

THE EMPORIA STATE



RESEARCH



STUDIES



THE GRADUATE PUBLICATION OF THE EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Three Studies
of
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Robert Goltra

The Confession in the Green Chapel: Gawain's True Absolution

Nedra C. Grogan

Mulier est hominis confusio: The Green Knight's Lady

Cora Zalatel

The Green Knight as Thor

The Emporia State Research Studies

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY
EMPORIA, KANSAS

Three Studies
of
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Robert Goltra

The Confession in the Green Chapel: Gawain's True Absolution

Nedra C. Grogan

Mulier est hominis confusio: The Green Knight's Lady

Cora Zalatel

The Green Knight as Thor

Vol. XXXII

Spring, 1984

Number 4

THE EMPORIA STATE RESEARCH STUDIES is published quarterly by The School of Graduate and Professional Studies of the Emporia State University, 1200 Commercial St., Emporia, Kansas, 66801. Entered as second-class matter September 16, 1952, at the post office at Emporia, Kansas, under the act of August 24, 1912. Postage paid at Emporia, Kansas.

821.1
G24Zg

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY
EMPORIA, KANSAS

JOHN E. VISSER
President of the University

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE
AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

HAROLD DURST, *Dean*

EDITORIAL BOARD

JOSEPH V. HICKEY, *Associate Professor of Anthropology*

THOMAS D. ISERN, *Lecturer and Grants Fiscal Manager*

CARL W. PROPHET, *Professor of Biological Sciences*

MELVIN STORM, *Professor of English*

CHARLES E. WALTON, *Professor of English*

Editor of This Issue: MELVIN STORM

Papers published in this periodical are written by faculty members of the Emporia State University and by either undergraduate or graduate students whose studies are conducted in residence under the supervision of a faculty member of the University.

443553

DATA PROCESSING
JAN 18 1985

"Statement required by the Act of October, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code, showing Ownership, Management and Circulation." **The Emporia State Research Studies** is published quarterly. Editorial Office and Publication Office at 1200 Commercial Street, Emporia, Kansas (66801). The **Research Studies** is edited and published by the Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

A complete list of all publications of *The Emporia State Research Studies* is published in the fourth number of each volume.

The Confession in the Green Chapel: Gawain's True Absolution

by
Robert Goltra

Toward the end of Gawain's climactic encounter with the Green Knight, the Knight explains that he has feigned two blows at Gawain in recognition of the two tests Gawain has passed and that he has administered one blow due to Gawain's failure to pass the third test:

I couþe wroþeloker haf waret, to þe haf wrogt anger.
Fyrst I mansed þe murlyly with a mynt one,
And roue þe wyth no rof-sore, with rygt I þe profered
For þe forwarde þat we fest in þe fyrst nygt,
And þou trystly þe trawþe and trwly me haldez,
Al þe gayne þow me gef, as god mon schulde.
Pat oþer munt for þe morne, mon, I þe profered,
Þou kyssedes my clere wyf—þe cossez me ragtez.
For boþe two here I þe bede bot two bare myntes
boute scape.
Trwe mon trwe restore,
Þenne þar mon drede no waþe.
At þe þrid þou fayled þore,
And þerfor þat tappe ta þe.¹

The nick Gawain has suffered was dealt because of Gawain's desire for, acceptance of, and concealment of the green girdle with which the Lady tempted him during their third encounter. Gawain resisted the temptations offered on the first two occasions—thus the two feints—but failed the third test—thus the “tappe.” The reaction of the Green Knight, and the later reaction of Arthur and his court, is to minimize Gawain's failings. The Green Knight describes Gawain as “þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote zede” (2363), and later, when Gawain tells the court that he will wear the belt as penance, Arthur “comfortez þe knygt, and alle þe court als / Lagen loude þerat . . .” (2513-14). Gawain, however, takes a more serious view

Robert Goltra is a graduate student in the Division of English and Foreign Languages at Emporia State University.

¹*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, rev. Norman Davis, 2nd ed. (Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), 2344-57 (pp. 64-65). All further references to this work appear as line numbers in the text.

of what has occurred. He is described as being "[s]o agreed for greme he gryed withinne; / Alle þe blode of his brest blende in his face, / Þat al he schrank for schome þat þe schalk talked" (2370-72). He recounts his failures, saying that fear caused him to be covetous and to act in a dishonorable manner:

For care of þy knokke cowardyse me tazt
To accorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake,
Þat is larges and lewté þat longez to knygtez.
Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer
Of trecherye and vntrawþe: boþe bityde sorze
and care!

(2379-84)

He later pledges to wear the girdle "in sygne of my surfet" (2433). Gawain, then, sees himself as one guilty of "cowardyse," a failing which, in turn, has led him to practice "couetyse" and to reject "larges" and "lewté." Some readers, however, accept the judgment of the Green Knight, Bertilak, and the court. John Burrow, for one, examines Gawain's confession of "couetyse" and argues that contemporary readers "must have seen that it was Bertilak's rather than Gawain's version which was the right one and that Gawain's remorse was . . . extravagant."² Yet, given the author's portrait of Gawain, Gawain's actions in the poem, and the religious thought of the fourteenth century, Gawain's judgment of his failures may well be the more accurate one. Gawain not only sinned but also made an invalid confession, one later corrected by his confession to the Green Knight.³

Gawain is initially presented as the embodiment of Christian perfection. He is described as one

ay faythful in fyue and sere fyue syþez
Gawan watz for gode knawen, and as golde pured,
Voyded of vche vylany, wyth vertuez ennourned
in mote;
Forþy þe pentangel nwe
He ber in schelde and cote,
As tulk of tale most trwe
And gentylest knygt of lote.

¹John Burrow, "The Two Confession Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Modern Philology*, 57 (1959/60), 79.

²Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner* (East Brunswick, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1983). Braswell reaches the same basic conclusions regarding Gawain's lapse, its seriousness, and the role of the Green Knight as confessor as she traces the role of the sinner through the literature of the medieval period.

Fyrst he watz funden fautlez in his fyue wyttez,
And efte fayled neuer þe freke in his fyue fyngres
And alle his afaunce vpon folde watz in þe fyue woundez
Þat Cryst kagt on þe croys, as þe crede tellez;
And quere-so-euer þys mon in melly watz stad,
His þro þoht watz in þat, þurȝ alle oþer þyngez,
Þat alle his forsnes he feng at þe fyue joyez
Þat þe hende heuen-quene had of hir chylde.

(632-47)

Joseph Longo states that "no one can doubt the validity of the Gawain poet's delineation of his hero up to the Temptation Scene as, to borrow Henry James' useful epithet, a 'reflector' of the *humilitas* manifest in Christ's Incarnation,"⁴ The court describes Gawain as one who "[t]o fynde hys fere vpon folde, in fayth, is not eþe" (676). George J. Engelhardt sees Gawain's predicament as one

not made for petty knights uninitiated in the mysteries of consummate chivalric virtue; they could elude or ignore the dilemmas that it posed, just as the lesser knights in Arthur's hall shrank from the challenge of the "aghlich mayster." But for Gawain it was pat. By universal repute he was the perfect knight. . . . The pentangle or "endeles knot" emblazoned on his shield was the symbol of his reputation. Like the tracery of that star, his virtue was reputed to be whole, without gap or inconsistency.⁵

The very excellence of Gawain's spiritual condition is, of course, bound to magnify any lapse in his moral judgment. In *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas quotes Isidore as holding that a sin is to be considered "so much the more grievous as the sinner is held to be a more excellent person."⁶ Aquinas states four reasons for this:

First, because a more excellent person, e.g. one who excels in knowledge and virtue, can more easily resist sin. . . . Secondly, . . . because every good in which a man excels, is a gift of God, to Whom man is ungrateful when he sins. . . . Thirdly, on account of the sinful act being specially inconsistent with the excellence of the person sinning. . . . Fourthly, on account of the example of scandal; because, as Gregory says (*Pastori* 1.2): *when the sinner is honored for his position*. . . .⁷

⁴Joseph A. Longo, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: The Christian Quest for Perfection," *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, n.v. (1967), 61.

⁵George J. Engelhardt, "The Predicament of Gawain," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 16 (1955), 218.

⁶St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. and supp. (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1946), p. 918.

⁷Aquinas, p. 918.

As the seemingly perfect knight, Gawain is an example of the "more excellent person" whose any sin will be intensified by that very excellence.

During his stay at Bertilak's castle, Gawain is thrice tempted by the Lady. The first day he is tempted by her flesh. Gawain resists this temptation. On the second day, the Lady appeals both to his lust and to his pride in himself as one noted for his skill in matters of love. She chides him that he "[o]ghe to a zonke þynk zern to schewe / And teche sum tokenez of trweluf craftes. / Why! ar ze lewed, þat alle þe los weldez?" (1526-28). Gawain again repulses her assault on his virtue. On the third day, the Lady appeals to Gawain's lust, avarice, and fear of death. The Lady again offers her body, and again Gawain rejects her offer. She next offers a ring, the rejection of which shows Gawain's lack of avarice and covetousness. The third temptation offered on this third day is a green girdle. The Lady

laȝt a lace lyȝtly þat leke vmbe hir sydez,
Knit vpon hir kyrtel vnder þe clere mantyle,
Gered hit watz with grene sylke and with golde schaped,
Noȝt bot arounde brayden, beten with fyn grez;
And þat ho bede to þe burne, and blyþely bisoȝt,
Þaȝ hit unworþi were, þat he hit take wolde.

(1830-35)

Gawain initially rejects this offer, saying he "nolde neghe in no wyse / Nauþer golde ne garysoun, er God hym grace sende / To acheue to þe chaunce þat he hade chosen þere" (1836-38). However, the Lady informs him that the wearer of the girdle cannot be slain:

quat gome so is gorde with þis grene lace,
While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,
þer is no haþel vnder heuen to hewe hym þat myȝt,
For he myȝt not be slayn for slyȝt vpon erþe.

(1851-54)

Gawain then withdraws his previous rejection. He realizes, "Hit were a juel for þe jopardé þat hym iugged were: / When he acheued to þe chapel his chek for to fech, / Myȝt he haf slypped to be vnslayn, þe sleȝt were noble" (1856-58). Gawain

þoled hir to speke,
And ho bere on hym þe belt and bede hit hym swyþe—
And he granted and hym gafe with a goud wylle—
And bisoȝt hym, for hir sake, disceuer hit neuer,
Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde.

(1859-63)

Gawain not only accepts the girdle but pledges not to reveal his acceptance to Bertilak. Gawain's rationale for accepting the girdle, the acceptance itself, and his vow of silence all constitute sins.

As J. F. Kitley points out, "Gawain accepts the girdle from Bertilak's wife only when he learns of its power to protect life."⁸ Robert C. Pierle argues that Gawain's failure of courage has been foreshadowed by the description of him at rest which precedes the Lady's offer of the girdle. Pierle notes that Gawain's "sleep is described as 'deep gloom' (I. 1748), and this sleep is troubled by 'oppressive thoughts' (I. 1751) of the Green Knight; that is, he is for the first time fearful that he will die—his inner courage has dissolved."⁹ Pierle reminds us that a "true Christian . . . is ready to face death as Gawain, prior to his inner failure, was ready to do, but this transformed man is obviously not so prepared."¹⁰ Aquinas refutes any objection that fear is not always evil by answering that "Our Lord said (Matth.x.28): *Fear ye not them that kill the body*, thus forbidding worldly fear."¹¹ He also notes, "It is natural for man to shrink from detriment to his own body and loss of worldly goods, but to forsake justice on that account is contrary to natural reason."¹² He later writes that "the inordinateness of [the fear of death] is opposed to fortitude."¹³ Gawain's fear, then, is both a sinful rejection of faith in God's justice and a rejection of the virtue of fortitude. As Aquinas notes, "[I]f a man through fear of the danger of death or of any other temporal evil is so disposed as to do what is forbidden, or to omit what is commanded by the Divine law, such fear is a mortal sin."¹⁴ Gawain has committed a mortal sin in his inordinate fear, fear which leads him to trust his life to a magic-token, the girdle, rather than to God. When Gawain later rejects his guide's advice to avoid the Green Chapel and thus save his life, he tells the guide, "Ful wel con Dryȝtyn schape / His seruantez for to saue" (2138-39). As D. Mills has noted, "Gawain is his own judge, both before and after the acceptance of the girdle. If what he says is true, there is no need for the girdle . . . , and it is the very

⁸J. F. Kitley, "The Knight Who Cared for His Life," *Anglia*, 79 (1961), 137.

⁹Robert C. Pierle, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Study in Moral Complexity," *Southern Quarterly*, 6 (1968), 210.

¹⁰Pierle, p. 210.

¹¹Aquinas, p. 1252.

¹²Aquinas, p. 1252.

¹³Aquinas, p. 1721.

¹⁴Aquinas, p. 1722.

needlessness of his lapse which constitutes the bitterest irony of all."¹⁵

Gawain's fear of death, a sin in itself, leads him to sin further. Gawain is guilty of being covetous. He has pledged to exchange with Bertilak "quat chek so ze acheue" (1107). If Gawain intends to fulfill this pledge, there would be no point in his accepting the girdle since it would no longer be in his possession when he meets the Green Knight and could not, therefore, preserve his life. However, Gawain has no intention of fulfilling his pledge. He intends to keep—and does keep—from Bertilak that which is due him. By his intention, Gawain sins. Aquinas writes, "It is natural to man to desire external things as means to an end; wherefore this desire is devoid of sin, in so far as it is held in check by the rule taken from the nature of the end. But covetousness exceeds this rule, and therefore is a sin."¹⁶ Gawain's end is self-preservation, regardless of God's will. G. V. Smithers states that "Gawain's lapse consists in his having held back the green girdle, instead of restoring it . . . as he had done with the kisses bestowed on him. . . ."¹⁷

Gawain's pledge to the Lady that "neuer wyge schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne / for nozte" (1864-65) shows him also guilty of the sin of oath-breaking. He has previously sworn to exchange gains with Bertilak and has now placed himself in a position where he must break one of the two oaths. In his letters, St. Augustine writes that "to deny an oath, I do not say to assert anything that contradicts it, but to waver in regard to it at all, this is utterly wrong."¹⁸ Gawain had sworn to the exchange, saying, "'Bi God,' quof Gawayn þe gode, 'I grant þertylle'" (1110). Aquinas writes that "to call God to witness is named *jurare* (to swear) because it is established as though it were a principle of law (*jure*) that what a man asserts under the invocation of God as His witness should be accepted as true."¹⁹ He further points out that "sometimes God is called to witness in confirmation of something future, and this is termed a *promissory oath*."²⁰ In addition to his breaking his oath, Gawain's granting the Lady's request for concealment of and silence concerning the girdle places him in a position in which he obviously intends

¹⁵D. Mills, "An Analysis of the Temptation Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *JEGP*, 67 (1968), 629.

¹⁶Aquinas, p. 1686.

¹⁷G. V. Smithers, "What *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Is About," *Medium Aevum*, 32 (1963), 175.

¹⁸St. Augustine, *St. Augustine: Select Letters*, trans. James H. Baxter (1930; rev. and rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), p. 245.

¹⁹Aquinas, p. 1579.

²⁰Aquinas, p. 1579.

to commit perjury, if only by omission. Aquinas writes that perjury "implies contempt of God" and that it "of its very nature, is a mortal sin."²¹

At the end of the third Temptation Scene, Gawain is obviously in a state of sin. Aquinas points out that "sins are divided into these three, viz., sins of thought, word, and deed, . . . wherefore sins of deed have the complete species; but the first beginning of sin is its foundation, as it were, in the sin of thought."²² Gawain has committed a sin of thought by fearing death, a sin of deed by accepting the girdle, and a sin of word by pledging his silence. His sins of deed and word are, in accordance with Aquinian theology, rooted in his sin of thought. If Gawain had not feared death, he would not have accepted the girdle and would not have needed to pledge silence concerning that acceptance. The fact that he has not yet physically withheld the girdle from Bertilak nor lied by omission concerning his possession of it does not alter his situation.

In this state of sin, Gawain confesses his sins to a priest and is absolved:

Syþen cheuely to þe chapel chos he þe waye,
 Preuély aproched to a prest, and prayed hym þere
 Dat he wolde lyste his lyf and lern hym better
 How his sawle schulde be saued when he schuld seye heþen.
 Þere he schrof hym schyrly and schewed his mysdedez,
 Of þe more and þe mynne, and merci besechez,
 And of absolucioun he on þe segge calles;
 And he asoyled hym surely and sette hym so clene
 As domezday schulde haf ben digt on þe morn.

(1876-84)

Yet Gawain has not made a valid confession and is not truly "clene." John Burrow notes that a "fourteenth-century layman would know that a 'right shrift' depended on a number of necessary conditions . . . , without which the priest's absolution was invalid."²³ Burrow points to the penitent's "disposition" as one of these conditions and judges Gawain as having "no intention either of returning [the girdle] to the lady or of giving it up, according to his promise, to the host."²⁴ Burrow believes that Gawain takes part only "in the 'sacramentum exterius'—the verbal forms of confession and absolution."²⁵ The *Summa Theologica* sets forth conditions necessary for

²¹Aquinas, p. 1618.

²²Aquinas, p. 908.

²³Burrow, 74.

²⁴Burrow, 74, 75.

²⁵Burrow, 74.

true penance. According to the Supplement to the *Summa Theologica*, penance consists of contrition, confession, and satisfaction.²⁶ Whether or not Gawain feels contrite for his sins is debatable, but the indications are that he does not. He does go to confession rather than to Mass for the first time since leaving Arthur's court, but a comparison of Gawain here and in the chapel scene when he recognizes his failure shows few grounds one might use to argue for Gawain's true contrition at this point. Following the confession, Gawain makes merry with the ladies of the court:

And syþen he mace hym as mery among þe fre ladyes,
With comlych caroles and alle kynnes ioie,
As neuer he did bot þat daye, to þe derk nyzt,
with blys.

(1885-88)

There is no evidence of contrition, which is defined in the Supplement to the *Summa Theologica* as "voluntary sorrow for sin whereby man punishes in himself that which he grieves to have done."²⁷ Even if one attributes contrition to Gawain, his confession to the priest could not restore him to grace unless it were complete and were followed by satisfaction. The *Summa Theologica* states that "confession is necessary in Penance in order that punishment may be enjoined for sin according to the judgment of the priest."²⁸ The priest would have insisted on the return of the belt to Bertilak as part of the satisfaction for Gawain's sins. Since there is no indication of such insistence, it is obvious that Gawain has not made a complete confession of his sins. An incomplete confession can be valid only if one does not remember a sin and therefore omits it.²⁹ Gawain cannot have forgotten his acceptance of the girdle, his reasons for doing so, and his pledge to keep that acceptance secret in the short time required to dress and find the priest. His confession is deliberately incomplete and by definition invalid. If Gawain were truly "clene," he would give the girdle to Bertilak, thus showing that fear for his life no longer controls his actions and that he no longer intends to perjure himself. Gawain does not give up the girdle; he conceals it.

If Gawain is still unclean after his confession to the priest, he needs to make a valid confession. John Burrow argues that Gawain

²⁶Aquinas, p. 2573.²⁷Aquinas, p. 2574.²⁸Aquinas, p. 2602.²⁹Aquinas, p. 2602.

does exactly that in his encounter with the Green Knight at the chapel. He points out that "Gawain's contrition ('schome') leads him to confess . . . and to offer satisfaction."³⁰ Gawain confesses that fear caused him to behave badly, asks the knight's forgiveness, and pledges to be more wary in the future:

For care of þy knokke cowardyse me tazt
To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake,
þat is larges and lewté þat longez to knyztet.
Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer
Of trecherye and vntrawþe: boþe bityde sorze
and care!

I biknowe yow, knyzt, here styлле,
Al fawty is my fare;
Letez me ouertake your wylle
And efte I schal be ware.

(2379-88)

Burrow sees a similarity between the priest's absolution and that of the Green Knight.³¹ The priest "asoyled hym surely and sette hym so clene / As domezday schulde haf ben dizt on þe morn" (1883-84). The Green Knight says to Gawain, "I halde þe polysed of þat plyzt and pured as clene / As þou hadez neuer forfeted syþen þou watz fyrst borne" (2393-94). One may view the "tappe" administered by Bertilak as a sign of penance, but, if so, it occurs out of the sequence of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Similarly, Gawain's removal of the belt and his return of it to Bertilak would also be out of sequence. His decision to wear the girdle for the rest of his life may act to fulfill the correct sequence.

One may question the propriety of the Green Knight's acting as a confessor. However, it is not necessarily forbidden to confess to someone other than a priest. The Supplement to the *Summa Theologica* states that although it is preferable to confess to a minister "for the fulness of the sacrament, . . . when there is reason for urgency, the penitent should fulfill his own part, by being contrite and confessing to whom he can."³² Gawain, left unclean by his invalid confession, is now truly brought to contrition by the "tappe" and words administered by the Green Knight. Gawain is "[s]o agreued for greme he gryed withinne; / Alle þe blode of his brest blende in his face, / þat al he schrank for schome þat þe schalk talk-ed" (2370-72). He urgently needs to confess and to offer satisfaction,

³⁰Burrow, 75-76.³¹Burrow, 76.³²Aquinas, p. 2595.

and he does so. Further support for the view of the Green Knight as confessor to one who remains unclean after an invalid confession is supplied by G. V. Smithers in his essay "What *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Is About." Smithers argues that the author was obviously familiar with "OF prose romances of the Arthurian cycle, notably *La Queste del saint Graal* and that part of the *Lancelot-Grail* which is known as the *Agravain*."³³ He points out that these works "teem with hermits and hermitages" and that "the authors or compilers of these works probably took it for granted that a hermit normally had his chapel as well as his hermitage."³⁴ Smithers feels that the

name of the Green Chapel (as distinct from its nature, to some extent) necessarily implies that the figure represented by the Green Knight is also to be understood as having a hermitage. In fact, we can now see why he was called Bertilak *de Hautdesert*: the explanation of this name as "of the high hermitage" is as certainly correct as such things can be. Moreover, someone who is represented as the occupant of a hermitage and the ministrant of a chapel attached to it could normally have been nothing but a hermit. And any such person would have been (at need) just the man to hear a confession by Gawain as a *knigt erraunt* . . . on a typical quest that led him through desolate country.³⁵

Smithers feels that this second confession is necessary because of the one "Gawain had made to the more orthodoxly qualified priest of the castle . . . , in which he had suppressed all mention (so far as we are told) of the girdle."³⁶

Gawain's agony over his failures and his comment that he will ever wear the girdle as a symbol of his failing—as "token of vntrawþe" —are met with laughter by both the Green Knight and Arthur's court. Yet the most telling example of Gawain's approach to spiritual perfection may well be his superior ability to recognize the gravity of his sins and the invalidity of the confession he made to the priest. He will continue to wear the green girdle as a sign of penance for his sins, and the decision of the court to emulate his action, their decision that "[v]che burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue, / A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryzt grene, / And þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were" (2516-18), may, even though they are unaware of it, comment on the spiritual imperfection of even the most perfect knight and, therefore, of all those less perfect.

³³Smithers, 171.

³⁴Smithers, 171.

³⁵Smithers, 172-73.

³⁶Smithers, 181.

Mulier est hominis confusio: The Green Knight's Lady

by Nedra C. Grogan

The character of the lady is of central importance to the outcome of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; at the center of the poem's most crucial scenes, she surely deserves an analysis as complete as those studies devoted to her comrade in intrigue, the Green Knight, and her chosen prey, Sir Gawain. Because of the influence of the lady, Gawain does not fulfill his agreement with the host; thus, he receives a blow at the Green Chapel for his "mysdede." Those critics who have been chosen to deal with the lady in their analyses of the temptation scenes generally have not credited her with such significance. Critics have perceived her as playing many diverse, but usually peripheral roles. Christopher Dean sees her as a crude, relentless temptress, whose "thoughts and feelings . . . are largely irrelevant to the needs of the poem";¹ Gollancz considers the lady as bumbling and "inexperienced in such a role";² J. A. Burrow discusses her as a fabliau character;³ W. A. Davenport praises her role as a successful play-actress;⁴ and Larry D. Benson casts her in the role of a "traditional romance heroine."⁵ Only David Mills treats the lady as a thinking being with emotions and attitudes; however, his purpose is an account of the dialogues, not of the lady specifically.⁶ My focus, however, is entirely on the lady and her behavior; a close analysis of the scenes in which the lady appears reveals evidence of her personality, her abilities, and her purpose in the poem. The host's wife accepts the challenge to tempt Gawain just as an intelligent, capable actress would undertake a difficult role. She

Nedra C. Grogan is a graduate of the Division of English and Foreign Languages at Emporia State University.

¹Christopher Dean, "The Temptation Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Leeds Studies in English*, 5 (1971), 8.

²J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 2nd ed. rev. by Norman Davis (Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 108.

³J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), pp. 74-78.

⁴W. A. Davenport, *The Art of the Gawain-Poet* (London: The Athlone Press, 1978), pp. 165-67.

⁵Larry D. Benson, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p. 51.

⁶David Mills, "An Analysis of the Temptation Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *JEGP*, 67 (1968), 612-30.

is accomplished in her use of language and able to exhibit proper breeding at appropriate times while often reversing convention to suit her purpose; she also has the ability to analyze situations and then to switch tactics or adapt her methods accordingly. From the behavior of the lady, we can infer, first, that she has full knowledge of the "plot" against Gawain; second, that all her actions and speeches are well planned and contribute to the meaning of the poem; and finally, most importantly, that she is determined to make Gawain sin.

A thorough analysis of the lady's character and behavior must include an account of her motivation and her strategy. The lady's determination is obvious, yet *why* is she so intent upon tempting Gawain? We can assume that Bercilak's motivation is based primarily on obedience to Morgan le Fay, and the lady's motivation may similarly lie in her obedience to her husband. It is also possible that the lady, like Morgan le Fay, is simply devious and seeks pleasure in watching an upright man fail. The lady's determination may also stem from a sense of duty; she may reason that by making an example of Gawain she will inspire other knights to become more moral. Finally, the lady may simply want a challenge, a typical motivation for humans who have faith in their abilities. Although no clear evidence exists for the precedence of one possibility over another, I choose to think that the lady accepts the challenge to tempt Gawain primarily as an occasion to use her acting talents and test her skills while also contributing to his moral development. Certainly it is at the least, discourteous, and at the most, immoral, for the lady and her husband to trick Gawain, but I would argue that the pair are working together toward a positive end; they hope to cause Gawain to commit a grave sin of pride, not so that they can relish his failure and their triumph, but so that the knight will learn from his experience and take his lesson back to Arthur and the Round Table.

In working toward this positive end, the Green Knight and the lady must create and follow a plan. From the time Gawain accepts the challenge to come to the Green Chapel for his return blow, the couple has a full year to determine the best possible strategy for making Gawain sin. They are certainly both aware of Gawain's spotless reputation, and thus it is likely that they do not sincerely believe Gawain can be seduced. They may reason, however, that it will make the game more difficult for Gawain and more exciting for them if the lady would feign seduction as a way of shocking and confusing Gawain to such a point that his courtesy can then be corrupted.

Bercilak may instruct his wife to carry out their plan by first making her way into Gawain's bedroom and then using her talents and charm to corrupt him. Once inside Gawain's chamber, however, the lady acts independently. As part of her ploy, she subtly offers Gawain's sexual favors, but she knows that there is no real possibility of Gawain's accepting her "love" because of his past fortitude and his current mission. With these two facts in mind, then, the lady focuses her temptation on causing Gawain to violate his pact with the host. If Gawain either accepts her offer of sexual advances or gains something from her without informing his host, he still will sin. Therefore, it seems likely that the plan of the host and his wife is to manipulate language and reverse convention, thereby causing Gawain to reject his courtesy, break his pact, and subsequently learn from his experience. Possibilities for the lady's motivation and strategy are numerous and cannot be firmly supported from the text, but by a study of the scenes in which the lady appears conclusions can be drawn about her personality and abilities.

We first encounter the lady in the second fitt, as the household makes its way to evening services at the chapel. The poet uses no formal introduction; he simply begins calling her "þe lady," and because of the proximity of the reference, we can assume that she is the host's wife: "þe lorde loutes þerto, and þe lady als."⁷ The lady does not become an important character until eight lines later when she shows her interest in the knight: "Þenne lyst þe lady to loke on þe knyzt" (941). She is curious about this knight whose reputation for courtesy has preceded him to the castle.⁸

Gawain's first reaction to the lady is that she is "wener þen Wenore" (945). As he goes to greet her, he is struck by the contrast of her beauty with the ugliness of her companion. Through rapid alternations the poet contrasts the two women, and Gawain becomes impressed with the young lady's freshness and skin that "Schon schyrer þen snawe" (956). Gawain wastes no time in kissing her "comlyly" and asking "To be her seruauant sothly, if hemsely lyked" (974-76). Gawain commits himself as a courteous knight to serve both ladies however he can. Gawain's careful attention to decorum gives the lady an advantage in later scenes because Gawain must try to live up to his pledge.

The lady next appears in the poet's description of the Christmas feast. Bercilak takes his place at the high dais beside the old woman,

⁷Tolkien and Gordon, line 933; all further references to this work will appear in the text.

⁸Benson, p. 45.

while "Gawan and þe gay burde togeder þay seten" (1003). Although the poet includes relatively little detail, he does say that he knows Gawain and the lady enjoyed pleasant conversation in their private words: "Wyth clene cortays carp closed fro fylþe, / Þat hor play watz passande vche prynce gomen, / in vayres" (1013-15). Their play "surpassed each princely game" because it was pure and sinless, interesting and intellectual, and because the two were so skilled at the "game" of being courteous and well-mannered. The feast scene anticipates following temptation scenes as it sets up the confrontation between two evenly matched opponents who respect each other, who follow the codes of courtesy, and who dedicate themselves to fulfilling their individual purposes.

Gawain and the lady first meet alone as courteous opponents on the morning after the pact is made between Bercilak and Gawain to exchange each day's winnings (1105-12). On this winter morning Bercilak and his company are out hunting, as promised, and Gawain is dozing in bed. The lady, whom we recognize by the phrase, "loflyest to beholde" (1187), enters Gawain's bedroom to initiate her plan. Her actions as she enters as well as the poet's diction signal the reader that she is doing something out of the ordinary: "[She] droȝ þe dor after hir ful dernly and stylye, / . . . / And ho stepped stily and stel to his bedde, / Kest vp þe cortyn and creped withinne" (1188-92). The language used implies surreptitiousness, and even Gawain is deceptive, as he sees her but pretends to be asleep: ". . . and þe burne schamed, / And layde hym doun lysterly, and let as he slepte" (1189-90). The lady's intention is to "set hir ful softly on þe bed-syde" (1193), not to awaken Gawain, but to play the part of a lovesick epic maiden who merely wishes to gaze upon her loved one in worship. She believes that she will surprise Gawain when he awakens and that he will be disoriented and disconcerted by seeing her beside him. However, unbeknownst to her, Gawain is already considering how to handle the situation while he lurks under the covers: "Þe lede lay lurked a ful longe quyle, / Compast in his conscience to quat þat cace myȝt / Meue oþer amount . . ." (1195-97). The lady begins the first of the temptation scenes, then, at more of a disadvantage than she realizes due to Gawain's feigned sleep but actual alertness.

When Gawain does "awaken" (1200), the lady immediately begins the conversation and introduces the poet's use of a common medieval image of captivity: "Ȝe ar a sleper vnslyȝe, þat mon may slyde hider; / Now ar ȝe tan as-tyt! Bot true vus may schape, / I schal bynde yow in your bedde, þat be ȝe trayst" (1209-11). The poet

draws on convention for this image, both to foreshadow that the lady will eventually "capture" Gawain by "binding" him with her girdle and also to illustrate the lady's character.⁹ Gawain and the reader discover, in this scene, the lady's ability to use language, specifically metaphor, effectively. The lady chooses to show Gawain this ability early in the scene, immediately after he awakens in fact, so that he has the chance to realize exactly what kind of opponent he faces. The lady wants Gawain to take her seriously, but, ironically, she uses a "jesting" tone to hint subtly that she is indeed Gawain's enemy out to capture his honor. The lady reasons that by using the metaphor of battle she will maintain her game-playing and give Gawain an opportunity to recognize the graveness of his situation without warning him outright.

Gawain senses her game and "surrenders" to her as a proper knight should: "'Me schal worþe at your wille, and þat me wel lykez, / For I ȝelde me ȝederly, and ȝeze after grace'" (1214-15). The lady is able to take command, therefore, early in this first temptation scene, but she does not enjoy complete victory, because Gawain "surrenders" only one time (1215).

When Gawain wishes to rise and get dressed, the lady's reaction (1223-29), as Burrow explains, is "an idea which is to dominate both this and the succeeding temptation scenes."¹⁰ She will make the decisions because she "possesses" him. In Burrow's view, her speech that begins "Sir Wowen ȝe are" (1226) "introduces the first of her attempts to manoeuvre Gawain into acting in accordance with *her* conception of what his identity involves. . . ."¹¹ Gawain should sense in this first scene, as the reader does, that this woman is strong-willed and determined; she refuses to let an opportunity pass to "ware my whyle wel, / Quyl hit lastez, with tale" (1235-36).

Because of the line quoted directly above in which the lady shows her eagerness to *talk*, I hesitate to interpret line 1237 as sexually suggestive, i.e., "You are welcome to my body." Dean believes, however, that such a "crude" translation is completely in keeping with her character; he argues that "crudity" is "the very effect that the lady hopes to achieve" in her plot to entrap Gawain.¹² Dean's argument parallels mine in that he also sees her as an actress and a "clever opponent," but one who wants Gawain to think of her

⁹It is Dean's idea that the lady "binds" Gawain once in the first scene and also in the third temptation scene (4).

¹⁰Burrow, p. 79.

¹¹Burrow, p. 80.

¹²Dean, 3.

only as a seductress; thus, Gawain will be unwary when she switches her attack from his chastity to his honesty.¹³ However, to accept Dean's interpretation of this controversial line, one must disregard the evidence in the text of the deep respect that Gawain and the lady have for one another, and such evidence is too crucial to ignore. It is difficult to believe that Gawain could continue to flatter the lady so convincingly and seem to enjoy her company so thoroughly if he thinks of her only as a crude, evil temptress, plotting to make him commit a sin of "incontinence," which, as Benson notes, would seriously offend Gawain due to his commonly held belief that continence means survival.¹⁴

Although Gerald Gallant also believes that the lady offers her body, his focus differs from Dean's. Instead of concentrating on the crudity of her offer, Gallant comments that "she offers herself as a servant (1240), a complete reversal of the courtly tradition, [which] is also significant."¹⁵ Critics disagree, therefore, about the meaning of the line, but it seems likely that the poet's craftsmanship has rendered it intentionally ambiguous, and it can be read either way—as a crude invitation or as a proper use of the French idiom, i.e., "You are welcome to me."¹⁶

The lady is fully aware of the ambiguity of her language, but she waits to see how Gawain will react so that she can quickly plan her next "speech." Since Gawain's reply is cheerful and mannerly (1242-47), he obviously has chosen not to interpret her statement sexually. Therefore, she reacts in turn with an expression of her desire to show good breeding also: "If I hit lakked oþer set at lygt, hit were littel daynté" (1250). We see here an example of how the lady adapts her tactics to Gawain's reactions and replies; she bases her next move on his response because she wants to uphold his trust in her and not offend him completely.

The lady needs to maintain Gawain's trust so that he will continue to believe in her as a sincerely pining maiden. It is essential to the lady's game that she continue to be an effective actress, and evidence that she is indeed acting can be found in the poet's own words: "And ay þe lady let lyk as hym loued mych," which I would paraphrase as "Always the lady *pretended as if* she loved him much" (1281). She is merely playing a part to achieve an end. Despite the

¹³Dean, 6.

¹⁴Benson, p. 42.

¹⁵Gerald Gallant, "The Three Beast Symbols of Temptation in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 11 (1970), 40.

¹⁶Burrow, p. 81.

fact that she is only acting in her love game, Gawain reacts defensively (1282), and the reader is then allowed to share the lady's conviction that even if she were the fairest lady of all, Gawain will still avoid love because of the blow that he faces (1283-87).¹⁷

The lady then speaks of taking her leave (1288), pretending that Gawain's will power and courtesy are too strong for her to overcome, but suddenly switches her tactics, challenges Gawain's identity, and casts doubts on his courtly behavior (1292-93 and 1297-1301). Her elaborate praise of Gawain is nullified by this accusation, and there is no indication by the poet that she is jesting. This sudden change is typical and certainly effective in catching Gawain off guard: "'Querfore?' quop þe freke, and freschly he askez, / Ferde lest he hade fayled in fourme of his castes" (1294-95). The lady, sensing Gawain's anxiety, responds with a softer approach, blesses him, and then reassures him; again, she does not want him to distrust her completely (1296). When Gawain agrees to kiss her, it is *she* who "cachez hym in armez" (1305) and kisses *him*.

The lady's display of aggressive behavior is reminiscent of the maiden of the epic tradition. She is playing the role of a woman in an epic tale, in complete reversal of romance tradition. Her actions befit those descriptions of epic ladies, who, as Maurice Valency points out, "normally made the necessary advances." They were, Valency continues, "shameless."¹⁸ Gawain may or may not consider the lady's aggression as "shameless," but there is no indication in the text of his opinion. He may allow her to kiss him because he wishes to calm her aggression, and he surely does not want to be accused again of lacking courtesy. Whatever Gawain's thoughts, the lady gains her kiss, a minor achievement to end the first day's visit. She also reaps a greater benefit on this morning; she learns that by effectively switching tactics, she can catch Gawain off guard and render him anxious and eager to please. This small victory anticipates her eventual triumph over Gawain's courtesy by the same method—a sudden change of tactics and a sly deception of the knight.

The second day's bedroom scene begins dramatically and abruptly, as the shift from the boar hunt to the lady occurs in the wheel: "þe lady nozt forgate, / Com to hym to salue; / Ful erly ho watz hym ate / His mode for to remwe" (1472-75). The poet is toying

¹⁷I disagree with Tolkien and Gordon, who support Gollancz's view that this passage (1283-87) is not her thought. If it were, they believe, it would be a "serious flaw in the handling of the plot" (p. 110n). The lady actually has full knowledge of what Gawain faces, and she knows that his reactions to her are greatly influenced by his fear of impending death.

¹⁸Maurice Valency, *In Praise of Love* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 53.

with the reader by commenting that the lady did not forget to greet Gawain; not only did she not *forget*, but she planned in advance what her approach to this meeting would be. She enters with an intent to change his mood (1475); in other words, she hopes to change his strict ideas about courtesy. For the second consecutive morning, she sits softly on his bed, smiles graciously, and then launches into a rehearsed speech before Gawain does any more than welcome her (1477). She picks up where she left off the day before: "‘Sir, gif ge be Wawen . . . ’" (1481). She renews her challenge of the previous day and again questions Gawain’s knowledge of courtly behavior. This repeated tactic illustrates that she has carefully pondered Gawain’s reactions to her accusations of the previous day, knows she was successful in bewildering him, and has adapted her plan for the second day accordingly.

The lady also accuses Gawain of having a poor memory as she says, "‘Dou hatz forzeten zederly þat zisterday I taztte” (1485). Her attack on his manners, his knowledge of society (1483), and his courtesy continues, as she sarcastically reminds Gawain that kissing "‘bicumes vche a knyzt þat cortaysy vses” (1491); her reasoning is that Gawain is ignoring courtesy by not immediately begging a kiss from her. Christopher Dean’s analysis of this second scene is in agreement with mine: "On the second day the lady presses home the advantage that she won the day before." He continues to say that "she claims that he shows no courtesy . . . and her accusation hits him at his weakest spot."¹⁹

Gawain defends himself by explaining that he does not ask for a kiss because he fears being refused (1494). The lady replies with a seemingly casual comment that she is certainly not so ill-bred as to deny him a kiss, but if she were, he could take her by force (1495-97). The lady is acting subtly seductive, but with no real fear of being forced by the knight, and he, offended by her implication, reminds her that "‘þrete is vnþryuande in þede þer I lende” (1499). The lady’s suggestive comment actually works against her because even though she has gained the kiss, she senses that Gawain gave it somewhat unwillingly; thus, she proceeds to soften her tactics by saying that she hopes he will not be "wrathed" at her inquiry which follows (1509). The lady’s ability to switch back and forth from severity to sweetness illustrates her command of improvisation and her ability to "think on her feet."

¹⁹Dean, 6.

The purport of the lady’s lengthy speech (1508-34) is a presentation of her view of chivalry; her speech serves to put pressure on Gawain and to reveal more of the lady’s character, such as her awareness of convention and her attention to detail. The lady thinks of chivalry as a knight’s duty to pursue love, take risks for love, and uphold conventions of courtly love through any trial:

“And conspicuous among all chivalry, the chief thing
praised
Is the loyal sport of love, the lore of the knightly
profession
For to describe this endeavor of these honest knights,
How men for their loyal love their lives have risked,
Endured for their love grievous times, . . .”
(1512-17, trans. mine)

Whether it is her sincere belief or only an adopted one suited to her purpose, the lady chooses to present this view of chivalry primarily to let Gawain know, however subtly, that if he does not fulfill her expectations, she will be offended. Thus far in their acquaintance the lady has been disappointed in Gawain, as she bluntly reveals:

“And I have sat by you here on two separate occasions,
Yet heard I never words proceed from your mouth
That ever befit love, less not more;
And you, who are so chivalrous and gracious in your vows,
Ought to a young thing eagerly show
And teach some sign of true love dealings.”
(1522-27, trans. mine)

The lady even accuses Gawain of judging her too stupid to listen to his courtly conversation (1529). She is dangerously close to abandoning her own courtesy here, but her purpose is to get a response from Gawain so that she can interpret how he reacts to a direct affront rather than to sexual suggestiveness.

Gawain’s courtesy remains intact once again; he responds to her exclamation of "For schamel!" (1530) by complimenting her worthiness and "slygt / Of þat art" (1542-43). Once more, the lady’s attempt to challenge his courtesy is foiled by Gawain himself, whose ability to speak well and defend himself is not to be denied. The poet ends the second temptation scene by calling it an impasse: "Bot he defended hym so fayr þat no faut semed, / Ne non euel on nawþer halue, nawþer þay wysten / bot blysse" (1551-53).

After the second day’s temptation scene, the lady has learned what technique is most useful is exposing Gawain’s vulnerability,

but she has yet to make him sin. As the third day approaches, therefore, the lady must plot carefully to ensure her success. The poet begins the third day's temptation scene by switching suddenly from a description of the fox hunt to a scene at the castle. It is another "colde morne," and again Gawain sleeps while Bercilak and his men are out hunting the wily fox (1731-32). In contrast to the previous two days, we first see the lady, not as she creeps into Gawain's chamber, but as she prepares to go to him. For this third meeting, it is essential that the lady be ready for this clever knight who challenges her skill just as she challenges his chivalry.

The poet tells us that, in anticipation of this third meeting, the lady has not had a restful night: "Bot þe lady for luf let not to slepe, / Ne þe purpose to payre þat pygt in hir hert" (1733-34). The first line quoted here is one of the most controversial of those lines in the poem which deal with the lady's character and motivation. Both the verb "let not" and the phrase "for luf" are difficult to translate, and various interpretations have resulted. Gollancz glosses "let not" as "did not permit (herself)," and says that "for luf" does not indicate love for Sir Gawain but simply a desire for pleasure in his company.²⁰ Burrow and Gollancz both note that the same use of "for luf" as "friendly sociability" is found in line 1086.²¹ Burrow feels that "for luf" in line 1733 is ambiguous.²² An entirely different interpretation is offered by Charles Moorman, who glosses "let" as "allowed *him*," i.e., "But the lady for love allowed *him* not to sleep."²³ Moorman's rendition would allow this line to reflect the traditions of normal romance literature, in which it is the man who pines and stays awake for love. One must consider, however, the poet's frequent reversal of convention and his use of the lady in ways reflecting the epic maiden; in epic tradition, the woman pines. Here, in keeping with her character, the lady *pretends* to pine. As Dean concludes, the lady maintains command of herself at all times, and thus "luf" must mean "pretended love," which she has "simulated from the beginning and which her role as temptress requires that she sustain."²⁴ I agree with the views of Gollancz, Burrow, and Dean; the lady lies awake planning her next move in her

²⁰Sir Israel Gollancz, ed., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 159 and 121.

²¹J. A. Burrow, ed., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 113. See also Gollancz, p. 121.

²²Burrow, *SGGK*, p. 113.

²³Charles Moorman, *The Works of the Gawain Poet* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1977), p. 395.

²⁴Dean, 8.

pretended love ploy. She is currently committed to the "purpose" that is "fixed in her heart" (1734). The lady is determined to succeed, not for personal gain, but to contribute to Gawain's moral development.

Before the lady goes to Gawain's quarters, the poet, for the first time since the chapel scene, emphasizes her provocative dress. She wears a full-length robe trimmed in fur, an elegant "tressour," with "hir þrote þrowen al naked, / Hir brest bare bifore, and bihinde eke" (1740-41). The lady's dress provides a parallel between the fox hunt and this third temptation scene. Gallant comments on the lady's provocative attire and suggests that "the lady is dressed like a fox, both sexually and figuratively, to catch a fox."²⁵ The poet's attention to detail in describing the lady's sleeplessness and her appearance foreshadows the importance of the third day's visit.

As she enters Gawain's room, the lady is again careful to shut the door, but instead of creeping in, peeping through the curtains, and sitting softly on the bed, as has been her custom, the lady alters her entrance on this third day, making it much more dramatic and impressive. She sails in and briskly "Wayuez vp a wyndow, and on þe wyze callez" (1743).²⁶ Although Gawain misses her grand entrance due to his "drez droupyng" (1750), it is lucky for the lady that he is having a bad dream about his "destiné . . . / At þe grene chapel" (1752-53) because he displays relief and happiness in seeing her, which has not previously been the case. While the lady started the first day's scene at a slight disadvantage because Gawain was already awake, this time she profits by his sudden awakening to see her "so glorious and gayly atyred" (1760). Because Gawain reacts to her presence with such genuine warmth, the lady once again tries her tactics of seductiveness; on this occasion she "Nurned hym so neze þe þred" (1771) that Gawain must make a definite decision about whether to accept her advances. It does not take him long to conclude that he must remain true to his host, while maintaining as much of his courtesy as possible (1771-76).

Gawain makes a conscious decision to reject her "love," but the lady knows that she still has a chance to corrupt him. Therefore, she switches tactics, adopts her argumentative method, and demands to know "if ze haf a lemman, a leuer, þat yow lykez better" (1782). Ga-

²⁵Gallant, 47.

²⁶Elizabeth M. Wright notes that "wyndow" (1743) "is an early example—not recorded in the *N. E. D.*—of the use of this word to signify an aperture other than that commonly so termed. In this case the 'window' is an opening made by flinging aside curtains drawn round a bed" (Elizabeth M. Wright, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *JEGP*, 34, [1935], 350).

wain's reply, "I welde riȝt non" (1790), causes the lady again to modify her approach. She pretends, as she did on the first day, sadly to give up on Gawain, playing the role of the maiden with a broken heart. Sighing and pretending to be a "may þat much louyes" (1795), the lady prepares to leave and then casually, seemingly harmlessly, tells Gawain (she does not *ask* him) to "Gif me sumquat of þy gifte" (1799). Gawain explains why he cannot comply with her request:

"It would be worth little to give you a love-token:
It is not worthy of you to have at this time
A glove for a keepsake of Gawain's gifts,
And I am here on a mission in countries strange,
And have no servants with bags with things of worth"
(1805-9, trans. mine)

The lady, who expects his refusal anyway, does not even repeat her request, but begins her carefully rehearsed scene: "Þaȝ I hade noȝt of youreȝ, / ȝet schulde ȝe haue of myne" (1815-16).

The lady's meticulous planning is illustrated by her offer of, first, "a riche rynk of red golde werkez" (1817) and then a simple "girdel" (1829). Knowing the mannerly knight as she does, and realizing that he is on a dangerous journey, the lady knows that he will not accept the huge "starande ston" (1818). She intentionally chooses a relatively plain belt to offer next—a belt which purposely lacks the magnificence of the ring—so that the modest knight will be convinced to accept such a thing "vnworþi" (1835).

After three days of working up to her climactic scene, the lady finally plays her trump card—if Gawain wears the green belt, then "Þer is no hæpel vnder heuen tohewe hym þat myȝt" (1853). With this offer, the lady demonstrates her tendency to plan every move in advance; she has perceived what Gawain must be feeling as he faces death, and she chooses her offer of a gift accordingly. Because he wishes both to maintain his courtesy and to save his life, Gawain accepts the girdle.

Although it seems the lady has "won" in getting Gawain to take the gift, she still has an essential detail to take care of before her victory is complete; she must impose "the condition of secrecy" immediately after Gawain accepts the belt.²⁷ The lady knows that once the belt is in Gawain's hands, he cannot graciously or easily give it

back, and she judges correctly; he agrees to keep it from her husband: ". . . þe leude hym acordeȝ / Ðat neuer wyȝe schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne / for noȝte" (1863-65). The lady depends on Gawain's attention to courtesy to carry out the final step of her intricate plan to entrap him. She pretends courteousness and entreats him to withhold information from her husband about her gift. As a courteous knight should, Gawain agrees to her terms. The lady, therefore, uses one of Gawain's renowned virtues to cause his downfall. He is not true to his agreement with her husband; thus the lady's goal is achieved, and her acting debut is a success.

Gawain finds himself in a complex situation indeed due to the lady's influence. He is torn by his pact made with the host (1110-12) and his pledge made to the two ladies of the castle (975-76). He will offend either his host or hostess no matter what decision he makes about accepting the lady's gift. Although the lady is not in a self-contradictory situation as Gawain is, she does have her share of problems. She, like Gawain, is bound to an agreement; she agrees to use all her perseverance and skill in influencing Gawain to put his self-preservation above all other commitments. She is faced by new challenges during each temptation scene and must make quick decisions about how to solve them, avoid them, or de-emphasize them.

Because Gawain does sin and then becomes better for it, the lady is successful overall, but she does not enjoy consistent victories. The lady shows an ability to match Gawain's understanding of social convention and the Green Knight's craftiness; her wit, talent, and her prominence in the poem make her equally important and just as fascinating as the characters of Gawain and the Green Knight. In her display of intelligence and persistence, the lady is an atypical romance heroine—and an assured delight for modern readers.

²⁷Tolkien and Gordon, p. 122.

The Green Knight as Thor

by Cora Zaletel

In the never-ending battle of the critics, few conflicts have been so lengthy as the contest among literary critics to determine the origins and purpose of the Green Knight in the medieval romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Why does this Green Knight continue to be such an intriguing character? Perhaps it is because we do not find any explicit indicators of his values as we do, for example, with Gawain through his association with the pentangle. For this reason, critics have chosen to look beyond the story itself for the Green Knight's identity. According to Larry Benson, "The Green Knight is especially difficult for critics, and the many attempts to explain features such as his 'rede eyen' have made him more of a shape shifter in criticism than he is in the poem."¹ Many critics have attempted to use myth to determine who or what the Green Knight represents. Nitze saw him as a vegetation myth. Speirs thought of him as a descendent of the vegetation god or nature god and also claimed he represented life. On the other hand, Zimmer saw the Green Knight as death, while Levy and Hans Snyder claimed he symbolized the devil and Christ, respectively.² The many attempts to link the Green Knight to fourteenth-century noblemen by biographical association further reveal the disparities among investigations and the failure of critics to agree on the origin or specific purpose of the Green Knight in the poem.

I propose to draw upon Nordic mythology and show that the Gawain-poet based the Green Knight character on the mythological god, Thor, and did so for a very specific reason. Because of the many similarities between the two in dress and accoutrements, physical characteristics, geographic surroundings, behavior, and possibly even values, the comparison of the Green Knight and Thor seems very plausible. I expect to suggest no startling redirection of critical interpretation. Instead, the purpose of this research is to present a

Cora Zaletel is a graduate student in the Division of English and Foreign Languages at Emporia State University.

¹Larry Benson, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1965), p. 57.

²A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), p. 179.

new way of accounting for the distinct characteristics of the Green Knight.

Before beginning to discuss the many parallels between Thor and the Green Knight, it may be useful briefly to recap Thor's life and his cult. In Norse mythology, Thor, also known as Thunor, is the Champion of the Aesir and the defender of Asgard. He appears as a massive, red-bearded figure armed with his hammer, his iron gloves, and his girdle of strength. The cult of Thor had a long life in Western Europe. His widespread cult is attested by the equally widespread name of the fifth day of the week over the Teutonic area—Swedish, Thursday; Danish, Torsday; Old English, Thunorsdæg and Thunresdæg.³ In the eleventh century, he was still worshipped with enthusiasm by the Vikings of Dublin, and at the close of the heathen period in Western Europe it was he who was thought of as the principal adversary of Christ. Among the Anglo-Saxons, the name Thunor does not occur, but its frequent appearance in English place names points to the presence of his cult in England.

Of all the gods, Thor seems to be the characteristic hero of the stormy world of the Vikings. He put reliance on his strong right arm and simple weapons. The figure of a god with a hammer is said to have stood in many temples at the close of the heathen period. It is with Thor and his hammer that we will begin to examine the many parallels between Thor and the Green Knight.

The first category concerns the objects which are most often associated with each of them—the hammer or ax and the belt or girdle. Mjollnir, as Thor's weapon was called, was used as a throwing weapon, never failed to hit its mark, and automatically returned to the owner's hand. The description of Thor's hammer as short-handled is borne out by the shape of Danish amulets made to imitate or honor Thor's weapon. These amulets all have a metal ring or piece of leather fitted through the handle, much like the weapon described at the beheading ceremony in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

A denez ax nwe dygt, þe dynt with to zelde,
With a borelych bytte bende by þe halme,
Fyled in a fylor, fowre fote large—
Hit watz no lasse bi þat lace þat lemed ful brygt.⁴

³John MacCulloch, *The Mythology of All Races*, Vol. II (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1930), 68.

⁴J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 61. Further references to this edition will be indicated by line numbers in parentheses.

The note on the Danish ax in the Tolkien and Gordon edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* explains that it was the ordinary long-bladed battle ax and was so called because it was the favorite weapon of the Vikings who raided England and France. It may be a coincidence that the ax is described specifically as Danish, but I am convinced that it is, in fact, another of many details that help to tie the character of the Green Knight to the Norse god, Thor.

From the ax, we turn to another item associated with the two—the belt or girdle. Gawain's decision to keep the belt is a crucial event in the poem and is directly related to the testing of his Christian and knightly behavior. At the end of the poem, we find that the belt is actually the Green Knight's and serves as a part of the attempt to show Gawain his faults. Gawain fails to turn over to the Green Knight the belt which, along with three kisses, was his gain on the third day. One of Thor's unique features was a belt that gave him ever renewed power and that doubled the strength of his limbs as soon as he fastened it around his waist.⁵ So, too, the green belt Gawain kept was known to contain "hidden powers," as we are told by the host's wife:

Bot who-so knew þe costes þat knit ar þerinne,
 He wolde hit prayse at more prys, paraenture;
 For quat gome so is gorde with þis grene lace,
 While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,
 Þer is no hæpel vnder heuen tohewe hym þat mygt,
 For he mygt not be slayn for slygt vpon erþe.
 (1849-54)

Relying on the magic belt for strength and security, these two characters were unlike most men of their day, who chose to use armor during their battles. Strangely, the absence of armor marks both Thor and the Green Knight. In no illustration or description of Thor is he wearing armor, unlike other gods, such as Odin, who frequently appeared with shield and helmet. Thor was also a colleague of the berserk warriors of Odin who "went without mailcoats and were frantic as dogs or wolves; they bit their shields and were as strong as bears or boars; they slew men, but neither fire nor iron could hurt them. This is known as 'running berserk.'"⁶ Even though it put one in danger in a time when armor was the norm, appearing without armor might be seen as intimidating. Arthur's company is rather curious about the Green Knight's appearance in bright

⁵Robert Graves, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (New York: Prometheus Press, 1962), p. 263.

⁶H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 89.

civilian clothes rather than armor: "Wheþer hade he no halme ne hawbergh nauþer, / Ne no pysan ne no plate þat pented to armes, / Ne no schafte ne no schelde to schwue ne to smyte" (203-5). Thor, who would enter fights unarmed with frost giants, and the Green Knight, who entered a potentially dangerous situation with Arthur's worthy knights, must have had so much confidence in their strength and fighting ability that they felt they did not need to bear the extra weight of armor. Seeing their opponents without armor, challengers must have been further humiliated realizing they had had an open shot at the foe's vulnerable body, yet still were defeated.

Besides dress and accoutrements, the physical characteristics of the Green Knight and Thor are also similar, including their eyes, voice, and beard. With all the other magnificent qualities of these men, observers still are drawn to comment on the fierceness and burning of the eyes of both. According to the medieval science of physiognomy, the Green Knight's "rede eye" that "he reled aboute" indicate strength, courage, and manliness, as we are told by Robert White in "A Note on the Green Knight's Eyes."⁷ Although Thor's eyes are never described as red, they are frequently noted as burning, a description which brings to mind the color of fire—red. Medieval authors often equated fire and the color red in their texts, including Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales*. In the Knight's Tale, a short cloak is described as "bret-ful of rubyes rede as fyr sparklynge" (2164), and the Prologue includes a Summoner "that hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face" (624).⁸ If their hammer or ax were not enough to intimidate, having to look into those eyes could have been sufficient to render any challenger, including Gawain, hesitant about going head to head in battle.

In addition to having intimidating eyes, both men are big, tall, and strong, which further enhances the connection between them. Gawain describes the Green Knight as, "half etayn in erde I hope þat he were" (140), and later when he sees him before the beheading ceremony speaks of him as a "hoge hæpel for þe nonez, and of hyghe eldee" (844). Thor's progress through the realms of gods and giants was marked by the continual overthrowing of adversaries and overcoming of obstacles. His usual method of killing his enemies was simple and direct; he simply struck at them with his hammer, slew them with boulders, or broke their backs by forcing weight down

⁷Donald Howard and Christian Zacher, eds., *Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 223.

⁸F. N. Robinson ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

upon them.⁹ Thor's power extended far, and he was the supreme god not only over the sky, but also over the life of the community whose safety relied on his broad shoulders.

As further evidence of his large stature, great vitality, and strength, Thor was famous for his tremendous appetite for food and drink. At one sitting he ate an entire ox, eight large salmon, and numerous side dishes, in addition to drinking three barrels of mead.¹⁰ Perhaps Thor's delight in eating and drinking is reflected in the frequency of descriptions of feasting in *Sir Gawain*. When not describing Arthur's knights involved in battles, the Gawain-poet provides explicit details of these knights indulging in numerous feasts centering on some holiday or festival. The Christmas or Yuletide feast is of primary focus in *Sir Gawain* and we learn from Funk and Wagnall's *Dictionary of Mythology and Legend* that this, too, is linked to Thor: "The Yuletide period of feasting which began with the winter solstice and varied in length from one day to a month was dedicated to Thor."¹¹ If the Green Knight is modeled after the figure of Thor, not only would the poem be set during Christmastime because of its Christian significance, but also, perhaps, as a reminder of Thor's own importance at that time of the year.

To catch the attention of feasting or warring knights, an authoritative voice was essential. Thor was a loud-voiced fellow, and this powerful voice rose above the tumult of battle and filled his enemies with terror.¹² Gawain and his fellow knights were stunned when the Green Knight first spoke: "and al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten" (242). The Green Knight's voice is also noteworthy when Gawain first meets his beheader at the Green Chapel as well as after the beheading game when the Green Knight begins to reproach Gawain for his faulty behavior. The Green Knight's words had quite an effect on Gawain: "þat oþer stif mon in study stod a gret whyle, / So agreed for greme he gryed withinne; / Alle þe blode of his brest blende in his face" (2369-2371). Had not the Green Knight spoken to Gawain, perhaps Gawain might not have been so hard on himself. But because of the authority in the Green Knight's voice, Gawain is even more critical of himself than the Green Knight is. Granted, there is a difference between a loud, boisterous

voice and one that commands respect, but that each character possesses a distinct, authoritative voice furthers the possibility that the figure of Thor was a major influence to the Gawain poet in formulating the Green Knight's character.

The presence of facial hair is yet another physical similarity between Thor and the Green Knight. Beards were hardly uncommon in the Middle Ages, but because the beards are so emphasized in prose and poetry we realize these beards must have been extraordinary, or in some way special. Both characters possess a stunning, full-length beard. The Green Knight's "berd as a busk over his brest henges" (182). It is "brode, bryzt . . . and al bever hwed" (845). Thor's face was adorned with a long red beard which he shook when roused, and he is frequently described as a huge, red-bearded, irascible fellow.¹³ The color of the beard may have been based on the red sky which foretells a storm. The fact that one of the most famous worshippers of the god, Thorolf of Most, was known as the "bearded man of Most" suggests his beard was something worthy of notice, even among bearded Vikings.¹⁴ Although there is a discrepancy in the color of the beards, the fact that the beard is played up as such a distinct characteristic in each man furthers the possibility that the Green Knight was meant to be Thor-like.

One other item associated with Thor seems to surface in the detail of the whetstone, found in only two of the medieval romances that contain beheadings. In Thor's fight with the giant, Hrungir, the giant had a huge whetstone and shield. Thor hurled his hammer, and the giant replied by throwing the whetstone. The stone shattered, but one lump of it buried itself in Thor's skull and was never removed.¹⁵ As Gawain waits for his encounter with the Green Knight at the chapel, he hears a noise which "wharred and whette, as water at a mulne; / What! hit rusched and ronge rawþe to here" (2203-4). He looks up to see the Green Knight sharpening his Danish ax in preparation for the beheading ceremony. Later Gawain describes the beheading weapons as having "a borelych bytte bende by þe halme, / fyled in a fylor" (2224-5). Of the six medieval tales that include beheading games, only in *Sir Gawain* and *Persevalus* does this detail appear.

The Gawain-poet's proximity to lands which earlier contained people who firmly believed in and worshipped Thor, and his use of

⁹Davidson, p. 75.

¹⁰Graves, p. 265.

¹¹Maria Leach, ed., *Dictionary of Folklore, Myth, and Legend* (New York: Funk and Wagnall's Co., 1949), p. 1109.

¹²Graves, p. 264.

¹³Richard Carylton, *A Guide to the Gods* (New York: William Morrow, 1982), p. 242.

¹⁴Davidson, p. 85.

¹⁵Carylton, p. 79.

descriptions which mirror the Northland raise many questions which might be easily answered if, indeed, the Green Knight was created to resemble Thor. Most critics agree about the poet's geographic references. As Charles Moorman notes, "Internal evidence also demonstrates that the poet was familiar with the geography and countryside of Northern Wales, and with the Wirral, a forest in northwestern Cheshire. . . ." ¹⁶ Germans, Slavs, and Celts all had holy groves in their forests dedicated to the worship of Thor. In fact, the forest of Thor on the bank of the Liffey outside Dublin existed as late as 1000 A.D. In that year King Brian Boru spent a month destroying it, until, we are told in an Irish poem, "the great trees and the lordly oaks alone stood upright." ¹⁷ If Moorman and other historians are correct in their assessment of where the Gawain-poet resided—in or around the Northwest Midlands—that puts the poet approximately one hundred miles from people and cultures who at one time in their histories worshipped Thor. Coinciding with the poet's proximity to prior Thor-worshipping lands is the extent to which the setting or scenery in *Sir Gawain* reflects the surroundings Thor would have been accustomed to in the Northlands. Thor was associated with the great oaks of the forest. Frazer's *Golden Bough* explains, "The veneration for sacred groves of trees seems to have held the foremost place [and] the chief of their holy trees was the oak, dedicated to the god of Thunder, Thor." ¹⁸ As Gawain rides in search of the Green Chapel, he describes the forest scenery "Of hore okez ful hoge a hundreth togeder" (743). His first sight of the host's castle was "as it schemered and schon perz þe schyre okez" (772). Wilmot-Buxton, in her foreword to *Stories of Norse Heroes*, reinforces the similarity between the wild scenery of the Northmen and that scenery described in *Sir Gawain*: "Northmen were fine storytellers and their imagination was forever being fed by the wild scenery of their rock bound coasts, snowy mountain tops, craggy hills, and dark, mysterious forests." ¹⁹ More than once in *Sir Gawain* do we read descriptions which sound very much like the Northland:

Mony klyf he ouerclambe in contrayes straunge

(713)

¹⁶Charles Moorman, *The Works of the Gawain Poet* (Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 1977), p. 15.

¹⁷Davidson, p.

¹⁸Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1950) p. 186.

¹⁹E. M. Wilmot-Buxton, *Stories of Norse Heroes told by the Northmen* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1909) p. vi.

Mo nyztes þen innoghe in naked rokkez,
þer as claterande fro þe crest þe colde borne rennez. . . .

(730-1)

Into a forest ful dep, þat ferly watz wyld. . . .

(741)

Bitwene a flosche in þat fryth and a foo cragge;
In a knot by a clyffe. . . .

(1430-31)

Pay clomben bi clyffez þer clengez þe colde. . . .

(2078)

Much of the scenery described in *Sir Gawain* is outdoors and includes intricate explanations of hunting techniques and beautiful descriptions of snow, which would be easily narrated by a Viking or anyone familiar with survival in the Northlands.

Though not as easily distinguishable as the obvious physical similarities, the intriguing behavior of these two men has much in common. Thor's battles are mostly with frost-giants and giantesses, such as Hrungir, Thrym, Hymir, and Geirrod. Sometimes they try to lure him into their realms unarmed, but for the most part he goes deliberately to seek them and kills them without much difficulty once it comes to a direct trial of strength. ²⁰ The Green Knight appears to behave in much the same way in arriving suddenly at Arthur's hall looking for an opponent. He intentionally goes to Arthur's castle because he has heard of the court's reputation in doing battle and so believes the knights will give him a good challenge:

To wone any quyle in þis won, hit watz not myn ernde;
Bot for þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyge,
And þy burz and þy burnes best ar holden,
Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,
þe wyztest and þe worpyest of þe worldes kynde,
Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykez,
And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,
And þat hatz wayned me hider, iwysis, at þis tyme.

(257-264)

Besides deliberately seeking opponents, both men appear as figures of comedy and bluff. Many of Thor's adventures are tinged with humor, especially in his cunningly outwitting the huge giants and playing tricks and practical jokes on the other gods. ²¹ In the

²⁰Davidson, p. 89.

²¹Rex Warner, ed. *Encyclopedia of World Mythology* (New York: Galahad Books, 1975) p. 175.

beheading scene, the Green Knight seems to delight in teasing Sir Gawain with feints of his huge ax. The annoyed Gawain, not amused, wishes instead the Green Knight would kill him quickly and cleanly: "Wyl þresh on, þou þro mon, þou þretez to longe; / I hope þat þi hert arze wyth þyn awen seluen" (2300-1). The Green Knight agrees that the teasing has gone on too long and says, "For soþe . . . so felly þou spekez, / I wyl no lenger on lyte lette þin ernde / riȝt nowē" (2302-4). Similarly, the frost giants did not appreciate Thor's comedy and jokes. Had they known their dislike for his humor would end in their deaths, they might have been more appreciative of his many escapades. In Arthur's hall, too, there is a grim touch of jokery; the Green Knight enjoys himself by holding his detached head in his hand, displaying it for all to see and frightening Guenivere and the rest of the court.

Both men also appear as figures of disguise. Thor dresses as the goddess, Freya, acting as Thrym's wife-to-be so he can recover his hammer buried eight fathoms below under the rocks of Jotunheim.²² The poet describes the Green Knight in so many guises—host, horrible giant, hunter, and beheader—that the Green Knight in consequence becomes a very problematic figure for critics. Larry Benson is neither the first nor last critic to struggle with deciding whether the Green Knight is a malevolent or benevolent monster, the merriest of men, or a handsome knight.²³

Although the values of a person are difficult both to measure and to define, in this instance we must make an attempt to determine the ends toward which Thor and the Green Knight strive. Thor's behavior caused many people to believe that his call in life was to keep law and order in the free community as well as to enforce the keeping of faith between men.²⁴ A.C. Spearing in *The Gawain Poet* claims:

The consequence of the failure of the poet to clarify the inner life or the ethical goals of the Green Knight in the way he does with Gawain and Arthur is that modern scholars and critics have felt the need to interpret the Green Knight from the outside.²⁵

²²Charles Mills Gayley, *The Classical Myths in English Literature and in Art* (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1939), p. 376.

²³Benson, pp. 60-61.

²⁴Davidson, p. 91.

²⁵Spearing, p. 179.

From the previous discussion, one might see the Green Knight's purpose and intentions in the poem to be much the same as Thor's. The testing of Gawain included a compact or contract in two parts. First, Gawain was supposed to find the Green Knight a year from the date of their first meeting. He kept that part of the bargain, and the Green Knight congratulates him: "For þe forwarde þat we fest in þe fyrst nyȝt, / And pou trystly pe trawpe and trwly me haldez" (2347-48). The second part of the compact was the three-day exchange of winnings. Gawain kept his oath until the third day, when he deliberately held back the girdle he had received from the host's wife. He broke the faith with the Green Knight and the Green Knight makes sure Gawain sees his error: "Bot here yow lakked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted" (2366). Gawain responds in shame to the accusation: "Lol þer þe falssyng, foule mot hit falle!" (2378). In the testing of Gawain, the Green Knight shows that he is concerned with honesty and the keeping of faith between men. The Green Knight does not appear as an outlaw. Although he disrupts the feasting and merriment of Arthur's court, he does no damage and politely asks for a challenge from one of Arthur's knights. He is, in a sense, respecting law and order in this free community. He does no real evil here, but merely addresses the company in a straightforward manner, seeking a competitor. The Green Knight does fail to mention his scheme with Morgan Le Faye to taint Gawain's character, but in the conclusion the Green Knight emerges as a character who teaches Gawain a lesson about himself, rather than as an opponent solely intent to kill him and ruin the court's reputation. The Green Knight finally improves Arthur's court. Gawain is determined to wear the green belt as a sign of his mistakes so that all the court will be reminded of his period of testing and of their own vulnerability.

Supplementing the lengthy list of connections between the Green Knight and Thor are such facts as Thor's mother's identity as Jord, or "earth," reminiscent of once-popular interpretations of the Green Knight as a vegetation or nature god. Also, the place near Staffordshire which even today still looks much like the Green Chapel—and may have influenced the poet—is called Thorsdale. Is it just coincidence, then, that the ax is specifically described as Danish, or that the physiques and physical characteristics of these figures are also similar? If it is more than coincidence, then how does recognition of a Thor-like Green Knight increase our understanding of the poem? What would have been the Gawain-poet's intention in involving a pagan character in a predominantly

Christian narrative? Questions such as these indicate the need for further investigation of the subject. Although the dissension among the critics as to the origin of the Green Knight has not been fully resolved, the present study may serve to provide initial resource material for further work in this ongoing critical controversy.

The Emporia State Research Studies

- Vol. I, No. 1, 1952: Willis Ratzlaff, *The Limnology of Some Roadside Ditches in Chase and Lyon Counties, Kansas*. No. 2,* 1952: C. Stewart Boertman, *Apportionment in the Kansas House of Representatives*. No. 3,* 1953: John Breukelman and Ted F. Andrews, *Offerings and Enrollments in Secondary School Sciences in Kansas in 1951-1952*. No. 4, 1953: George S. Blair, *The Office of County Corner in Kansas*.
- Vol. II, No. 1,* 1953: Green D. Wyrick, *The World of Ernest Hemingway*. No. 2,* 1953: Ira Everett Welch, *The Comparison of Column Method Versus the Context Method in the Teaching of Spelling*. No. 3, 1954: Jerry P. Leibman, *Press Freedom and Libel as Defined by Kansas Law*. No. 4, 1954: Harold Crimmins, *A History of The Kansas Central Railway, 1881-1935*.
- Vol. III, No. 1, 1954: Fred W. Grabhorn, *Status of Teachers of Business Subjects in the Secondary Schools of Kansas, 1953-1954*; Billy Lee Fowler, *Turnover of Business Teachers in the Secondary Schools in Kansas, 1952-1953*; Eleanor Patrick Evans, *List of Free Teaching Aids for Typewriting, Bookkeeping, and Shorthand*. No. 2, 1954: Garrett R. Carpenter, *Silkville: A Kansas Attempt in the History of Fourierist Utopias, 1869-1892*. No. 3, 1955: John C. Scafe, *Foreign Language Teaching in Kansas High Schools, 1953-1954*. No. 4, 1955: Richard A. Valyer, *A Proposed Course of Study for Driver Education*.
- Vol. IV, No. 1,* 1955: Jessie Louise Losey, *A Selected, annotated List of One-Act Plays for Festival Use*. No. 2, 1955: George E. Thornton, *The Social and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Dekker*. No. 3, 1956: John Breukelman and Ted F. Andrews, *Offerings and Enrollments in Secondary School Sciences in Kansas in 1954-1955*. No. 4, 1956: S. Hull Sisson and Harry Walthall, *An Annotated Bibliography of Theses Accepted for the Master of Science Degree, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1945 Through 1954*.
- Vol. V., No. 1,* 1956: Walt Butcher, *Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. No. 2,* 1956: Alex A. Daughtry, *A Report on the Post-Graduation Activities of the 1955 Kansas High School Graduates*. No. 3, 1957: Carl W. Prophet, *Seasonal Variations and Abundance of Cladocera and Copepoda and Some Physical-Chemical Conditions of the Fall and Verdigris Rivers in Wilson and Montgomery Counties, Kansas*; Claire L. Schelske, *An Ecological Study of the Fishes of the Fall and Verdigris Rivers in Wilson and Montgomery Counties, Kansas*. No. 4, 1957: William C. Tremmel, *The Social Concepts of George Herbert Mead*.
- Vol. VI, No. 1,* 1957: John M. Matthews, *Sang De Boeuf: Its Chinese Historical References and Local Reduction Experiments in Electric Firing Kilns*. No. 2, 1957: Weldon N. Baker and Merle E. Brooks, *Background and Academic Preparation of the Teachers of Science in the High Schools of Kansas 1955-1956*. No. 3,* 1958: Harold V. Sare, *Nehru and the Rise of the Modern State of India*. No. 4,* 1958: Robert M. Taylor, *Acoustics for the Singer*.
- Vol. VII, No. 1, 1958: Robert F. Clarke, *An Ecological Study of Reptiles and Amphibians in Osage County, Kansas*. No. 2, 1958: Harold V. Sare and Wallace Browning, *Background and Academic Preparation of the Social Science Teachers in the High Schools of Kansas 1956-1957*. No. 3, 1959: John Burger, *Background and Academic Preparation of the Mathematics Teachers in the Public High Schools of Kansas 1957-1958*. No. 4, 1959: Johnny L. Kloefkorn, *A Critical Study of the Work of H. L. Mencken as Literary Editor and Critic on the American Mercury*.
- Vol. VIII, No. 1, 1959: Herman H. Harris, Jr., *The History and Calculation of Pi*. No. 2, 1959: Willard O. Stibal, *The Historical Development of Student Personnel Records in Colleges and Universities*. No. 3, 1960: Donald E. Zimmerman, *The Nature of Man: John Donne's Songs and Holy Sonnets*. No. 4, 1960: Emily L. Hartman, *The F. B. and Rena G. Ross Natural History Reservation*.
- Vol. IX, No. 1, 1960: Charles E. Walton, *To Maske in Myrthe: Spenser's Theatrical Practices in The Faerie Queene*. No. 2, 1960: Paul G. Jantzen, *The Ecology of a Boggy Marsh in Stafford County, Kansas*. No. 3,* 1961: R. Alton Lee, *Pasquale Paoli: Fighter for Freedom*. No. 4, 1961: Eugene Donald Decker, *A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Sources in the Kansas State Historical Society Pertaining to Kansas in the Civil War*.
- Vol. X, No. 1, 1961: John Breukelman and Ralph P. Frazier, *Offerings and Enrollments in the Secondary School Sciences in Kansas in 1960-61*. No. 2, 1961: Marvin Ewy, *Charles Curtis of Kansas: Vice President of the United States, 1929-1933*. No. 3, 1962: J. J. Weigand, *A Comparison of the Effectiveness of Two Methods of Teaching General Music in the Junior High School*. No. 4, 1962: Roma Ball and Others, *Four Studies in Elizabethan Drama*.

- Vol. XI, No. 1, 1962: Robert L. Dorsch and Dorothy D. Greer, *Faulkner—Three Studies*, Part I. No. 2,* 1962: Sherland N. Dirksen, *Faulkner—Three Studies*, Part II. No. 3, 1963: George M. Rundell and Minnie M. Miller, *Foreign Languages in Kansas Secondary Schools, 1961-62*. No. 4, 1963: James S. Wilson, *Flowering Plants of the Ross Natural History Reservation, Lyon and Chase Counties, Kansas*.
- Vol. XII, No. 1, 1963: Eldon E. Snyder, *Offerings and Enrollments in the Secondary School Social Sciences in 1961-62*. No. 2,* 1963: John Breukelman and Ralph P. Frazier, *Offerings and Enrollments in Junior High School Science in Kansas in 1962-1963*. No. 3, 1964: D. Stanley Eitzen, *David J. Brewer, 1837-1910: A Kansan on the United States Supreme Court*. No. 4, 1964: Franklin L. Jensen, *Mark Twain's Comments On Books and Authors*.
- Vol. XIII, No. 1, 1964: Craig Smith, Walton, James, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance*. No. 2, 1964: R. C. Anderson, *Secondary School Geography and Its Status in the North Central Region: 1962-1963*. No. 3, 1965: Charles L. Bell, *Industrial Arts in the Public Secondary Schools of Kansas in 1962-1963*. No. 4, 1965: Robert F. Clarke, *An Ethological Study of the Iguanid Lizard Genera Callisaurus, Cophosaurus, and Holbrookia*.
- Vol. XIV, No. 1, 1965: Lattin, McClure, Daniel, *Three Studies in Middle English Literature*. No. 2, 1965: Saada Ishang and Constance Denniston, *The American Novel: Two Studies*. No. 3, 1966: Loren E. Pennington, *Hakluytus Posthumus: Samuel Purchas and the Promotion of English Overseas Expansion*. No. 4, 1966: John Breukelman, *Offerings and Enrollments in the Secondary School Sciences in Kansas in 1965-1966*.
- Vol. XV, No. 1, 1966: Walton, Morgan, Myers, Bergman, Wheelen, *Studies in Renaissance Drama*. No. 2, 1966: Carl W. Prophet, *Limnology of John Redmond Reservoir, Kansas*. No. 3, 1967: James S. Wilson and Robert J. Boles, *Common Aquatic Weeds of Kansas Ponds and Lakes*. No. 4, 1967: Dicks and Clark, *Medieval Renaissance Studies*.
- Vol. XVI, No. 1, 1967: Craig M. Goad, *Daylight and Darkness, Dream and Delusion: The Works of Truman Capote*. No. 2, 1967: Dale M. Garvey, *Simulation, Role-Playing, and Sociodrama in the Social Studies*, with *An Annotated Bibliography* by Sancha K. Garvey. No. 3, 1968: Richard A. Overfield, *Science in the Virginia Gazette, 1736-1780*. No. 4, 1968: Carey Wilds Kaltenbach, *Evidence for a Quem Quaeritis Easter Matins Trope in the Divine Office at Poitiers, Annorum Ctrcter 800?*
- Vol. XVII, No. 1, 1968: William R. Elkins, *The Dream World and The Dream Vision: Meaning and Structure in Poe's Art*. No. 2, 1968: Robert J. Bicker, *Granville Hicks: An Annotated Bibliography, February, 1927 to June, 1967 with a Supplement to June, 1968*. No. 3, 1969: Ruby Brandley Kirk, *An Inquiry into the Elements of Time and Space in Spenser's The Faerie Queene*. No. 4, 1969: H. Michael LeFever, *Studies on Laboratory Populations of Drosophila americana americana and Drosophila americana texana*.
- Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 1969: Joy E. Prather and Carl W. Prophet, *Zooplankton Species Diversity in John Redmond, Marion, and Council Grove Reservoirs, Kansas, Summer 1968*. No. 2, 1969: Doris Morton, *Ralph Waldo Emerson and The Dial: A Study in Literary Criticism*. No. 3, 1970: James D. Kemmerling, *A History of the Whitley Opera House in Emporia, Kansas, 1881-1913*. No. 4, 1970: Carl W. Prophet, Joy E. Prather, and N. Leon Edwards, *Comparison of Summer Water Quality in Three Grand River Reservoirs, Kansas*.
- Vol. XIX, No. 1, 1970: John Studer and Sharon S. Geddes, *Two Studies in Middle English Literature*. No. 2, 1970: Patrick C. O'Brien, *Senator Robert B. Howell: Progressive and Insurgent During "Normalcy."* No. 3, 1971: Mary Ellen Goad, *The Image and the Woman in the Life and Writings of Mark Twain*. No. 4, 1971: Carter M. Cramer, *The World of Nathanael West: A Critical Interpretation*.
- Vol. XX, No. 1, 1971: Paul T. Graham, *The Mystical and Musical Realism of Richard Crashaw*. No. 2, 1971: Richard F. Raugewitz, *The Horse Disease in Kansas, 1912-1913*. No. 3, 1972: Paul Schnitzel, *The Role of Euro-Dollars in Financing United States Exports*. No. 4, 1972: Loren E. Pennington, *John Frampton and Thomas Nicholas: Two Sixteenth-Century Propagandists for English Expansion*; Patrick C. O'Brien, *William H. McMaster: An Agrarian Dissenter During "Normalcy."*
- Vol. XXI, No. 1, 1972: Paul D. Hahn, *Reformation of New Criticism: "Burnt Norton" Revisited*. No. 2, 1972: Peter J. Ceib, *East-West Trade and Congressional Party Voting, 1947-1970*. No. 3, 1973: James F. Hoy, *The Staging Time of the York Cycle of Corpus Christi Plays*. No. 4, 1973: Clarence R. Morse, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen: A Study of Noel Coward*.
- Vol. XXII, No. 1, 1973: William R. Lindsey, *Treatment of American Prisoners of War During the Revolution*. No. 2, 1973: L. B. Wade Anderson, Jr., *A General Method for Determining Simultaneously Polygonal Numbers*. No. 3, 1974: Peter J. Ceib, *The Origins of the Soviet-American Conflict over United Nations Peacekeeping: 1942-1948*. No. 4, 1974: Henry C. Aiman, *Spenser's Debt to Heliodorus in The Faerie Queene*.

*This issue is no longer available.

- Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 1974: Eugene P. Burr, *A Detailed Study of the Aubry Cutoff of the Santa Fe Trail and Fort Aubry*. No. 2, 1974: Gregory Marshall, *Completeness in Spenser's The Faerie Queene*. No. 3, 1975: Lila Lee Jones, *The Ku Klux Klan in Eastern Kansas during the 1920's*. No. 4, 1975: Charles R. Hill, *Brock Pemberton, Broadway Producer*.
- Vol. XXIV, No. 1, 1975: Robert J. Boles, *Fish Worms*. No. 2, 1975: Marjorie Sullivan and John S. Goodell, *Media Use in the Study of Minorities*. No. 3, 1976: Dubnick, Ray, Underwood, Vowell, *Women and Literature: Four Studies*. No. 4, 1976: Melvin J. Dubnick, *Blaming the Planner: An Alternate Explanation of Development Program Failure*.
- Vol. XXV, No. 1, 1976: Samuel E. Dicks, *Antoine Saugrain (1763-1820): A French Scientist on the American Frontier*. No. 2, 1976: Stephen W. Waite, *Filter-Feeding Dynamics of Two Kansas Cladocerans*. No. 3, 1977: Ravi Sheeey, *Studies in Linguistics*. No. 4, 1977: Walter B. Roettger, *Parsons, Behavioralism, and the Notion of Responsibility*.
- Vol. XXVI, No. 1, 1977: Joyce F. Fleming, *Population Dynamics of "Physa Anatina" Lea in a Natural Spring Community*; Francis L. Funk and John D. Ransom, *Benthic Species Diversity and Related Physicochemical Features of John Redmond Reservoir, 1971-72*; David J. Palavanchuk, *Winter Fauna of Cladocera and Copepoda in Ponds and Ditches, Lyon County, Kansas*. No. 2, 1977: L. Julian Efird, *Tests of Bivariate Hypotheses Relating Characteristics of International Organizations to Interorganizational Relations*. No. 3, 1978: Thomas A. Newton, *A Character Index of Robert Penn Warren's Long Works of Fiction*. No. 4, 1978: Glenn E. Torrey, *Romania's Entry into the First World War: The Problem of Strategy*.
- Vol. XXVII, No. 1, 1978: Roger Lee Haden, *"Ilike a Creature, Takes Entente": A Re-investigation of the Purpose and Effectiveness of Medieval Corpus Christi Drama*. No. 2, 1978: Bruce Edward Koel, *Viscosity of Potassium Iodide in 1-Propanol-Water Mixtures at 20°C and 30°C*. No. 3, 1979: M. Steve Cringan, *Dragonflies and Damselflies of McKinney Marsh*. No. 4, 1979: Leone Karena Buyse, *The French Rococo Flute Style Exemplified in Selected Chamber Works of Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755)*.
- Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, 1979: Mark Scheel, *Death and Dying: Hemingway's Predominant Theme*. No. 2, 1979: Larry Jochims, *Medicine in Kansas, 1850-1900*. No. 3, 1980: Michael L. Nulty, *Ecology of Caddisflies (Trichoptera: Hydropsychidae) in a Neosho River Riffle*. No. 4, 1980: Linda Schexnaydre, editor, *Index to The Emporia State Research Studies, Volumes I - XXVIII (1952-1980)*.
- Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 1980: Patricia R. Spillman, *The Kansan Ethos in the Last Three Decades of the Nineteenth Century*. No. 2, 1980: Barbara Cooper, *The Artist as Historian in the Novels of E. L. Doctorow*. No. 3, 1981: Alan K. Benear and John D. Ransom, *The Effect of a Renovated Sewage Treatment Plant on the Cottonwood River, Kansas*. No. 4, 1981: Glenn E. Torrey, *Romania in the First World War, 1914-1919: An Annotated Bibliography*.
- Vol. XXX, No. 1, 1981: Carolyn G. Boles, *Jane Austen and the Reader: Rhetorical Techniques in Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice, and Emma*. No. 2, 1981: Larry Jochims, *Medicine in Kansas, 1850-1900 (Part II)*. No. 3, 1982: Elizabeth Ann Du Bois, *A Comparison of Georg Philipp Telemann's Use of the Recorder and the Transverse Flute as Seen in His Chamber Works*. No. 4, 1982: Bert E. Eustace and John D. Ransom, *The Limnology of Wyandotte County Lake, Kansas*.
- Vol. XXXI, No. 1, 1982: Nancy Burns, *The Collapes of Small Towns on the Great Plains: A Bibliography*. No. 2, 1982: Esther Wilson Will, *Effects of Temperature on Fatty Acids of Crayfish Tissues*. No. 3, 1983: Kirk Winters, *Joyce's Ulysses as Poems: Rhythm, Rhyme, and Color in "Wandering Rocks."* No. 4, 1983: Rhonda J. Baker, Robert J. Gress, and Dwight L. Spencer, *Mortality, Home Range, and Population Density of Cottontail Rabbits at Ross Natural History Reservation, Lyon County, Kansas*.
- Vol. XXXII, No. 1, 1983: Melanie S. Weaver and Stephen F. Davis, *Motivational Specificity of the Signal Value of Odor Cues: A Reconsideration and Extension*. No. 2, 1983: Larry D. Bradfield., *Prose Decorum and The Anatomy of Folly in Bartholomew Fair*. No. 3, 1984: Gregory J. Bruner, *Coexistence Strategies of Daphnia in Lake Reading, Ks.* No. 4, 1984: Goltra, Grogan, and Zalatel, *Three Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

*This issue is no longer available.