959), 21.



and it succinctly summarized and catenated schemata for use in the schools.<sup>12</sup> Centuries later, the basic schemes of the Ad Herennium were taught by such prominent writers as Geoffrey Vinsauf and Evrard Allemand. Other rhetorical tracts that are often associated with the teaching of medieval composition are Horace's Arts Poetica, Quintilian's Institutio Oratoria, Lonjinius' De Sublimate, and Augustine's De Doctrina and Ecclesiastica Rhetorica.

Of special significance to grammar schools was Martianus Capella's fifth century De Nuptiia Philologiae et Mercurii, which became an extremely influential text in the schools of Europe.<sup>13</sup> Capella promulgated the theory that rhetoric was a vital part of the curriculum and, in so doing, helped to establish a respect for classical writers among later medieval scholars.<sup>14</sup> Two other equally influential texts were Ars minor, Ars major by Donatus and Institutes by Priscian, a sixth-century schoolmaster of Constantinople; both works were used extensively by medieval Latin students.<sup>15</sup> Priscian's text contained basic exercises in dilation and

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<sup>12</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>13</sup>Henry Osborn Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>15</sup>Jackson J. Campbell, "Knowledge of Rhetorical Figures in Anglo-Saxon England," JEGP, LXVI (January, 1967), 7.

abbreviation, very popular with schoolboys until the sixteenth century, and most medieval students were thoroughly familiar with these writing drills.<sup>16</sup>

The use of classical rhetoric was naturally dependent upon an acceptance by the Church. Early writers in the Church were schooled in classical rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> However, Augustine was one of the first clergy to realize the effectiveness of rhetoric in Church literature.<sup>18</sup> In De Doctrina Christiana, he explains the necessity for using rhetorical methods in the interpretation of the scriptures.<sup>19</sup> Finally, in De Modis Locutionum, he verifies the use of rhetoric in the Bible itself.<sup>20</sup> The practice of using the Bible as an example of rhetorical composition was continued by Cassiodorus, whose Commentary on the Psalms influenced Anglo-Saxon scholars.<sup>21</sup>

Bede, the first Englishman to compose a treatise on rhetoric, wrote De Schematibus et Tropis (701) as an early

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<sup>16</sup>Clark, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

<sup>17</sup>McKeon, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>20</sup>Marbury Bladen Ogle, "Some Aspects of Medieval Latin Style," Speculum, I (April, 1926), 178.

<sup>21</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 12.

statement on eloquence illustrating many devices suitable for the persuasive composition needed by clergy.<sup>22</sup> Although the schemes explained were certainly no more than a restatement of other former works, Bede used parts of the Bible as exempla to illustrate his terms. In contrast to earlier sophistic attitudes of eloquence for its own sake, Bede carefully explains the responsibility of high persuasion:

The Greeks pride themselves on having invented these figures or tropes. But, my beloved child, in order that you and all who wish to read this work may know that Holy Writ surpasses all other writings not merely in authority because it is divine, or in usefulness because it leads to eternal life, but also for its age and artistic composition, I have chosen to demonstrate by means of examples collected from Holy Writ that teachers of secular eloquence in any age have not been able to furnish us with any of these figures and tropes which did not first appear in the Holy Writ.<sup>23</sup>

He, also, lists seventeen prominent figures and thirteen tropes for his students. In all of these cases, Bede gives, first, the definition of the figure, and then follows it with an example: "Allegory is a trope in which a meaning other than the literal is indicated, for example, 'Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest.'"<sup>24</sup> Since allegory was an important medieval

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<sup>22</sup>Gussie Hecht Tanenhaus, "Bede's De Schematibus et Tropis--A Translation," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLVIII (October, 1962), 237.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

device for interpreting the scriptures, Bede rather carefully explains the use of this device, distinguishing between "factual" and "word" allegory.<sup>25</sup> His early treatise on Latin poetry, De Arte Metrica, offering definitions and illustrations of metrical forms, also became popular among early English scholars.<sup>26</sup>

There is evidence, moreover, that medievalists considered stylistic rhetoric to be more important than Cicero's more comprehensive plan of inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronuntiatio.<sup>27</sup> Even the Church, which had its preference for the "middle style,"<sup>28</sup> began to emphasize elaborate devices. With Alcuin's On Rhetoric (793) came the idea that style was completely determined by the extent to which the rhetorical figures were used.<sup>29</sup> This preoccupation with ornamentation of style was to predominate for the next four centuries.<sup>30</sup>

The pre-eminence of stylistic rhetoric began to wane, however, by the twelfth century, a period that brought with

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>26</sup>Frederick B. Artz, The Mind of the Middle Ages, p. 309.

<sup>27</sup>Tanenhaus, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>28</sup>Harry Caplan, "Rhetorical Invention in Some Medieval Tractates on Preaching," Speculum, II, (July, 1927), 286.

<sup>29</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>30</sup>Tanenhaus, op. cit., p. 239.

it the advancement of science.<sup>31</sup> At least, some of the prominent scholars of the age were attempting to affix sensible priorities to the use of ornamentation in composition. The sophistry of style had caused composition to be nothing more than exercises in embellishment similar to the French romances in which writers replaced the sentiment inherent in their genre with highly artificial modes of expression.<sup>32</sup> One of the scholars who made a foray against the traditional preoccupation with style was John of Salisbury, who studied in the twelfth-century Parisian schools, which included in their curricula the grammar of Priscian, the logic of Aristotle, and the rhetoric of Cicero.<sup>33</sup> Salisbury took with him to England theories which he later published in his Metalogican.<sup>34</sup> Returning to the classical idea that rhetoric and philosophy are inseparable, he emphasizes the fact that rhetoric and grammar are integrated parts of logic; that valid thinking should be stressed over eloquence.<sup>35</sup> In the Metalogican, he espouses the theory that figures of rhetoric should be employed under strict conditions and

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<sup>31</sup> Artz, op. cit., p. 308.

<sup>32</sup> W. P. Ker, Epic and Romance, pp. 400-401.

<sup>33</sup> Cambridge History of English Literature, I, 185.

<sup>34</sup> Atkins, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-71.

within prescribed limits of propriety and good sense.<sup>36</sup> He concedes that the more ornamented style is best suited for poetry, but that the clear style is to be used in normal communication.<sup>37</sup>

In the thirteenth century John of Garland became an important rhetor and writer. Although Garland wrote an extensive treatise on the art of poetry, he was one of the first text writers to discuss also the ars dictamen.<sup>38</sup> Even though the dictamen had been recognized very early by the Church and legal professions, this restatement of its principles, intended to instruct students specifically in this branch of composition, was significant, because it reflects a more practical approach to the use of rhetoric.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, some scholars assert that rhetoric existed in its purest, discernible form in the medieval ars dictamen.<sup>40</sup> Because of his clerical training, Chaucer may have been most familiar with the popular art of letter writing.<sup>41</sup> John of

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<sup>36</sup> Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind, II, 157.

<sup>37</sup> Atkins, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>39</sup> Manly, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Artz, op. cit., p. 309.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Sears Baldwin, "Cicero on Parnassus," PMLA, XLII (March, 1927), 108.

Garland, adhering closely to the Ad Herennium,<sup>42</sup> begins his text with general statements concerning both writers of prose and poetry and closes it with an explanation of legal documents.<sup>43</sup> Making references to style, he reserves the highest form for the clergy.<sup>44</sup> The Poetria deals extensively with dispositio.<sup>45</sup> Outlined as the proper elements of a letter are the salutation, the exordium (a fitting proverb or quotation from the Bible), the narration (an explanation of the writer's purpose), the petition (which allows the development of the main points), and the conclusion.<sup>46</sup>

Two thirteenth-century writers, Matthieu of Vendome and Geoffrey of Vinsauf, attempted systematic texts on the art of poetry.<sup>47</sup> Following the precepts of Horace, Vendome wrote Ars Versificatoria, a manual of considerable influence in the thirteenth century.<sup>48</sup> He concerned himself with

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<sup>42</sup>James J. Murphy, "A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," RES, XV (February, 1964), 10.

<sup>43</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>44</sup>Murphy, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>45</sup>Douglas Kelly, "Scope of the Treatment of Composition in the Twelfth and Thirteenth-Century Arts of Poetry," Speculum, XLI (April, 1966), 275.

<sup>46</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>47</sup>Florence E. Teager, "Chaucer's Eagle and the Rhetorical Colors," PMLA, XLVII (June, 1932), 411.

<sup>48</sup>Kelly, op. cit., pp. 264-266.

appropriateness of language and methods of descriptions.<sup>49</sup>

Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Artes Poeticae, however, may have been the most extensive of all medieval manuals on poetry.<sup>50</sup> That this work was well known in the centuries following its composition is evident in Chaucer's tongue-in-cheek allusion to it in the "Nun's Priest's Tale."<sup>51</sup> Vinsauf's is a technical manual on verse that deals with different manners by which to begin a poem, with amplification and abbreviation of material, and with a complete explanation of tropes and colors.<sup>52</sup> The Artes Poeticae provides the student with a three-step consideration of composition--inventio, dispositio, and elocutio.<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is clear that poetry was becoming a definitive art for which authoritative rules, principles, and schemes were being sought,<sup>54</sup> and the Artes Poeticae was typical of medieval manuals which promulgated an art of imitation and ornamentation by highly restrictive rules of

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>50</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>51</sup>This is another of the many passages from Chaucer that interest Manly in his study, "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," pp. 1-2.

<sup>52</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>53</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 272.

<sup>54</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 117.



composition.<sup>55</sup>

The most plentiful of all rhetorical texts in the Middle Ages were the preaching manuals. Because of the early Church interest in persuasive rhetoric, the artes praedicatoria had a long, illustrious tradition.<sup>56</sup> Numerous preaching manuals written in English were ubiquitous by Chaucer's day.<sup>57</sup> Many of these texts were written by Dominican preaching orders, anxious to make practical use of persuasive oratory.<sup>58</sup> With the emphasis now on inventio, many of these manuals were repositories for anecdotes, bestiaries, exempla, tracts on vices and virtues, and other useful materials.<sup>59</sup> Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale and Parson's Tale may have been based on these preaching manuals.<sup>60</sup> One can only estimate the total significance that the artes praedictoria had for secular literature, but, as Owst points out, clear vestiges of pulpit

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<sup>55</sup>A. C. Spearing, Criticism and Medieval Poetry, p. 49.

<sup>56</sup>Raymond F. Howes, Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians, p. 72.

<sup>57</sup>G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England, pp. 281-282.

<sup>58</sup>Harry Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching," Speculum, IV (July, 1929), 282.

<sup>59</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>60</sup>Coolidge Otis Chapman, "Chaucer on Preachers and Preaching," PMLA, XLIV (March, 1929), 185.

rhetoric can be seen in a significant number of medieval romances.<sup>61</sup>

The curriculum of English medieval universities, including the seven liberal arts as set forth in Varro's Disciplina,<sup>62</sup> consisted of the trivium and quadrivium. The trivium encompassed the study of rhetoric, grammar, and logic. However, to what extent actual rhetoric was taught in the universities is still a matter for conjecture. One writer thinks that rhetoric was not extensively taught to students in English universities until the middle of the fifteenth century, because early library catalogues contained entries for very few rhetoric texts, listing only the more practical manuals on preaching and letter writing.<sup>63</sup> An Oxford document of 1267 indicates that rhetoric was not considered a formal area of study.<sup>64</sup> The possibility exists that more basic instruction took place in the lower schools than previously thought. Consequently, only those students who had not yet mastered Latin grammar may have received

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<sup>61</sup>Owst, op. cit., pp. 295 and 230.

<sup>62</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400, p. 92.

<sup>63</sup>Murphy, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>64</sup>James J. Murphy, "The Earliest Teaching of Rhetoric at Oxford," Speech Monographs, XXVII (November, 1960), 345.

additional training in the university.<sup>65</sup>

Much of the confusion in determining whether or not a true rhetoric existed in the medieval universities is a result of the vagueness of differentiation between rhetoric, grammar, and logic in the Middle Ages. Throughout the Middle Ages, the emphasis tended to shift successively from rhetoric to grammar and, finally, to logic.<sup>66</sup> Structural drills and writing exercises were all actually in the province of grammar.<sup>67</sup> Rhetoric, as a separate field of study, suffered even more ambiguity with the re-discovery of Aristotle's works on rhetoric, lost to most of the Middle Ages, although many of his ideas were transmitted in part by such widely read writers as Cicero and Horace.<sup>68</sup> Alcuin's translation of the De Rhetorica prescribed the Ciceronean five-step division of rhetorical discourse,<sup>69</sup> but Salisbury abbreviated this lengthy procedure into two steps (invention

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<sup>65</sup>Lynn Thorndike, "Elementary and Secondary Education in the Middle Ages," Speculum, XV (October, 1940), 403.

<sup>66</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400, p. 151.

<sup>67</sup>L. Spitzer, "Prologue to the Lais of Marie de France and Medieval Poetics," MP, XLI (November, 1943), 101.

<sup>68</sup>Marvin T. Herrick, "The Early History of Aristotle's Rhetoric in England," PQ, V (1926), 243.

<sup>69</sup>Howes, op. cit., p. 14.

and disposition).<sup>70</sup> It would appear, then, that rhetoric became more closely identified with dialectics and theory, and grammar, which encompassed most of the considerations that one attributes to actual writing, became associated with stylistic matters.

The education of the young man must have begun with a thorough practical knowledge of Latin, to be followed by selected reading.<sup>71</sup> After he had demonstrated his felicity in writing, the student would be expected to study some classical writers--Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Cicero, and Quintilian--as exemplars of style and diction.<sup>72</sup> Somewhere in his grammar training, the young man probably came into contact with Donatus' Ars major, Ars minor, Evrard of Bethume's Graecismus, and Priscian's manual.<sup>73</sup> These texts often present typical exercises which include fabula (the retelling of well known tales), narratio (the retelling of more sophisticated stories), sententia (practice in dilating of themes), and refutatio.<sup>74</sup> Other popular drills include

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<sup>70</sup>Wilbur Samuel Howell, Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700, p. 119.

<sup>71</sup>Abelson, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>73</sup>James J. Murphy, "A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians, RES, XV (February, 1964), 3.

<sup>74</sup>Clark, op. cit., p. 25.

paraphrasing poetry and dilating maxims.<sup>75</sup>

It would appear that originality was not necessarily considered to be a virtue in these school drills, since inventio often represented the renovating of an old legend or story and the rendering of it into the proper language for the occasion. On the other hand, dispositio of common material would necessarily have been vitally important in these drills. This emphasis on organizing material is evident in the medieval sermon which had to possess clearly discernible divisions and transitions if it were to be effective, and manuals prescribed methods of partitioning to insure this clarity. One such scheme advocates three clear steps; i.e., a statement of theme (usually taken from a lesson, epistle, or gospel); prothema (a transitional prayer and invocation); and processus (restatement of the theme with a careful division into three subpoints which had to be explained and supported).<sup>76</sup>

In much of medieval literature one finds conventions governing the beginnings and endings of poems. For example, the natural beginning, ordo materialis, was usually employed if the material lent itself to chronological order.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400, p. 63.

<sup>76</sup>Spearing, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>77</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 101.

Preferring the artificial method, ordo artificiales, Vinsauf writes that aesthetic requirements dictate that point in the narrative where a poet should begin.<sup>78</sup> Successive medieval theorists developed many elaborate schemes to provide for the artificial opening, the more popular means of which were in medias res, the establishment of a final situation before narrating the extenuating events, and the use of sententia, proverbs, generalizations, exempla,<sup>79</sup> and, possibly, the invocation, popular in oral literature.<sup>80</sup> The artificial beginning is used often by Chaucer; for example, he begins House of Fame, by devoting 500 lines to a combination of a dream, an invocation, and an exemplum; the "Reeve's Tale," "Manciple's Tale," and "Friar's Tale" by using proverbs; Anelida and Arcite with invocations; and The Legend of Good Women with adages.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, medieval writers inherited an extensive repertory of ornaments from the classical rhetoricians for the embellishment of verse--the Latin figures of speech or "colors." Extensively outlined in Ad Herennium, these figures

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<sup>78</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>79</sup>Manly, op. cit., pp. 1-6.

<sup>80</sup>Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," Speculum, XI (January, 1936), 109.

<sup>81</sup>Manly, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

of speech became widely accepted by medieval rhetors as the primary tools for style.<sup>82</sup> Classical rhetoricians, concerned with both oral and written composition, thought of the colors as grammatical (schemata lexeos) and oratorical (schemata deanoceas).<sup>83</sup> Later medieval rhetoricians also differentiated between the figures of thought (figurae sententiarum), used for amplification, and speech (figurae verborum), employed as simple ornamentation.<sup>84</sup> Most medieval manuals contain the colors; for example, in Evrard of Bethume's Graecismus, 104 figures are listed.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps, the most important chart of these figures, however, exists in Vinsauf's Poetria Nova, in which he devotes 1125 lines to the use of the colors, dividing them into two categories; i.e., "emotional-and-aesthetic" and "word-and-thought patterns."<sup>86</sup> Specifically, he illustrates thirty-four figurae verborum, nineteen figurae sententiarum, and ten tropes.<sup>87</sup> The tropes, more difficult

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<sup>82</sup>Clark, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>83</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>84</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>85</sup>James J. Murphy, "John Gower's Confessio Amantis and the First Discussion of Rhetoric in the English Language," PQ, XLI (April, 1962), 406.

<sup>86</sup>Manly, op. cit., pp. 12 and 13.

<sup>87</sup>The figures translated by Atkins and listed in this paper in a subsequent reference are taken from Vinsauf's Poetria Nova. Faral's translation of both Vinsauf and Vendome illustrates a common similarity among all such lists in medieval texts.

to employ than the other ornaments, are figurative devices expressive of basic human emotions, whereas the facile figures were more mechanical considerations of words.<sup>88</sup> The following is a list of Vinsauf's figures:

#### Tropes

- (1) nominatio (onomatopoeia), formation of names or words from sounds that suggest the things signified.
- (2) pronominatio, descriptive term or epithet used for a proper name.
- (3) denominatio (metonymy), substitution of an attributive or other suggestive word for the name of a thing.
- (4) circuitio (periphrasis), circumlocution.
- (5) transgressio (hyperbaton), transposition of words out of their normal order.
- (6) superlatio (hyperbole), use of exaggerated terms for emphasis.
- (7) intellectio (synecdoche), mention a part when the whole is to be understood, or vice versa.
- (8) abusio (catachresis), the use of a word in a wrong sense.
- (9) translatio, metaphor.
- (10) permutatio, expression with hidden meaning, allegorical or ironical.

#### Figurae Verborum

- (1) repetitio, repetition of a word at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences.
- (2) conversio, repetition of a word at the close of successive clauses or sentences.
- (3) complexio, combination of repetitio and conversio.
- (4) traductio, repetition of a word elsewhere for emphasis.
- (5) conduplicatio, repetition of a word to express emotion.
- (6) adnominatio, repetition of the root of a word with a change of prefix or suffix: often represents a play upon words.
- (7) gradatio, repetition of the closing word of one clause as the opening word of the next; a linking effect.

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<sup>88</sup> Atkins, op. cit., p. 108.



- (8) interpretatio, repetition of an idea in different words.
- (9) contentio, antithesis of words.
- (10) contrarium, denying the contrary of an idea before affirming it.
- (11) compar, balancing of two clauses of equal length.
- (12) commutatio (chiasmus), in balanced clauses the reversal of the order of the first clause in the second clause.
- (13) similiter cadens, two successive clauses ending in words with the same inflexional endings.
- (14) similiter desinens, two successive clauses ending in words with similar sounds.
- (15) dissolutio (asyndeton), omission of connective words.
- (16) articulus, succession of words without conjunctions; a staccato effect.
- (17) continuatio, a rapid succession of words to complete a sentence.
- (18) praecisio (aposiopesis), a sentence unfinished; a significant or emotional break.
- (19) transitio, a brief statement of what had been said and what was to follow.
- (20) conclusio, a brief summation.
- (21) interrogatio, a rhetorical question or summary challenge.
- (22) ratiocinatio, a question addressed by a speaker to himself.
- (23) subjectio, a suggested answer to a question.
- (24) definitio, a brief explanation.
- (25) exclamatio, exclamation or anger or grief.
- (26) sententia, a wise or pithy saying.
- (27) correctio (epanorthosis), substitution of a more suitable word for one previously used.
- (28) occupatio (occultatio), refusal to describe or narrate while referring briefly to a subject under cover of passing it over.
- (29) disjunctio, use of different verbs to express similar ideas in successive clauses.
- (30) conjunctio, use of one verb (interposed) for the expression of similar ideas in successive clauses.
- (31) adjunctio, use of one verb (either at the beginning or end) for the expression of similar ideas in successive clauses.
- (32) premissio, an admission or concession.
- (33) expeditio, disproof of all but one of various alternatives.

Figurae Sententiarum

- (1) licentia, bold or censorious speech.
- (2) diminutio, self-disparagement.
- (3) descriptio, clear and lucid explanation of a matter.
- (4) divisio, presenting a dilemma.
- (5) frequentatio, accumulation of arguments or facts.
- (6) explolitio, enlarging on a topic in different ways.
- (7) commoratio, emphasizing an important point.
- (8) contentio, antithesis (of ideas).
- (9) similitudo, simile.
- (10) exemplum, illustrative story.
- (11) imago, a comparison.
- (12) effictio, personal description (outward appearance).
- (13) notatio, personal description (character).
- (14) sermocinatio, speech attributed to someone; imaginary discourse.
- (15) conformatio (prosopopoeia), speech or action attributed to mute or inanimate things; personification.
- (16) significatio (emphasis), suggestion of more than is actually said; inuendo.
- (17) brevitas, concise expression.
- (18) demonstratio (vision), description which brings an event or scene vividly before one's eyes.
- (19) distributio, division, giving details.<sup>89</sup>

Using these devices as adornment, medieval writers could elevate the style of commonplace material. If their material had been more original, poets probably would not have sought to embellish their style as consciously as they did.<sup>90</sup>

Chaucer, as Manly has demonstrated, illustrates how these devices are employed, since in virtually all of the Canterbury

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<sup>89</sup>Translated and listed in Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, pp. 201-203.

<sup>90</sup>Manly, op. cit., p. 8.

Tales, he uses the Latin colors in a discernible degree to retell old tales:

<u>Teller</u>	<u>Percentage of Rhetoric</u>
Monk	nearly 100
Manciple	61
Nun's Priest	50
Wife of Bath	50
Pardoner	40
Knight	35
Man of Law	20 - 30
Physician	20 - 30
Prioress	20 - 30
Franklin	20 - 30
Second Nun	20 - 30
Merchant	20 - 30
Squire	16
Clerk	10
Reeve	5
Shipman	5
Miller	1
Friar	1
Summoner	1 91

Many of the rhetorical devices were used in the dilation and abbreviation of material. Because of the Gothic tendency in the Middle Ages, the dilation of poetry was thought to be necessary for the elevation of the style of a given work.<sup>92</sup> Dilation was first employed in Church homiletics, because of the need to explicate carefully many scriptural lines.<sup>93</sup> These modus dilatandi were explained by Priscian and thoroughly discussed in later texts; however, Vendome was

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>92</sup>George John Engelhardt, "Medieval Vestiges in the Rhetoric of Erasmus," PMLA, LXIII (June, 1948), 740.

<sup>93</sup>Loc. cit.

the first rhetorician to formalize rules of expansion for poetics.<sup>94</sup> It is clear, then, that medieval theorists realized that most of a writer's material would be either too brief or too lengthy;<sup>95</sup> consequently, amplification and abbreviation were necessary considerations. As a result, the Poeticae Nova lists eight modes of amplification: (1) descriptio, (2) interpretatio and expositio, (3) apostrophe, (4) repetition, (5) periphrasis, (6) contrast, (7) comparison, and (8) digression.<sup>96</sup> The medieval sermon generally followed these eight methods with, perhaps, more formal attention given to a discussion of words, interpretation of names, and listing of authorities in order to secure amplification.<sup>97</sup>

By the time of the fourteenth century, rhetoricians carefully discussed description in poetry.<sup>98</sup> For example, Vendome, considering description most important in poetry, declares that description should be quite definite, should

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<sup>94</sup>Atkins, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

<sup>95</sup>Manly, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>96</sup>Edmond Faral, Les Arts Poetiques du XII et du XIII Siecle, pp. 63-85.

<sup>97</sup>C. O. Chapman, "'The Pardoner's Tale:' A Medieval Sermon," MLN, XLI (December, 1926), 506-507.

<sup>98</sup>Benjamin S. Harrison, "Medieval Rhetoric in The Book of the Duchess," PMLA, XLIX (June, 1934), 435.

embellish, and should be applied appropriately as Cicero and Horace intended.<sup>99</sup> Vendome devotes most of his attention to the description of persons, whereas Vinsauf also considered the describing of objects.<sup>100</sup> Most of these statements were based upon the Ad Herennium, wherein two primary methods of approaching the description of persons were listed; e.g., effictio (the discussion of physical features) and notatio (the discussion of the subject's character).<sup>101</sup> Effictio tended to become highly conventionalized in medieval literature; consequently, stock descriptions of beautiful women, furniture, and landscape exist in many different sources.<sup>102</sup> Notatio was convenient for dilation, since one could make extended references to one's name, birth, sex, home, nation, faults, education, profession, attitudes, and mannerisms.<sup>103</sup> As far as this writer can discover, no inherent natural order existed in this technique, so he assumes that the medieval writer could terminate his list by caprice. Finally, an ancient attitude that carried over

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<sup>99</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>100</sup>Harrison, op. cit., p. 435.

<sup>101</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>103</sup>Faral, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

into the Middle Ages was the use of all these elements in description for the express purpose of praising or condemning one's subject.<sup>104</sup>

Vinsauf carefully explains the second mode, apostrophe, a device that in the ancient tradition was applicable to legal persuasion.<sup>105</sup> In the medieval tradition, however, this device was actually exclamatio, or, a pause in the narrative to present an emotional lament to animate or inanimate things.<sup>106</sup> Another rhetorical principle, circumlocution, was seen by medieval poets as one of the most eloquent ways in which to elevate material.<sup>107</sup> According to the list of figures from Vinsauf's Poetria Nova, periphrasis and repetitio (including the figures interpretatio and exploitio) were the devices with which to dilate material. One can imagine the importance to repeat and explicate certain passages in the oral tradition. Two main types of figures and schemes used to effect repetition are those intended to help the poet relate to his audience and those used primarily for adornment.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>105</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>106</sup>Manly, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>108</sup>Crosby, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

Hence, because repetition was a necessity, stock expressions or formulas became widely used in both oral and written literature.

The formula is a popular argument, a conventional phrase or expression, or a common description used frequently by different writers.<sup>109</sup> Tatlock classifies an expression as a formula if it occurs three or more times in one piece of literature.<sup>110</sup> Rhetors cite the Iliad and the Odyssey and La3amon's Brut as perfect examples for the use of such epic formulas.<sup>111</sup> Originally, reciters may have used formulas as oral devices to allow transitions in their narratives.<sup>112</sup> Certainly, a poet of alliterative verse could use these devices for the metrical convenience rather than for any specific stylistic purposes.<sup>113</sup> Little doubt exists, however, that the formula eventually was used as a technique for embellishment through which a poet might display his erudition

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<sup>109</sup>Spearing, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

<sup>110</sup>John S. P. Tatlock, "Epic Formulas, Especially in La3amon," PMLA, XXXVIII (March, 1923), 511.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 527.

<sup>112</sup>Spearing, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>113</sup>Ronald A. Waldon, "Oral-Formulaic Technique and Middle English Alliterative Poetry," Speculum, XXXII (October, 1957), 794.

and rhetorical training.<sup>114</sup> Consequently, the use of formulas became attractive for several reasons--facileness of use, emphasis, mnemonics, and style.<sup>115</sup> Later medieval formulas tended to become quite brief and parenthetical.<sup>116</sup>

The most obvious means of dilating material, digression, was studied as a narrative method by earlier rhetoricians.<sup>117</sup> Medievalists, however, associated this technique more with the ancient rhetorical system of proof (loci argumentum) which partitioned a subject into subpoints, such as place, time, cause, manner, and person, allowing elaboration on each point.<sup>118</sup> Also, exempla, comparison, and contrast became popular modes of digression in all medieval literature.<sup>119</sup> Finally, another particularly useful device for expanding material was permutatio. After allegory in scriptural interpretation became prevalent, the use of symbolic objects as conveyances similarly became popular in secular literature.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Spearing, op. cit., pp. 123-124.

<sup>115</sup>Tatlock, op. cit., p. 528.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>117</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>118</sup>George John Engelhardt, "Beowulf: a Study in Dilation," PMLA, LXX (September, 1955), 827.

<sup>119</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>120</sup>Owst, op. cit., p. 325.



Although medieval theorists were aware of techniques of abbreviation, medieval writers, fearing obscurity, employed it less than amplification.<sup>121</sup> Vinsauf, however, recommends that, in some instances, a poet leave familiar parts of his material quickly so as to elaborate more upon less known events.<sup>122</sup> Some of the colors of abbreviatio were those of significatio, occupatio, articulus, and dissolutio, most of which employed either suggestion or the fusing of sentence elements by eliminating connectives.<sup>123</sup> Eventually, in the later medieval period, the practice of conciseness began to come into vogue. For example, Chaucer's more mature poems are characterized by a more concise style with a good deal of absolute construction.<sup>124</sup>

All of these classical rhetorical conventions constitute the major proportion of the literary tradition that existed in the Middle Ages. The colors, the procedures for organizing material, and the methods of amplification were readily accepted by medieval scholars who preferred to approach composition in an organized, a priori manner. However, not all medieval literature was written in an elevated style

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<sup>121</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>122</sup>Manly, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>123</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>124</sup>Manly, op. cit., p. 12.

with an abundance of rhetoric. It is necessary, therefore, for one to investigate the priorities that medieval theorists imposed upon the use of rhetorical high style in poetry if he is to study the stylistic mannerisms of the Gawain-poet.

## CHAPTER II

### MEDIEVAL POETRY AS A BRANCH OF RHETORIC

#### AND SUBSEQUENT LEVELS OF STYLE

Attempting to appraise Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Bloomfield asks several relevant questions about the high style of poetry and its use by the Gawain-poet.<sup>125</sup> Perhaps, one might also add these questions to Bloomfield's list: Did romance material lend itself to the high style? Was the alliterative verse of the fourteenth century suitable to the rendering of such a style? Answers to these questions lie within the province of medieval rhetoric, wherein poetry existed as a branch of rhetorical study. Actually, by the twelfth century, poetry was not even a tributary of grammar, but, rather, it was used as material for practicing circumlocution, digression, description, and argumentation by medieval students.<sup>126</sup> Consequently, poetry must have been closely associated with mechanical considerations of style, not invention.

To medieval poets, then, style meant the elaborate elocutio so carefully discussed by the rhetoricians.<sup>127</sup> In

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<sup>125</sup>Morton W. Bloomfield, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: an Appraisal," PMLA, LXXVI (March, 1961), 11.

<sup>126</sup>McKeon, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

<sup>127</sup>George John Engelhardt, "Medieval Vestiges in the Rhetoric of Erasmus," PMLA, LXIII (June, 1948), 741-742.

fact, different levels of style were considerations in all types of discourse. For example, there were three styles in preaching oratory, each determined by occasion, purpose, and audience.<sup>128</sup> Such a tendency prevailed in medieval poetry to determine style by adornment, because all literary criticism came from the manuals of the rhetoricians who interpreted the Latin colors as devices for outward decoration.<sup>129</sup> Three styles (humilis stylus, mediocurus stylus, and gravis stylus) were recognized by fourteenth-century rhetoricians.<sup>130</sup> The origin of these three is somewhat vague, although most medieval scholars probably attribute it to Cicero.<sup>131</sup> For example, in Book III of De Rhetorica, Cicero discusses two aspects of style--choice of words and movement of sentences.<sup>132</sup> However, he makes a more explicit statement of styles in De Oratore, wherein he states definitely that a distinct style should be consciously sought after by a writer (I.V.17.).<sup>133</sup> He cites,

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<sup>128</sup>Owst, op. cit., pp. 312-313.

<sup>129</sup>Teager, op. cit., pp. 411-412.

<sup>130</sup>Faral, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>131</sup>Teager, op. cit., p. 411.

<sup>132</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400, p. 53.

<sup>133</sup>Cicero, De Oratore, I, edited by T. S. Page, L. D. Post, et. al. All subsequent quotations from De Oratore are taken from this edition.

as the four prerequisites of style, correct diction, lucidity, suitable imagery, and continuity (III.x.38-49). Considering eloquent style, he asks " . . . what is so pleasing to the understanding as a speech adorned and polished with wise reflections and dignified language?" (I.vii.31). He discusses, also, the appropriateness of language, stating that the primary goal of discourse is to communicate effectively with one's audience (III.xxiv.91). Finally, in the Ad Herennium, Cicero makes his distinction among styles:

The Grand type consists of a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words. The Middle type consists of words of a lower, yet not of the lowest and most colloquial class of words. The Simple type is brought down even to the most current idiom of standard speech.  
(IV.viii.11)<sup>134</sup>

To Cicero, then, style meant arrangement of words and choice of diction. Ostensibly, these considerations of style were very important in the Middle Ages. This classical ideal of style was introduced very early into England through the writings of Virgil.<sup>135</sup>

Virgil was respected as a consummate master of style by the fourth century.<sup>136</sup> One of the reasons for the veneration

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<sup>134</sup>Rhetorica Ad Herennium, edited by T. S. Page, E. Capps, et. al.

<sup>135</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400, p. 144.

<sup>136</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 34.

of both Cicero and Virgil was the writings (Commentary and Scipio's Dream) of Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius.<sup>137</sup> Also, Macrobius establishes a reverence for Virgil as a stylist in Saturnalis.<sup>138</sup> Evidence suggests, furthermore, that Donatus may have helped establish the Virgilian cult by collecting material on Virgil for his students.<sup>139</sup> Basically, one finds that Virgil was transmitted to the Middle Ages through rhetorical texts, eulogies, and allegories.<sup>140</sup> Thus, medievalists considered Virgil's greatest quality as a writer to be his adroit handling of embellishment.<sup>141</sup> Hence, three styles of poetry were modeled on Virgil; e.g., rhetoricians used the Bucoliques to illustrate the low style, the Georgics for the middle, and the Aeneid for the high style,<sup>142</sup> and used the writer as a model for imitation in the schools. By the time of the fourteenth century, two other writers, Petrarch and Seneca, were now also popular as models of style. For example, Murphy, basing his conclusion on Chaucer's

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<sup>137</sup>Rand, op. cit., p. 257.

<sup>138</sup>Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, edited by William Harris Stahl, p. 257.

<sup>139</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>140</sup>Abelson, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>141</sup>Atkins, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

<sup>142</sup>Faral, op. cit., p. 87.

allusions to Petrarch, writes that the high style was associated primarily with Petrarch by the time of the late fourteenth century.<sup>143</sup> Certainly, Petrarch's neo-classical tendencies made him an exemplary stylist for the fourteenth century.<sup>144</sup> Seneca's works criticized by some rhetors for their ambiguity, were, nevertheless, plentiful in medieval England.<sup>145</sup> Seneca thought that the use of high rhetoric was most appropriate in descriptive amplification and delineation of character.<sup>146</sup> Cicero, Virgil, Petrarch, and Seneca, then, were read extensively in medieval schools as models of eloquent style, to be read and imitated whenever possible.

Because of this willingness by English scholars to accept without reservation classical theories of composition, pronounced similarities exist between the levels of style of ancient writers and those practiced by medieval rhetoricians; for example, both the classical and medieval writers used elevated style in religious, philosophical, and eulogistic

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<sup>143</sup>James J. Murphy, "A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," RES, XV (February, 1964), 11.

<sup>144</sup>Artz, op. cit., pp. 341-342.

<sup>145</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>146</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400, p. 89.

literature.<sup>147</sup> As it has been shown, Augustine was instrumental in transmitting a distinction between style in De Doctrina Christiana, wherein he instructs the use of grande for religious truths, and submissum and temperatum for less important material.<sup>148</sup> Medievalists also followed the ancient writer's distinctions of style according to three main types of poetry--narrative, dramatic, and epic.<sup>149</sup> After the tenth century, rhetoricians were careful to determine style by the propriety of the poetic subject.<sup>150</sup> Garland makes a reference to this kind of control in his discussion of the four styles, gregorianus, hilarianus, isidorianus, and tullianus.<sup>151</sup> According to him, the low style would be used for shepherds, the middle style for farmers, and the highest style for nobility.<sup>152</sup> Faral, a French translator of Vendome and Vinsauf, states that ". . . la distinction entre styles implique une distinction entre les qualities des personnes dont il s'agait."<sup>153</sup>

Thus, the important matter of style involved distinctions

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<sup>147</sup>Ogle, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>149</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-108.

<sup>151</sup>Teager, op. cit., p. 413.

<sup>152</sup>Spearing, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>153</sup>Faral, op. cit., p. 87.



between the nature of the material. Another consideration of stylistic level was the extent to which the figures were used.<sup>154</sup> Consequently, high style came to be closely identified with much verbal adornment for early rhetoricians.<sup>155</sup> By the later part of the fourteenth century, elaborate devices in poetry were common since, with the vernacularization of poetry, many more native poets used the doctrine of the ancient rhetorical schools.<sup>156</sup> Up to the time of the Gawain-poet, then, the distinctions between styles were made by the degree of embellishment;<sup>157</sup> rhetoricians were evidently looking to Cicero's pronouncement in De Oratore that ". . . the highest distinction of eloquence consists in amplification by means of ornament, which can be used to make one's speech . . . increase the importance of a subject and raise it to a higher level . . . ." (III.xxvii.104) Limiting research to the figures of style and their employment by medieval writers, one author arrives at the following conclusions:

The style, high, low, or middle, then was determined by the absence or presence of the colors in general but rather the absence or

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<sup>154</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>155</sup>Spearing, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>156</sup>Larry D. Benson, Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 124.

<sup>157</sup>Faral, op. cit., p. 98.

presence of certain colors. That is to say, among the colors themselves a distinct hierarchy existed. The doctrine taught that a writer must use high style for high matters, i.e., he must employ the so-called difficult ornaments for high style, and, by contrast chiefly the mechanical or facile ones for low style. High style might include the facile ornaments as well as the difficult ones, but the low style practically excluded the tropes.<sup>158</sup>

The debate as to whether or not the high style was possible in English is valid, mainly because the traditional colors and schemes described by most of the medieval rhetoricians were contained in Latin and concerned Latin poetry. One is tempted to think that later vernacular verse may have had its own unique characteristics, apart from the Latin metrics. However, most of the principles described in contemporary manuals were simply those presented for ideals of composition. It is likely that these techniques applied to French, English, or, for that matter, to any language or dialect. For example, Vendome's definition of poetry presented no obstacles to the vernacular poet: "Verse is metrical description proceeding concisely and line by line through the comely marriage of words and the flowers of thought . . . ." <sup>159</sup> Similarly, Vinsauf instructs his students to avoid such errors as

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<sup>158</sup>Teager, op. cit., pp. 412-413.

<sup>159</sup>Quoted in Henry Osborn Taylor's The Medieval Mind, II, 219.

" . . . hiatus, word jingles, forced metaphors, and excessive periods."<sup>160</sup> One realizes that any of these rhetorical considerations were readily applicable to medieval English verse. The poet of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight uses many of these traditional stylistic devices, and at the same time, evolves an eloquence that is undoubtedly native to his own dialect. Moreover, Chaucer, more than any other English poet, gives prestige to English verse by the application of a conscious eloquence that, while employing many devices of rhetoric, became inherently English. Reading the poems of Chaucer's mature period, one observes the trend from the dilation of the rhetoricians to a more conciseness of expression.<sup>161</sup> Particularly apparent is Chaucer's evolved style in Troilus and Criseyde.<sup>162</sup> Herein, he replaces the devices of dilation with short catalogues; and his digressions become more brief, thus allowing him to continue uninterruptedly with his narrative.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, this new emphasis upon prolixity may be seen, to some degree, in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

Throughout the centuries, epic style was traditionally

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<sup>160</sup> Atkins, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>161</sup> Manly, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>162</sup> A. C. Spearing, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>163</sup> Manly, op. cit., p. 18.

elevated. Indeed, Aristotle thought that the epic style was more ornate than other genre.<sup>164</sup>

Some of the old Teutonic epics contain a great amount of dilation and adornment.<sup>165</sup>

At the same time, another historical consideration of significance concerns the traditional seriousness of epic material, because medieval rhetoricians traditionally reserved the higher style for use with dignified, serious themes.<sup>166</sup>

Consequently, Chaucer's more humorous tales are lacking in elaborate rhetorical devices.<sup>167</sup> It was only natural for later medievalists to adopt many of the epic themes for their own.<sup>168</sup> The medieval romance has many characteristics in common with the older epic.<sup>169</sup> The romances that came

to the Middle Ages were historical, religious, and allegorical.<sup>170</sup> The last two types were comparable to the

<sup>164</sup>Lane Cooper, "The Verbal 'Ornament' in Aristotle's Art of Poetry," Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Edward Kennard Rand, p. 64.

<sup>165</sup>Ker, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>166</sup>Richard J. Beck, "Educational Expectation and Rhetorical Result in the Canterbury Tales," ES, XLIV (August, 1963), 249.

<sup>167</sup>One can see the low rhetorical content of the fabliaux in Manly's chart on page 22 of this study.

<sup>168</sup>Henry Osborn Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages, p. 287.

<sup>169</sup>Nathaniel E. Griffin, "Definition of Romance," PMLA, XXXVIII (March, 1923), 52.

<sup>170</sup>J. P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English, p. 24.

subject matter traditionally elevated by the rhetoricians. Fourteenth-century romances were infinitely more sophisticated than older epics.<sup>171</sup> Similarly, adroit ornamentation and sophistication were adopted by romance writers, because the romance was, many times, a renovation of old material.<sup>172</sup> The romancers, therefore, had need of a thorough knowledge of medieval rhetorical devices, and the romance eventually became known for its skillful narrating of old subjects.<sup>173</sup>

Assuming that French romances influenced the English tradition, especially that of the Northern poets, it is worthwhile for one to note, here, that French romances of the period surrounding the composition of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight were highly rhetorical, with obvious demonstrations of ornamental amplifying and allegory.<sup>174</sup> The embellishments prescribed by the medieval rhetoricians were adopted early by French romance writers who, in turn, influenced vernacular English poets.<sup>175</sup> This influence seems to have been manifest particularly in the North where

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<sup>171</sup>Griffin, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>172</sup>Arthur Heiserman, "Gawain's Clean Courtesy, or The Task of Telling of True Love," MLQ, XXVII (December, 1966), 449.

<sup>173</sup>Alan M. Markman, "Meaning of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," PMLA, LXXII (September, 1957), 582.

<sup>174</sup>Ker, op. cit., p. 393.

<sup>175</sup>Atkins, op. cit., p. 118.

English verse of the fourteenth century was embellished to a considerable degree.<sup>176</sup> Too, the oral tradition of the Northern poets fostered the literary phenomenon of the time--the alliterative revival.<sup>177</sup>

No substantial amount of alliterative verse was written in England until its resurgence around 1350.<sup>178</sup> This fourteenth-century revival of alliterative verse has been an enigma, therefore, for scholars. However, speculation that the revival was a manifestation on the part of Northern lords against King John and Edward II may be valid,<sup>179</sup> since, ostensibly, the Northern and West Midland poets, writing for these barons, ignored the continental influences that exerted themselves upon East Midland poets like Chaucer and employed the traditional style.<sup>180</sup> This hypothesis is relevant to a stylistic study of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, because, if the poem were written for a conservative country nobility, certain conventions of the older style must have been imposed

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<sup>176</sup>Benson, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>177</sup>Ronald A. Waldon, "Oral-formulaic Technique and Middle English Alliterative Poetry," Speculum, XXXII (October, 1957), 793-94.

<sup>178</sup>J. R. Hulbert, "A Hypothesis Concerning the Alliterative Revival," MP, XXVIII (May, 1931), 405.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 422.

<sup>180</sup>Elizabeth Salter, "Alliterative Revival," MP, LXIV (November, 1966), 150.

upon its author.<sup>181</sup>

Consequently, a number of conclusions may be drawn about poetic style in the Middle Ages: (1) the levels of style were basically those discussed in the rhetorician's manuals; (2) medieval writers associated amplifications of material with the rhetorical style; (3) foreign influences were making themselves manifest in the works of poets like Chaucer; but (4) the Gawain-poet, because of the very nature of the fourteenth-century revival, would have been expected to render his poetry in the more traditional style. How the author of Sir Gawain used this high style is the remaining query of this investigation.

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<sup>181</sup>Hulbert, op. cit., p. 414.

### CHAPTER III

#### RHETORICAL FIGURES IN

#### SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Sir Gawain stands as proof of its author's knowledge of rhetorical stylistic devices. Since medieval high style has been shown to be primarily determined by verbal adornment, one may expect to find such evidence of figures in Sir Gawain. Assuming that the anonymous poet took several diverse themes from other sources and combined them in his narrative, the writer will eliminate, therewith, any meaningful discussion of inventio and dispositio and apply his investigation specifically to elocutio, wherein style was generally determined in the Middle Ages. Similarly, it may be assumed that the subject matter of Sir Gawain, with its sources in the vast tradition of Arthurian romance, is, in itself, appropriate for the use of high style by its writer. Determining the extent to which the tropes (which Teager concludes were restricted to elevated style) and proper diction are used in this romance should provide one with an estimation of its rhetorical content. Furthermore, identifying his methods of dilation and his use of traditional conventions and themes may help to establish the Gawain-poet's familiarity with the rhetorical precepts that characterize the works of many other medieval authors.



Of the ten tropes considered by medieval theorists as appropriate to high style, onomatopoeia (nominatio), metonymy (pronominatio and denominatio), circumlocution (circuitio), hyperbaton (transgressio), hyperbole (superlatio), metaphor (translatio), and allegory (permutatio) appear in Sir Gawain. Chapman, in his study of the poet's frequent allusions to sounds, identifies two examples of onomatopoeia in Sir Gawain: e.g., "þen þe first cors come with crakkyng of trumpes . . .," and "Wyth such a crakkande kry as klyffes haden brusten" (118 and 1166).<sup>182</sup> In addition, one cites the following examples: cakled (1412), co3ed, (307), gronyed (1442, 2157, 2502), 3arrande (1595), 3aule (1453), rynkande (2337), rout (457), and strakande (1923).<sup>183</sup> Many of the scenes in which this figure occurs are particularly vivid accounts of courtly life. Chapman speculates that the poet's tendency to infer sound in all his poems represents a special chorister's training.<sup>184</sup> Similarly, in alliterative verse naturally suited to oral delivery, the Gawain-

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<sup>182</sup>Coolidge Otis Chapman, "Virgil and the Gawain-Poet," PMLA, LX (March, 1945), 18.

<sup>183</sup>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, EETS, edited by Sir Israel Gollancz. All subsequent references to the poem will be taken from this edition. Citation will be made by line.

<sup>184</sup>Coolidge Otis Chapman, "The Musical Training of the Pearl-Poet," PMLA, XLVI (March, 1931), 181. Chapman cites the poet's description of eight different instruments in Sir Gawain.

poet has a particularly appropriate medium in which to use sound to full advantage.<sup>185</sup>

Pronominatio was used quite extensively in the romance. Because an elevated vocabulary is advocated by the rhetoricians as a characteristic of style, this device is particularly convenient for the poet to expand his repertory of words.<sup>186</sup> In Sir Gawain, pronominatio is employed in the form of adjectives used as substitutes for proper nouns.<sup>187</sup> Oakden has compiled a list of examples of this device, including, among others, bat cortays and be clere as substitutes for Bercilak's queen.<sup>188</sup> Other similar references to persons by metaphorical adjectives occur throughout the poem: e.g., bat noble, referring to Gawain (1750), be rychest, used to describe the company in Bercilak's castle, subsequent descriptions of other characters as be hy3, and be lo3e (302), bat semly (672), bis wyly (1905), a semloker (83), be grete (2490), and some variations of gaye (970, 1213, and 1822). Furthermore, the substantival adjective is used by the author for metrical

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<sup>185</sup>A. C. Spearing, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>186</sup>John W. Clark, "Gawain-Poet and the Substantival Adjective," JEGP, XLIX (January, 1950), 65.

<sup>187</sup>Oakden, op. cit., p. 394.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., p. 399.

purposes; for example, lines 464, 1104, 1814, and 2530 contain this device in rhyming positions in the line.<sup>189</sup>

According to Vinsauf's list of figures, denominatio is a similar device for referring to animals or objects. In Sir Gawain, it is employed by the use of some adjectives, but depends occasionally upon other diminutive terms. The Gawain-poet makes numerous such inanimate and fewer animate references in the poem: e.g., schyre poetically represents flesh in ll. 1331 and 2256; syluerin describes the elaborate tableware in l. 125, and broun is used for deerhide in l. 1162. Other similar uses occur in halue (165, 185, 649, 1542), lyke (498), lo3e (1040), scharp (424, 1593, 1902, 2313, 2332), selly (28, 475), felle (1585), and fresche (129).

The fourth trope circuitio appears in Sir Gawain through stock expressions, dilation of terms, elaborate descriptions, digressions, and careful explications. Since it has been established that dilating material was formalized as an exercise in eloquent writing by the rhetoricians, one may expect the Gawain-poet to use many conventions familiar to this tradition. One such convention in Sir Gawain occurs in the traditional references to Troy at the beginning and ending of the poem. Ebbs specifically refers to the Troy

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<sup>189</sup>John W. Clark, "Gawain-Poet and the Substantival Adjective," JEGP, XLIX (January, 1950), 62.

lines as a "frame" into which all other diverse elements of the romance are placed; i.e., the poem begins with the line "Siþen þe sege & þe asaute wat3 sesed at Troye," which occurs again in the last stanza of the poem with almost identical wording as "After þe segge & þe asaute wat3 sesed at Troye."<sup>190</sup> The three sections of this opening--the allusions to Troy, to Brutus' exploits, to the fame of Camelot--are precisely reversed in the closing.<sup>191</sup> This tendency to adhere to symmetry is similarly evident in the Pearl, wherein the author places comparable expressions at the beginning and end of many stanzas.<sup>192</sup> Therefore, the existence of this convention serves as stylistic clues in support of a common authorship for all four poems, Patience, Cleanness, Pearl, and Sir Gawain.<sup>193</sup> The poet's use of these stock lines does not, however, constitute the artificial order praised by the theorists, since the romance continues chronologically without any distortion.<sup>194</sup>

Other conventional expressions are used for dilating

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<sup>190</sup>John Dale Ebbs, "Stylistic Mannerisms of the Gawain-Poet," JEGP, LVII (July, 1958), 523.

<sup>191</sup>Dale B. J. Randall, "Note on Structure in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," MLN, LXXII (March, 1957), 162.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>193</sup>Ebbs, op. cit., p. 523.

<sup>194</sup>Benson, op. cit., p. 170.

material in Sir Gawain. Obvious vestiges of oral-formulaic devices, existing in many English romances, are apparent in this poem in the many "minstrel phrases."<sup>195</sup> Also, many other phrases in the poem seem to indicate a close relationship with an audience. Based upon their shift in tense and their parenthetical nature, the following examples of this oral device exist in the poem; ostensibly, for the purpose of emphasis or achieving credibility: "Mony wylsum way he rode / De bok as I herde say" (689-690); "A hundreth of hunteres, as I haf herde telle / þe best" (1144-1145); "Den with ledes & ly3t he wat3 ladde to his chambre / & blyþely bro3t to his bedde to be at his rest / 3if he ne slepe soundly, say ne dar I / For he hade muche on þe morn to mynne, 3if he wolde / in þo3t" (1989-1993); and other instances in ll. 26-27, 83-84, 246-249, 301-302, 416, 486-490, 624, 629-630, 651, 660-661, 665, 1007-1010, and 2521. If Baugh is correct in his hypothesis, many more of the direct references to audience may be formulaic in nature and used in common by many other poets of the revival.

In addition to the more traditional formulaic expressions common to medieval poetry, the Gawain-poet uses his own patterns in many places. Benson, in a detailed study of the

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<sup>195</sup>Albert C. Baugh, "Middle English Romance: Some Questions of Creation, Presentation, and Preservation," Speculum, XLII (January, 1967), 3.

syntax in Sir Gawain, points out that the poet often repeats patterns to fill out his lines, thus constructing his own formulaic phrases.<sup>196</sup> This kind of line expansion by the author is particularly noticeable in his traditional references to God, wherein he tends to expand his terms with lengthy modifiers: e.g., "Dat dryȝtyn for oure destyne to deȝe watȝ borne" and ". . . þe wyȝe . . . þat vp-holdeȝ þe heuen."<sup>197</sup> This dilation is prevalent throughout Sir Gawain, a stylistic device that is inherently convenient for expediting the metrical requirements of the verse.<sup>198</sup> Finally, the use of conventional phrases or formulaic expressions enabled the Gawain-poet to amplify commonplace ideas and adorn his verse with a minimum of effort.

Another method of circumlocution is the author's repetition of ideas and terms. For example, in these following lines interpretatio is used to amplify one line into two: "Der tournayed tulkes by tymeȝ ful mony / Justed

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<sup>196</sup>Benson, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>197</sup>This technique was explained with these examples quoted in John W. Clark, "Paraphrases for 'God' in the Poems Attributed to the Gawain-Poet," MLN, LXV (April, 1950), 232-236.

<sup>198</sup>Waldon, op. cit., p. 794. The opinion that many formulas of this period are used more for metrics than style is expressed by this author.

<sup>199</sup>Robert D. Stevick, "Criticism of Middle English Lyrics," MP, LXIV (November, 1966), 115.

ful jolile þise gentyle kni3tes" (41-42). The simpler device of repetitio is employed by beginning several clauses or sentences with identical words. In all of the following three examples, this device not only provides an expansion of an idea but also produces a pleasing parallelism (compar) that alters the cadence of the passage: (1) "Der wat3 mete, þer wat3 myrþe, þer wat3 much iove" (1007); (2) "What! hit wharred & whette as water at a mulle / What! hit rashced & ronge, rawþe to here" (2203-2204); and (3) "Sumwhyle wyth worme3 he werre3, & with wolues als / Sumwhyle wyth wodwos þat woned in þe knarre3" (720-721).

Within the elaborate descriptive passages in Sir Gawain, one sees rhetorical amplification at its best. Many of the general principles employed by the author in his descriptions of persons and scenery have precedents in the texts of the theorists. Pearsall, in his excellent study of rhetorical description in Sir Gawain, points out that many of the scenes contain "themes" common to medieval literature; for example, the description of Guenevere and Bercilak's queen are traditional examples of the feminae pulchritudinus; the references to spring and winter, the landscapes of Gawain's quest, the passages devoted to the arming of Gawain, and two of the hunting scenes appear to be directly from the manuals of the rhetoricians, thus commonly used by many

writers of the age.<sup>200</sup> Significant for amplifying passages, medieval theorists use the modus dilantandi in their descriptions.<sup>201</sup> For example, this theory of copiously placing detail into the narrative may be readily seen in Chaucer's Knights Tale, in which the narrative is completely stopped to allow elaborate description of the temples of Venus, Mars, and Diana. Furthermore, Clark's investigation of Priscian's school drills illustrates the rhetoricians' preoccupation with enlarging a given topic:

As expolitio . . . the exercise encouraged many medieval poets to stop their story in order to expatiate, amplify, dilate, pile it on, and inflate.

Sententia . . . was essentially more practice in dilating on a theme and taught the use of the same topics. The pattern was: praise the author of the proverb, paraphrase the proverb, give a reason, cite a contrast, make a comparison, give an example, quote an authority, end with a hortatory conclusion.<sup>202</sup>

In order to see how this rhetorical principle is applied in Sir Gawain, one may chart the amplification of events in the first 319 lines of Fit II. The three main

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<sup>200</sup>Derek A. Pearsall, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio' in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," MLR, L (April, 1955), 130-133.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., pp. 129-130. Pearsall explains that these modes of dilation were originally placed under inventio by the classical theorists, but medievalists saw their usefulness in partitioning descriptive subjects.

<sup>202</sup>Quoted in Donald Lemen Clark, "Rhetoric and the Literature of the English Middle Ages," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XIV (February, 1959), 25.



events that take place in this section are (1) Gawain's leave-taking, (2) his quest, and (3) his arrival at Bercilak's castle. The first forty-four lines of the fit are devoted to the rather conventional descriptions of spring, summer, and winter that often appear in other works of the period. The actual farewell at the court is further dilated with a listing of numerous knights who bade Gawain farewell. The next four fits (104 lines) describe the arming of Gawain. The poet's careful labeling of the armour placed on Gawain and Gryngolet comprises abundant listing or "cataloguing," prescribed by the rhetoricians.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, within this elaborate description of the amour, the author further amplifies the pentangle by the use of interpretatio (repetition of ideas) and commoratio (emphasis by explication), first with,

For hit is a figure þat haldeþ fyue poynteþ,  
 & vche lyne vmbe-lappeþ & loukeþ in oþer,  
 & ay-quere hit is endeþ, & Englych hit callen  
 Ouer-al, as I here, þe endeles knot.  
 (627-630)

and again,

. . . & vchone halched in oþer, þat non ende hade,  
 & fyched vpon fyue poynteþ, þat fayld neuer,  
 Ne samned neuer in no syde, ne sundred nouþer;  
 With-uten ende at any noke i-wis no-quere I fynde,  
 Whereuer þe gomen bygan, or glod to an ende.  
 (656-661)

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<sup>203</sup>Pearsall, op. cit., p. 130.

The poet employs explication in the same passage with,

Fyrst he wat3 funden fautle3 in his fyue wytte3,  
 & efte fayled neuer þe freke in his fyue fynGRES,  
 & alle his afaunce vpon folde wat3 in þe fyue  
 wounde3  
 Dat Cryst ka3t on þe croys, as þe crede telle3;  
 & quere-soeuer þys mon in melly wat3 stad,  
 His þro þo3t wat3 in þat, þur3 alle oþer þynge3,  
 Dat alle his fersnes he feng at þe fyue joye3  
 Dat þe hende heuen quene had of hir chylde . . . .  
 (640-647)

In total, forty-six lines are devoted to this description and explanation of Gawain's shield.

Following a transitional fit, the quest is portrayed. Actually, the trip is remarkably brief with only a trace of dilation in the listing of geographical points. Some descriptive passages of the quest appear to be purposely vague in order to produce mystery:<sup>204</sup> e.g., "Mony klyf he ouer-clambe in contraye3 straunge . . ." (713). Another mode of dilation, however, recurs when Gawain, at the height of his discomfort in the wilderness, makes his lament (apostrophe) to Mary:

. . . ' I be-seche þe, lorde,  
 & Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere,  
 Of sum herber þer he3ly I my3t here masse  
 & þy matyne3 to-morne, mekely I ask,  
 & þer-to prestly I pray my pater & aue  
 & crede.'  
 (753-758)

The last significant halt in the narrative is the description of Bercilak's castle. Once Gawain approaches

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<sup>204</sup>Markman, op. cit., p. 585. This writer believes the poet consciously mingles elements of reality and romance throughout his poem.

through the gate, the familiar cataloguing of details appears:

& innermore he be-helde þat halle ful hyȝe,  
 Towres telded bytwene, trochet ful þik,  
 Fayre fylyoleȝ þat fyȝed, & ferlyly long,  
 With coruon coprounes, craftyly sleȝe;  
 Chalk-whyt chymnees þer ches he in-noȝe,  
 Upon bastel roueȝ þat blenked ful quyte . . . .  
 (794-799)

Consequently, in the first half of Fit II, over half of the lines are used to describe or dilate in some manner. Although the poet does not deleteriously impede the story, the methods used are familiar to the medieval tradition.

Two last vestiges of this doctrine that taught abundance are apparent in, first, the hunting scenes and, secondly, the rendezvous at the Green Chapel. Although the chases may be more properly a consideration of dispositio, they, ostensibly, were a method of digression, because the weaving together of two diverse sources, not considered a rhetorical device, is somewhat foreign to medieval English poets.<sup>205</sup> These three scenes, then, appear to be the most extensive digression in the romance, with almost 300 lines devoted to careful portrayal of this country sport. Likewise, after Gawain has his confrontation with the Green Knight at his chapel, the author employs imago, another rhetorical color. When the nature of the trials is explained to Gawain, the hero cites several traditional comparisons to

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<sup>205</sup>Spearing, op. cit., p. 32.

emphasize the morals involved:

Bot hit is no ferly þa3 a fole madde  
 & þur3 wyles of wymmnen be wonen to sor3;  
 For so wat3 Adam in erde with one bygyled,  
 & Salamon with fele sere, & Samson eft-sone3,  
 Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde, & Dauyth þer-after  
 Wat3 blended with Barsabe, þat much bale  
 boled.

(2414-2419)

The principles of circumlocution, then, evident in Sir Gawain as formulaic passages and phrases, parenthetical oral expressions, repetitions, conventional themes, elaborate descriptions, explications, digressions, laments, and comparisons, are representative modes of dilation taught by the theorists and subsequently practiced by writers in the Middle Ages.

Four other tropes--transgressio, hyperbole, abusio, and metaphor--do not seem to be used to any significant degree in Sir Gawain. In Bede's De Schematibus et Tropis, transgressio was explained as several devices, including the simple reversing of word-thought order and the use of parenthetical statements within the sentence.<sup>206</sup> Alliterative verse of the fourteenth century is inherently "loose."<sup>207</sup> Thus, it is rather difficult to judge examples of this device

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<sup>206</sup>Tanenhaus, op. cit., pp. 248-249. Specifically, Bede lists five variations of this device; i.e., hysterology, anastrophe, parenthesis, tnesis, and synchysis.

<sup>207</sup>Oakden, op. cit., p. 392.

because of the variations possible in Sir Gawain. Nevertheless, the following examples are offered as possible illustrations of this figure: "& he þat wan wat3 not wrothe, þat may 3e wel trawe" (70) and "& al grayes þe gres, þat grene wat3 ere" (527). In addition, the poet's use of adjectives at the end of sentences may be a deliberate descriptive device of this nature.<sup>208</sup>

The Gawain-poet's use of exaggeration is noticeably of a literal nature, with, perhaps, the use of the superlative adjectives at its most apparent manifestation. Undoubtedly, many of these expressions used to extoll are "tag phrases" common to other poems of the period. Some of the more noticeable examples in Sir Gawain are "þe hapnest vnder heuen" (56), "prynce withouten pere" (873), "þer is no hapel vnder heuen to hewe hym þat my3t" (1853), "Hit wat3 þe myriest mute þat euer men herde" (1915), and many more. Similes are very plentiful in the poem,<sup>209</sup> and some of these figures are hyperbolic, e.g., "Felle face as þe fyre" (847) and "As growe grene as þe gres and grener hit semed."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup>Marie Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 113. She points out the use of this device specifically during the description of the Green Knight to produce climax in the first scene.

<sup>209</sup>Coolidge Otis Chapman, "Virgil and the Gawain-Poet," PMLA, LX (March, 1945), 19.

<sup>210</sup>Loc. cit. This last simile is quoted in the article as one of the poet's double comparisons.

The writer finds no examples of synecdoche in Sir Gawain, and only limited uses of metaphor (abusio, a related trope, was often considered a metaphor by medieval theorists).<sup>211</sup> Chapman reports that he found no examples of classical metaphors in the poem.<sup>212</sup> Nevertheless, a few terms are metaphorically combined, similar to the Old English kenning. Two such examples are stonstil (242), and luf-la3ing (1777). In addition to these, a common medieval metaphorical reference to heat and cold as considerations of distress and joy are apparent in some instances in Sir Gawain.<sup>213</sup> One possible explanation to show why some of these devices are so scarce in the poem may be that they were too subtle to employ in an oral delivery of alliterative verse, so complex in its nature.

The last trope, permutatio, is the use of allegory and irony. Although earlier rhetoricians did not consider it a common rhetorical device, later writers cite allegory as a scheme to be used in poetry.<sup>214</sup> Medieval scholars,

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<sup>211</sup>Tanenhaus, op. cit., p. 245. This ambiguity of terms was explained in the author's footnote number 75.

<sup>212</sup>Coolidge Otis Chapman, "Virgil and the Gawain-Poet," PMLA, LX (March, 1945), 18.

<sup>213</sup>L. Whitbread, "A Medieval Metaphor," PQ, XVII (October, 1938), 367-368.

<sup>214</sup>Atkins, op. cit., pp. 21 and 23.

concerned with scriptural analysis, recognized four levels of allegory--sensus literalis, sensus tropologicus, sensus allegoriocus, and sensus anagogicus.<sup>215</sup> In Sir Gawain possible symbolism is acknowledged by scholars, particularly in the description of the pentangle and the courtesy trail,<sup>216</sup> and in the hunt scenes that revolve around the chamber scenes.<sup>217</sup> Ostensibly, most Arthurian legends are characterized by such hidden meanings.<sup>218</sup>

The use of irony by the Gawain-poet is cited by some scholars as a device that constitutes part of the very temper of the poem, thus making it quite different from its convention.<sup>219</sup> Whether or not irony was used to the extent that it produces the "high comedy" that Shedd indicates, one can see passages wherein it appears to be used. For example, when Arthur welcomes the Green Knight

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<sup>215</sup>Harry Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching," Speculum, IV (July, 1929), 283.

<sup>216</sup>Oscar Cargil and Margaret Schlauch, "The Pearl and Its Jeweler," PMLA, XLIII (March, 1928), 119.

<sup>217</sup>Henry Lyttleton Savage, The Gawain-Poet, pp. 36-37.

<sup>218</sup>M. Mells, "Christian Significance and Romance Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," MLR, IX (October, 1965), 483.

<sup>219</sup>Gordon M. Shedd, "Knight in Tarnished Armour: the Meaning of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," MLR, LXII (January, 1967), 12-13.

to Camelot, he uses the salutation " . . . 'wyȝe, welcum, iwys to þis place (252). Similarly, as Gawain arrives at the Green Chapel, he is greeted with strikingly similar terms by his formidable host: "I-wysse þou art welcom, wyȝe, to my place" (2240). Perhaps, another instance of irony occurs when Bercilak returns from the third hunt to receive three kisses from Gawain, who has, also, accepted the green girdle:

"Mary," quof þat oper mon, "myn is bi-hynde,  
For I haf hunted al þis day, & noȝt haf I geten  
Bot þis foule fox felle, þe fendeȝ haf þe godeȝ . . . ."  
(1942-1944)

In summary, of the ten tropes admonished for rhetorical high style, one concludes that (1) nominatio, pronominatio, denominatio, circumlocution, and permutatio are used extensively in Sir Gawain; (2) a limited use of transgressio hyperbole (superlatio), and metaphor (translatio) appears; and (3) no significant examples of syndecdoche (intellectio) seem to be present. Of course, many of the minor colors are used in the poem. Chapman, in his study of such colors, lists examples of similes, chiasmus, personification, syndeton, polysyndeton, and ellipsis.<sup>220</sup> Another scholar, analyzing the conventional Troy material in only the first stanza of the poem, finds a surprising abundance of stylistic

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<sup>220</sup> Coolidge Otis Chapman, "Virgil and the Gawain-Poet," PMLA, LX (March, 1945), 17-18.



devices including interpretatio, contentio, compar, dissolutio, circuitio, adnominatio, chiasmus, similiter cadens, disjunctio, and commoratio.<sup>221</sup>

A final consideration of style is the Gawain-poet's diction. Northern alliterative poets of the fourteenth century used a vocabulary that contains both remnants of Anglo-Saxon,<sup>222</sup> and an increasingly significant amount of French words.<sup>223</sup> Borroff's study of the Gawain-poet's language suggests that he uses primarily traditional words, some of which were considered specifically appropriate for higher style.<sup>224</sup> She further writes that these more elevated terms are often found in positions in the verse where special connotations are desired by the author.<sup>225</sup> One readily notices sections in Sir Gawain wherein the vocabulary changes. For example, in the hunting scenes many specialized words, such as gargulun and fermysoun tyme appear. It would seem, also, that these more colloquial words are not congruous

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<sup>221</sup>Benson, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>222</sup>Hartley Bateson, "Three Notes on the Middle-English 'Cleanness,'" MLR, (January, 1924), 99.

<sup>223</sup>Merle Fifield's "Thirteenth-Century Lyrics and the Alliterative Tradition," JEGP, LXII (January, 1963), 13.

<sup>224</sup>Borroff, op. cit., pp. 90 and 93. She lists, among others, these elevated nouns, ubiquitous in the poem: burne, freke, gome, lede, renk, schalk, segge, tulk, and wy3e.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-68.

with the higher style of other passages, such as the scenes in Bercilak's castle in which the diction is very "courteous" and characterized by French words like cheuisaunce, which occurs four times in these scenes only. One concludes, therefore, that much of the vocabulary in Sir Gawain is elevated, but that certain passages employ a higher speech, much as the rhetoricians prescribed.

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