

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE RECONCILIATION OF GOLD AND GREEN
IN ROMANCE'S VISION OF REALITY:
VARIATIONS OF A MYTHIC PATTERN
IN THREE MEDIEVAL ROMANCES

BY

PENNY L. JONES SQUARE

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Abstract

Northrop Frye discusses romance in terms of its displacement of myth in a human direction and its re-alignment of reality in an ideal direction, a shift which serves to make the ideal apparent in the real and available to humanity. Using this valuable insight into the nature and function of romance, this thesis demonstrates that romance provides a vision of reality in which the ideal is reconciled with the real. Whereas romance is generally read as fantasy, its vision suggests that it should be read with a regard to the truth it embodies. It does not present a perfect world unattainable in reality, but a complete world in which the ideal and real are reconciled. This complete world has always been available to man. Romance reveals this world to remind him of its attainability.

Romance modifies the ideal to present an attainable ideal. One of the devices romance uses to accomplish this is to take myth and re-create it in human terms. This re-creation of myth, by displacing its divine or ideal world in a human direction, serves to make romance suggestive of mythic patterns more closely related to the reality of human experience. This thesis examines three Medieval romances, Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, through the medium of one such mythic pattern. The mythic pattern informing these specific romances fulfills romance's reconciling function and is therefore suggestive of the shape of romance in general.

The hero of romance is human though graced with touches of divinity. The mythic pattern describes the process by which this human hero comes to terms with his natural limitations in order to realize his

divine potential. This, in turn, serves to humanize the ideal the hero represents, to make it attainable in reality. The hero's descending journey into nature defines the shape of this mythic pattern. It is a journey which involves the ideal in the real to effect the necessary reconciliation within the human hero.

This mythic pattern unfolds in three stages: the withdrawal from the court of the golden knight, the potentially perfect representative of the human world; his descent into the green world, of nature or the natural self; and his return to the human world where the reconciliation achieved in him may be extended outward to the renewing of that world. The fulfilled pattern presents a picture of reality in which the gold and the green are harmonized.

Chapter I establishes the existence of this mythic pattern, defines it, and discusses certain of the undisplaced myths to which it alludes. The concepts of the golden and green worlds are explained to justify my choice of the terms, the gold and the green, to discuss this mythic pattern. Chapter I also outlines my approach to the reading of Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The pattern is present in each but, in each, unfolds a different vision which is determined by the poet's perspective. The pattern will be examined in each romance with a view to defining the distinctive visions it unfolds in each.

Chapters II, III, and IV examine the poetic treatment of the mythic pattern in Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, respectively. The pattern presented in Sir Orfeo from a divine perspective unfolds a vision of re-creation which emphasizes the pattern's comic promise. The vision of retreat unfolded from the pattern presented

from a human perspective in Sir Launfal suggests but does not emphasize the pattern's tragic potential. The pattern viewed in Sir Gawain from both a human and a divine direction provided by the poem's dual perspective unfolds a vision which is the revelation of the pattern's fulfillment. It expresses both the pattern's tragic potential and its comic promise by its perfect balance of mockery and celebration, sadness and mirth. Chapter V summarizes the significance of this mythic pattern as it relates to the interpretation of these specific romances, and as it relates to the reading of romance in general.

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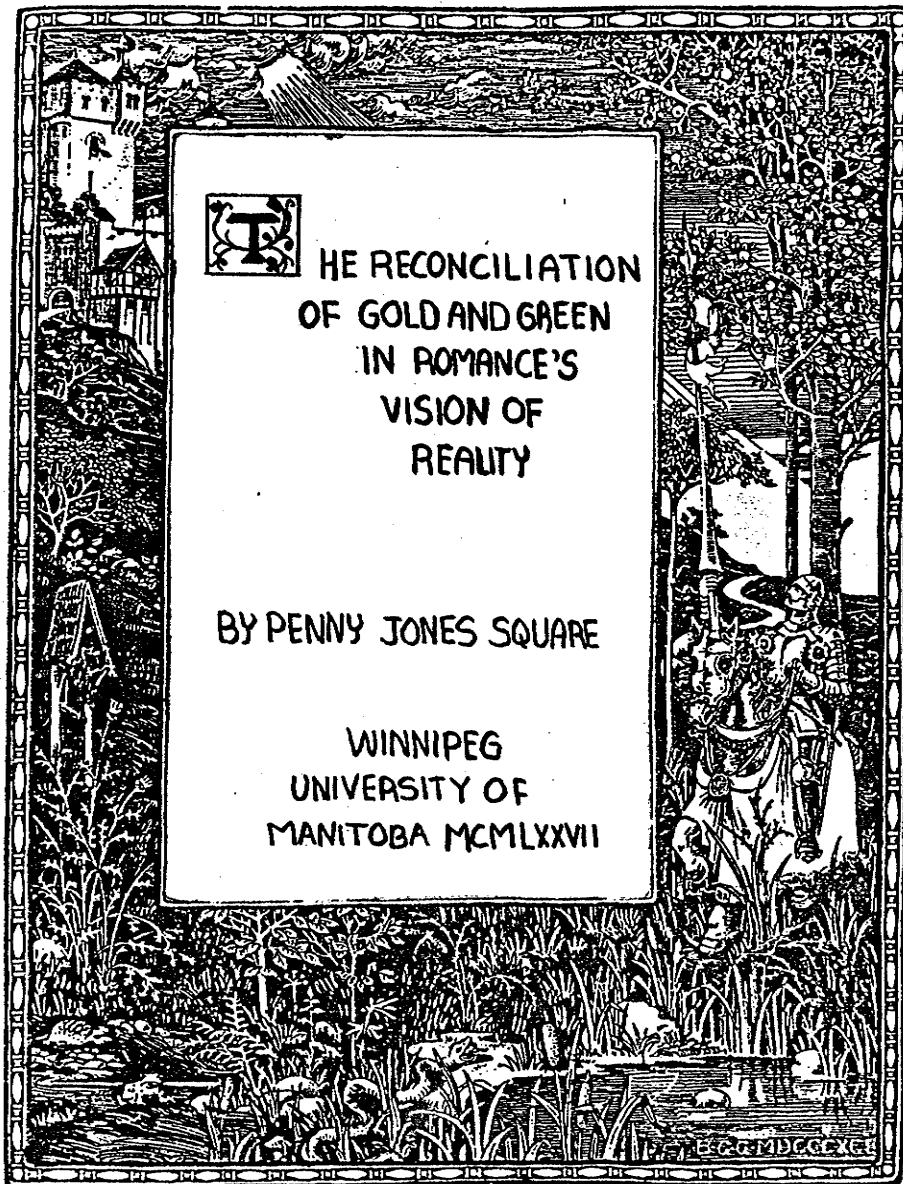
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NOTE ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1, which I have chosen for the frontispiece and entitled "The Descent from Gold to Green," is a border design by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue for the periodical, Knicht Errant, I (April, 1892). Figure 2, "Realms of Gold and Green: The Castle and the Forest," is an illustration by Charles Robinson for the title page of Barrington MacGregor's King Longbeard: or, The Annals of the Golden Dreamland (London: John Lane, 1898). Figure 3, "The Knight's Departure," is an illustration by Howard Pyle in his book, The Story of King Arthur and His Knights (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954). Figure 4, "The Sojourn in the Green Wood," and figure 6, "The Re-Ascent from Green to Gold," are designs by Aubrey Beardsley for an edition of Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1894). Figure 5, "The Knight's Return," is an illustration by John G. Galsworthy for M.R. Ridley's modern English translation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (London: Edmund Ward, 1962).



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CHAPTER I

THE MEETING OF GOLD AND GREEN:

THE MEANING OF THE MYTHIC PATTERN

Northrop Frye has located romance between the realms of myth and realism, between the divine and the natural, the ideal and the real, which, for purposes of this study shall be called the golden and green worlds respectively.¹ For romance is that tendency "to displace myth in a human direction and yet, in contrast to "realism" to conventionalize content in an idealized direction."² Thus the realm of romance occupies the middle human world and in the unfolding of its vision of reality romance seeks to effect a reconciliation between the divine order above and the natural one below: to refashion a golden-green world atoned with the divine and attuned to the natural.

Romance gives us not the golden goal of human vision nor the green garden of human nature but the process of reconciliation between them, the familiar and frequent romantic quest to re-create a golden-green world harmonized with the ideal yet rooted in the real.³ The romantic hero is not the divine hero of myth nor the natural man of realism but a human hero with touches of divinity. The romantic hero's quest to reconcile heaven and earth, the golden world of the ideal dream with the green world of reality, mirrors the interior process by which the golden knight comes to terms with the natural man within. Romance does not tell of restoration won by climbing upward out of one's nature, in defiance of human limitation and mortality, to the divine. Rather, romance tells of

restoration won by the descent into one's natural roots, as evidenced by romance's frequent journeys into the green world of Faery, forest, or the equivalent inward realm of self in madness or in exile.⁴ For romance "is largely concerned with an attempt to present the desirable in human, familiar, attainable, and morally allowable terms."⁵ It seeks to explain the divine in natural terms, disclosing by the hero's descending journey the inherent connection between the gold and the green which may be discovered and re-created in every human heart.

Romance, as the medium between myth and realism, tends "to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience."⁶ The romantic hero's quest to effect a reconciliation between the gold and green worlds is one such mythic pattern. It may be defined as the coming into contact of the gold with the green by the descent of the golden aspect in human existence, the potentially perfect knight, into the green world of reality, the natural self, or nature. The hero's journey defines the shape of this pattern and makes manifest its meaning in the rhythm of its imagery, in the meeting of the gold and the green and the movement to reconciliation and return, or separation and retreat. Further examination of this mythic pattern together with an identification of certain of the undisplaced myths to which it alludes and a clarification of the concepts of the golden and green worlds which contribute to the pattern's structure of imagery must precede the specific examinations of the pattern's variations in three Medieval romances. Although this pattern can be seen to be the inherent shape of many romances, as I have suggested above, it provides an infinite variety in its unfolding as, I trust, the following readings, indicative of the pattern's versatility, will make apparent.

The gold and green are recurrent images in romance; star and flower, court and wood, knight and shepherd, Paradise and Faery, are frequently interlaced in romance to tell the timeless tale of the descent of the golden thing into the green world to seek the reconciliation which is the re-creation of the world in time.⁷ The ideal is fulfilled by falling into nature and thereby the natural is sanctified. For romance, which is defined by the descending journey of this mythic pattern, reveals that the ideal must be rooted in the natural if it is not to become an illusion, and the natural must flower forth enlightened by the ideal if it is not to resolve into chaos.

The reminiscence of certain undisplaced myths, both Christian and pagan, is implicit in this mythic pattern and their disclosure may enhance an understanding of this romantic displacement. The pattern may suggest the dying god of Christianity, forsaking divinity and assuming mortality to reconcile fallen man with his golden father, thereby making falling divine, sanctifying this descending journey. There may be a reflection of the golden Venus descending to love Adonis, a dying man, that he may be resurrected an eternal flower, a golden-green thing, or as Spenser puts it: made "eterne in mutabilitie."⁸ Persephone's sad beauty, borne of her annual descent into the death kingdom, may be shadowed forth, for it is as a golden-green thing, a beauty that must pass yet made more beautiful by its passing as Ovid makes clear.

That brow of gloom, which seemed a darker night
To Dis himself, on earth is gay and bright;
As when the sun, which rain-filled clouds concealed,
Issues in triumph forth, and rides revealed.⁹

Thus in Persephone's sad beauty, resplendent with spring promise and reminiscent of winter loss, the gold and the green are reconciled; the truth of

transience is enveloped in the eternal ring of recurrence.

This pattern may also recall the myth of the divine Orpheus' descent, by virtue of his golden harp's harmony, into the death kingdom to seek his earthly bride. In this myth, tragic separation replaces the reconciliation of romance's resolution. For by his clinging backward glance on his beloved, Orpheus refuses the essential consent, demanded by this descending journey, to the green truth of transience that taints all life. Desiring an eternity in his earthly beloved rather than accepting and cherishing her vulnerable nature he loses her and is robbed of all his joy. Thus these myths may be reflected in the magic mirror of this mythic pattern which manifests the meeting of the divine and the earthly if only for a moment.

Where reconciliation is won the pattern reveals a vision of the world made new, in which the golden ideal is refreshed by a touch of green and the natural green sanctified by a touch of gold; the divine is humanized and the human emerges touched with divinity. It is a world new born by the contact of the gold with the green. Behind this fulfilled pattern of romance the divine pattern of Revelation is perceived with its vision of the unfolding of a new heaven and a new earth born of the descent of the Jerusalem bride, at once a golden city and a green garden, to marry the Man-God.

The concepts of the gold and the green present in this mythic pattern may be revealed explicitly as images and implicitly as suggestions of those qualities conveyed by the images. The golden aspect may be conveyed by the image of the court circle that seeks to fashion a perfect society, the earthly counterpart of the heavenly golden city "at the goal of human vision."¹⁰ It may be defined as the human hero's excellence, his

potential perfection, that portion of divinity the knight shares with God. The golden quality may be discovered in the hero's dream, the ideal he upholds, his vision of himself and his world as each ought to be. And the gold may be evident as the eternity in nature's mutability, the golden ring of recurrence within its cycle of change, expressive of the life there is in death.

The green is explicit in the image of the forest into which the knight ventures forth on his quest and is implicit in his fall into nature mirrored in that journey. For the quest into the forest and the fall into nature cannot be separated; man is a microcosm of nature, his blood and its rivers correspond. The green wood often leads to Faery, but this too is a green emblem, graced though it is with a golden aspect. Frye has shown Faery to occupy the same place as ordinary physical nature, as do the forest and inward realm.¹¹ As Tolkien expresses it "The road to fairyland is not the road to Heaven," and the elves encountered there are not supernatural but natural, "far more natural" than we.¹² The realm of Faery is a perilous realm, at once delightful and dangerous, demanding the knight's eternal vigilance, for the golden glow of Faery's magic does not dispell the real claims of human mortality and natural mutability.¹³ Faery is but another image of the green world and as such affords a place around which the golden-green world can crystallize, in which the reconciliation can be effected, and from which the essential return must be made.

Thus the descending journey into the green world, whether of the forest, the natural self, or Faery is a perilous quest. For here the knight confronts realities as well as fantasy, the facts and fears and

failings which he bears into this realm, as well as the death and danger residing here. Wishes do fail here and prohibitions do exist here. The journey into the green world provides the opportunity to confront and so acknowledge the realities of limitation, death, and time residing at the heart of Faery's fantasy. And once these are accepted by the experience of suffering them which brings understanding, the well of the green world springs forth with waters of restorative grace. For then the gold and the green are reconciled in romance's natural miracle.

Hope is reclaimed at this well in the green world as the wound of knowledge now accepted is healed by the waters of grace, promising the reconciliation to be re-enacted in the human heart. In hope the ascending journey is fulfilled as hope adds to the golden ideal the sad wisdom of the green world to transform the human realm golden-green.

The frequency with which this mythic pattern informs romance might suggest that the genre was capable of only a single statement about life. Yet the three romances I have selected, Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, reveal the varied use of this mythic pattern as it unfolds in each a distinctive vision of the romantic reconciliation according to the poet's perspective. The same story told from different directions provides diversity in affinity: various visions reflected from the single mythic mirror.

The reconciliation of the gold and green manifested in this mythic pattern encompasses both a tragic and comic note. It tells us that perfection is always beyond a man's grasp, that the green will always limit his gold, and yet, it also tells us that if a man come to terms with this truth about his nature he can come as near perfection as this world permits.

What may appear to be a limited compromise, potentially tragic, from the human perspective, focusing as it does on the green term of the equation of reconciliation, from the divine perspective, focusing upon the golden term, may appear to be an unlimited promise, potentially comic.¹⁴ The perspective from which the pattern is viewed thus determines the nature of its final vision.

Sir Orfeo presents the mythic pattern as it unfolds viewed from the divine perspective. The final vision unfolded from the pattern reveals the human world of Orfeo's kingdom re-created golden-green, become "a new earth turned upward, or sacramentally aligned with a new Heaven."¹⁵ We view this new earth with the poet from the perspective of heaven, as it were, from above. Thus its golden aspect, its proximity to heaven, rather than its green aspect, its displacement in a human direction, is the focus of our perspective. From this perspective, the pattern evokes the joy of comedy's affirmation.

The pattern in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is presented from the human perspective provided by Sir Gawain. Here it unfolds a vision of the human world of Arthur's court re-created golden-green as is Orfeo's kingdom, but its green aspect, its human limitation, seems to overshadow the golden aspect of its divine promise. We view this world with Sir Gawain from below, from earth, as it were, rather than from heaven as in Sir Orfeo. From this perspective the pattern evokes something of the sorrow of tragic knowledge. Yet the potential tragedy present in the pattern's final vision viewed from Gawain's perspective is balanced by the poet's larger comic perspective provided by the court's laughter. Although the pattern in Sir Gawain tends more toward the tragic potential implicit in romance's

vision of reconciliation yet it reveals the kernel of comedy equally implicit in it, realized in Sir Orfeo.

Sir Launfal also presents the pattern as it unfolds from a human perspective but one very unlike that present in Sir Gawain. The pattern's final vision here reveals the human world of Arthur's court unredeemed by the reconciliation achieved in Sir Launfal. We view this world neither from heaven, as in Sir Orfeo, nor from earth, as in Sir Gawain, but from the realm of Faery into which Sir Launfal retreats. From this perspective the pattern evokes the ambiguity of irony rather than the joy of comedy or the sorrow of tragedy. Or more precisely, the final vision of the pattern in Sir Launfal is a cynical picture presented naively, for the poet is content that his hero has been saved and is unconcerned that the world has been untouched by his achievement.

The human worlds of Sir Orfeo and Sir Gawain are brought into closer alignment with the divine by virtue of the hero's fall into nature, while the human world of Sir Launfal is distanced from the divine by virtue of the hero's retreat into Faery. Although Sir Launfal does indeed return to the court bearing his saving boon the court resists the redemption implicit in the reconciliation borne in him and so it remains a brazen world, neither gold nor green. Because it provides this variation of the mythic pattern and so comments on the very different visions unfolded from the pattern in Sir Orfeo and Sir Gawain, Sir Launfal is considered here. This study is, however, largely concerned with the greater works of Sir Orfeo and Sir Gawain, and less with Sir Orfeo than with Sir Gawain which provides a profounder and more complex treatment of the pattern as evidenced by the dual perspective provided by the Gawain-poet. An

examination of the pattern's unfolding in each of these romances reveals the meaning of reconciliation, romance's restorative virtue, which heals by making whole the gold and the green.¹⁶

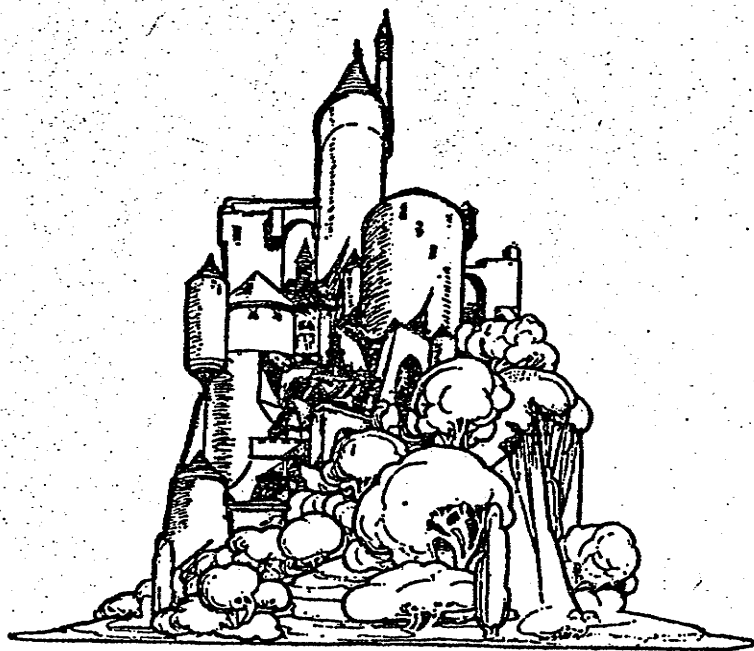


Fig. 2. Realms of Gold and Green

CHAPTER II

A DIVINE PERSPECTIVE: THE PATTERN'S

PROMISE IN SIR ORFEO

In Sir Orfeo the mythic pattern unfolds from the divine perspective and the clarity of its final vision of pure joy and fulfilled harmony, which resolves Orfeo's dark descent in a triumphant re-ascent and return reunited with his bride, provides a perfect counter-point to the more ambiguous vision of Sir Launfal and the more complex vision of Sir Gawain.

King Orfeo is descended of more distant divinity than his original namesake, the mythic Orpheus, divine son of the god, Apollo, and the muse Calliope. As romance requires, Sir Orfeo is a human hero with touches of divinity. Although his parents are of divine descent they are not gods: "His fader was comen of King Pluto/And his moder of King Juno."¹ However, even the divine or golden portion inherent in the human Orfeo contains an element of the green world and the natural death it implies, since his father "is comen of King Pluto," a divinity allied with death. The green is not only implicit in Sir Orfeo by virtue of his humanity, inevitably limited by mortality, but is also seen to reside in his very divinity, derived from King Pluto, divine ruler of the death kingdom.

Orfeo must make his descending journey to realize the two realities of the divine and the natural residing in his human breast. The golden king must encounter the natural man within in order that he may re-connect the gold and the green in his own heart and thereby transform

his kingdom golden-green. The two are ultimately reconciled to create an eternity which includes succession, a golden circle turning in measure with the green world, for the first thing the "newe coround" Orfeo does is name his successor (1.548). Thus is the original golden world from which he fell re-created golden-green by virtue of Orfeo's return bearing the gift gleaned from the green world journey; it has absorbed into itself the fact of death and made it no defect in that world. The process is proven perpetual by the inclusion of succession; reconciliation must be re-enacted in each new heir to maintain the presence of paradise on earth.

King Orfeo's origins so clearly anticipate his ultimate destiny that the conclusion, thus concealed in the beginning, seemed to demand disclosure. But before the concluding resolution can be confirmed we must return to the beginning and examine more closely the unfolding of Orfeo's destiny, from its origin to its end.

As is King Orfeo so is his kingdom. The golden aspect which is his divine inheritance has a human counterpart in the excellent royalty with which he graces his kingdom to make it reminiscent of Paradise. This harmonizing virtue is symbolized by Orfeo's mastery of the harp--"ther nothing was/A better harper in no plas." (11.15-16)--a mastery by which he draws a magic circle around his court wherein one

...shulde thinke that he were
 In one of the joys of paradis -
 Such joy and melody in his harping is. (11.20-23)

Thus Orfeo's kingdom recalls the original golden world, the garden God intended to be man's home, a paradise of perfect joy and melodious harmony.

As such, Orfeo's kingdom excludes the reality of man's fall into experience; it is bounded by a magic circle which not only excludes the fallen order without but maintains its inhabitants in a state of innocence within. But although Orfeo is a king with the divine function to fulfill of harmonizing his kingdom upon the pattern of Paradise by the art of his harping, yet he is also a "stalworth man" (1.3), and as a man, tainted with man's fall. So too are his subjects merely men although participants in this paradisaal society born of Orfeo's virtue. Although this kingdom is an image of the other world it seeks to imitate yet is it of this world and, as such, it must come to terms with this world's reality to which it is inevitably and irrevocably related. And so there is an essential incompleteness implicit in Orfeo and his kingdom; their innocence is their virtue but may become their fault. The potential perfection innocence promises may remain ineffective unless it is acted out in the process of perfecting which involves the encounter with experience.

For this ideal order to be fulfilled the magic circle must be broken. Innocence, the golden garden from which man fell, must pass into experience to gain the greater goal man seeks, an innocence beyond and encompassing experience. Without the encounter with the fact of fallen reality the golden ideal cherished by Orfeo and his court becomes but an illusion protected by the magic circle of delusion. Only by the dark descent can the ideal be realized. For the golden thing unfolded in the fall, the inner excellence revealed by the stripping away of Orfeo's external royalty, may be infolded in the re-ascent, made one with his re-won royalty, renewed and reconciled with the green. Then the golden ideal will prove more brilliant yet by virtue of the green that has been added to it.

As evidence of this essential incompleteness implicit in Orfeo's golden realm, Herodis, his "Queen of priis" (1.27), is stolen away "in the comessing of May" (1.33), as she rests in the green orchard outside the golden court, thereby introducing the note of discord that disrupts Orfeo's harmony and heralds the breaking of his magic circle. Orfeo is learned in the excellence of kingship and knows the joy of fulfillment in his royal role. He has experienced perfect love with the "fairest levedy" (1.29), his queen, Herodis, "Full of love and godenisse" (1.31). But he has yet to learn of the sorrow at the heart of human joy and love born of the transience that taints all life, and of the vulnerability of virtue: the fallibility of the fallen man within the half divine king. So he must come to experience this loss of all his joy and love and enter the wood of the world as a lonely pilgrim in exile to become an adept in the art of feeling sorrows and thereby become a more masterful harper of joy harmonized with human sadness.

Herodis is that part of Orfeo that is vulnerable in the world: that aspect of human experience subject to loss,² that joy that "may be snatched away without warning and without explanation."³ She is Orfeo's desire, his human joy and love, those qualities subject to the arbitrary onslaught of the world that would rob a man of them. He has loved her as his life (11.99-100), but that life is necessarily limited by mortality and her loss would remind him of this. Like "the grene" (1.48) upon which she "felle on slepe" (1.48), Herodis is tainted with transience, a fragile flower whose virtue is defenseless outside the golden court. She is like Persephone whose beauty is sorrowful and sinister for it has at its centre the memory of death and darkness, and her abduction reflects Persephone's

annual disappearance into the death kingdom. It is this dark centre, this green, and therefore potentially withered aspect indwelling in earthly joy and love, that Orfeo must come to know in order to reclaim his beloved by understanding her full nature and his own.

Herodis is not stolen away because of her sin of sloth,⁴ though her innocence makes her slothful, but because it is her nature to be stolen away; because of her inherent vulnerability which neither she nor Orfeo have confronted within the confines of the court. The significance of the "ympe-tree" (1.46) under which Herodis sleeps confirms this.⁵ Being a grafted tree it implies an artful illusion, an art which "adds to nature" and so is unnatural, as are the grafted flowers which Perdita calls "nature's bastards" in The Winter's Tale.⁶ The illusion this "ympe-tree" affords Herodis is the illusion that the world Orfeo bestows on her by his virtue, is a permanent paradise, purely gold. She discovers in her dream a fuller and darker truth.

If the Boethian interpretation of the Orpheus myth as a vehicle for the story of the Fall has any validity in its displacement here,⁷ it is as a vehicle for the story of the Fall without guilt, for there is really no sin in either Orfeo or Herodis except the sin of innocence in a fallen world, of believing that world to be permanently golden and failing to accommodate the green orchard except as art, a green and grafted tree giving the illusion of gold. Herodis' delight in the green orchard (11.42-44), though not completely harmless as the consequences make clear, is still not the great sin Penelope Doob believes it to be.⁸ Indeed, the consequences do not belie her virtue but rather prove it for it is her innocence that makes her defenseless; she rests in the garden believing it

paradise and so is susceptible to the attack of the Fairy King.

Just as Herodis' abduction need not be explained by attributing to her evil derived from external sources,⁹ the Fairy King does not need to be interpreted as the "noon-day demon" or the lustful fairy,¹⁰ for which there is little internal evidence. He is what he is, the King of Faery, though of a Faery seen in its inverted or demonic form which is entirely familiar in romance.¹¹ Spenser's Fairy Land includes both the delightful and demonic aspects of Faery, both the Gardens of Adonis and the Bower of Bliss. True Faery turns in time with the green world and is identified by its natural flow, as the Gardens of Adonis made "eterne in mutabilitie," expressive of the life there is in death, or as the green "orchardside" outside Orfeo's court where "the floures sprede and spring" (1.43). The false Faery knows no change and is identified by its unnatural stillness. Its seeming splendor but conceals a sinister centre expressive of the death there is in life, as the glorious image of the Fairy King whose crown, "a precious ston-/As bright as the sonne it shone" (11.127-28), conceals a darker reality revealed in his bloody threat (11.145-50) and as his brilliant castle conceals the living dead, the captives that seemed "dede and nare nought" (1.366), only frozen in the aspects in which they were taken. The green, though allied with natural death, is eternally creative and, as such, is touched naturally with gold. When one subtracts all the green from the gold one is left with this 'other', this false Faery of unnatural and death-like stasis ruled by a sinister Fairy King.

Yet, if one subtracts all the gold from the green the result is equally horrifying as the Fairy King's vision makes clear. He offers

Herodis everything she has but without Orfeo and it is to her credit that this is something that drives her mad with horror. There is nothing in the Fairy King's illusion to suggest the dark reality of his inner court. What horrifies Herodis is her perception that without Orfeo the illusion reveals this inner reality. For the Fairy King simply shows her the things that contribute to her happiness but she sees that what truly makes up her happiness is not these "castels and tours,/Rivers, forest, frith with flours," (ll.135-36) but the golden Orfeo she loves. The poet deliberately uses the same words to describe Orfeo's kingdom (ll.221-22) and the Fairy King's vision (ll.135-36) to show us that Herodis perceives the true nature of the illusion she has been under. She has trusted in the green only as it gave the illusion of the gold, only in the golden grafting of the green tree. Now she sees the falseness of that golden art which discloses mortality, the green without the virtue of the gold, destruction without reconstruction. Herodis has thought she was golden; she has thought the grafting was successful. But by being "ymped" the tree has been made an agency through which the falsely golden world of Faery can approach her.

In the same way Orfeo is prepared to abandon his kingdom which is nothing to him without Herodis. The delightful illusion of the grafted tree which admits the green only as art is replaced by the demonic illusion of the Fairy King which discloses the true nature of the tree's illusion, the living death that comes of the denial of the naturally golden quality of the green. Although the golden grafting, without the natural green roots, creates a delightful illusion of a permanent paradise, its destructive potential is realized in the demonic illusion of eternal

stasis, a perverted paradise of pride, created by the Fairy King's gold which has lost its virtue by being unallied with the green. Orfeo and Herodis must accept the natural half of the "ympe-tree" which is rooted in the green world and is naturally golden, not its artificial half, its artful grafting which reflects a false gold. The entrance of the Fairy King heralds the awakening from illusion to reality.

The full awakening from illusion occurs when Orfeo recognizes the implications of his loss and the ineffectiveness of his untried excellence. Though armed and accompanied with ten hundred knights Orfeo can offer no defense against the Fairy King whose threat is internal and is not to be met with external force. The Fairy King is the arbitrary agent of the evil that inevitably exists in human experience but which Orfeo has not yet encountered. Now he finds himself confronted by an event for which "There was non amendement" (l.176). Herodis' abduction gives evidence of the ineffectiveness of Orfeo's untried excellence and of the essential need for the perfecting of that virtue by trial in experience. Trial is provided by the descent into the green world. The golden king now recognizes the mortal man within because of the loss of his beloved. He knows "that neighe his life was y-spent" (l.175), for he has ever loved her as his life (ll.99-100) and so her loss becomes his death. His complete acceptance of her loss amounts to an "acceptance of the inevitability of death."¹² His self-exile is indeed "a substitute for death,"¹³ willingly accepted by his complete submission to the claims of the quest to be undertaken. In utter humility he vows to enter the wilderness and "live ther ever-more" (l.189), without hope of ever reclaiming his beloved and without expectation of ever returning.

The "grete cry" (1.196) of protesting sorrow and the pleading prayers of his loyal subjects cannot deter Orfeo from his chosen self-exile for he knows "it shall be so" (1.202). Thus firm in his conviction that this is the end for which he was created, he accepts his fate without challenge or expectation of cure, choosing to acknowledge and so endure the sadness and finitude at the heart of human existence. And in thus choosing to become but a man, a poor pilgrim in the green wood, he is resurrected a truer king than he was before. For as the golden king descends into the roots of human nature a truer king steps forth, to be re-crowned by virtue of the deep and human humility that confirms his golden virtue.

Thus, "all his kingdom he forsoke" (1.203), to "learn how little it is to be a king."¹⁴ Orfeo casts off his royal robes to don a pilgrim's mantle (1.204). As he does so his royalty is voluntarily stripped away to expose the natural man within and to prepare a place within him for the entry of grace which alone can help him. For, as Orfeo knows, "No man most with him go" (1.209). His golden royalty has become an empty shell which must be filled with the natural flowering of faith won by humility which opens a man to grace. And by faith, the gift of grace, Orfeo's virtue is consolidated, connected with the green, and what before was ineffective because not grounded in the green, proves supremely powerful in the next encounter with the Fairy King.

Before he comes to that encounter Orfeo "liveth in gret malais" (1.216), finding comfort in nothing and in no man. The suffering Orfeo submits to by virtue of his descent from the golden kingdom into nature, the green wood without and within, is emphasized by the repeated

contrasting of his former estate with his fallen estate. He that had dressed royally is now dressed "poverlich" (1.212). He that had slept in comfort must now "on hard hette" lie (1.219). He that had had "castels and tours,/Rivers, forest, frith with flours" (1.221-222) must make his home in the wilderness which admits the cruel winter excluded from the seemingly perpetual springtime of his paradisal court. Once surrounded by his excellent subjects who confirmed his royalty in their loyalty, Orfeo knows now the loneliness of solitude in exile (1.225-27). Having enjoyed the plenitude of paradisal innocence, he must now suffer the deprivation of experience in fallen human existence (1.229-32). He must relearn in the wood of his exile the penalty of Adam, the necessity to labor, to gain food by the sweat of his brow:

Now may he all day digge and wrote,
Er he finde his fille of rote. (11.231-32)

Thus Orfeo suffers "ten yere and more!" (1.240) And in all that time of trial Orfeo endures his suffering without complaint. For Orfeo is not entirely defenseless in the wood of the world; he has his harp to sustain him. Though stripped of the external manifestations of royalty, Orfeo never abandons the inner royalty of his virtue; the natural man within is nurtured by his golden potential which through this sojourn in suffering is afforded the opportunity to be perfected. Once the source of civil order, his harping now becomes the source of internal order. For on those days "when the weder" is "clere and bright" (1.245), Orfeo plays on his harp, "whereon was all his glee" (1.243), to create a harmony of joy and melody in the wilderness (11.250-54): In this way he tames the wild beasts as they gather "for joye" (1.250) about him which

gives evidence of his controlling the inward beasts of his natural instincts encountered in the fall into human nature mirrored in his fall into the green world. And as this golden harmony unfolds in the green world, it is proven more effective. For it is far more difficult to create a harmony of a wilderness exile than of a golden home.

Orfeo's harping in the green wood manifests a growth in his virtue for it is evidence of its consolidation within the natural man, now strengthened and so sustaining him, protecting him as it does, from despair and death. That his golden potential has been grounded in the green is bodied forth in the imagery of the harp "hidde in a holwe tree" (1.244) which manifests the meeting of the gold and the green. As the golden harp is protected by being placed in the green tree so is Orfeo's divine potential perfected by being rooted in the natural man. And as the hollow place of this natural tree, the true counterpart of the unnatural grafted tree, is filled with the golden harp, so the natural man is to be filled with the golden gift of grace, the reward of reconciliation, from which unfolds the natural flowering of human faith. This essential reconciliation, anticipated in the imagery, is soon to be effected as Orfeo has long endured, without complaint, the experience which brings it to birth.

Having come to terms with the natural man within by suffering the experience of fallen existence in the green wood, Orfeo's golden virtue is polished brighter by its contact with the green which Orfeo accepts in utter humility as his human lot. And as his humanness is actualized to reveal the gold inborn in the man, not only upborn by the King, so is a golden quality revealed indwelling in the green world. The visions of purposeless and repetitious activity presented Orfeo in the parties of

fairy hunters, knights, and dancers prepare for his discovery of the deep truth embodied in the green world. The utter futility of unfulfillment manifest in these fairy hunters who take no game (1.263), fairy knights, armed but aimless, who never fight (11.267-72), and fairy knights and ladies endlessly dancing (1.274),¹⁵ gives the lie to the Fairy King's illusion. The unfulfilled desire conveyed by these visions from Faery specifies the content of the false Faery, the demonic counterpart of the true Faery's vision of fulfilled desire. These images of unfulfillment describe the true nature of this Faery's illusion, revealing its opposition to the natural fulfilling flow of the green world with which the true Faery is attuned. The unfulfilled actions embodied here anticipate the more horrible stasis of the inner court of Faery from which all movement has been removed by its being unallied with the green.

Orfeo is no more attracted to these visions than Herodis was by the vision offered her by the Fairy king. He displays no delight in watching these fairy parties but the next vision he sees draws a truly joyous response from him. This vision embodies the truth that unveils the illusion of the former visions. As it elicits the correct and climactic response in Orfeo it proves him ready to reassume his heroic task. When Orfeo watches the sixty ladies hunting with their falcons he sees an action finally completed as "Ich faucoun his pray slough" (1.289). And seeing that Orfeo laughs (1.290) and says "there is fair game" (1.291). His laughter and words express a joyous consent to the natural rhythm of existence. As Nietzsche would have us, Orfeo says "Yes!" to all of existence which necessarily encompasses death and sorrow.¹⁶ His consent confirms the good quality, the golden aspect, inherent in transience,

time's natural turning, which eternally re-creates life, its virtue made clear by its perversion in the false visions from Faery, by the unfulfillment which only frustrates life.

By this essential consent, the requisite act for reconciliation, Orfeo departs from the tragic way of his mythic ancestor, Orpheus, whose fatal backward glance amounts to a denial of his beloved's vulnerability, of the green implicit in her nature by virtue of her humanness. The denial expressed in Orpheus' backward glance robs him of his beloved once again just as doubt perpetually destroys life. Orfeo's consent returns his beloved to him just as faith constantly restores life. The sight of his beloved is Orfeo's reward for the reconciliation of the gold and the green he has clearly achieved by this affirmative act of faith. That consent accomplished, instantly Orfeo beholds his beloved as he approaches the band of lady hunters (ll.295-98). Orfeo may not speak with Herodis nor she with him (l.300). Sight alone must satisfy and inspire him. Indeed it does for the sight of Herodis is the unsought gift of grace which heralds the assumption of the heroic task to reclaim her. The sight of "his owen queen" (l.298) fills Orfeo with faith, the faith that issues from a despair that momentarily overcomes him as he desires death since he cannot speak with her (ll.308-14). Because it issues from despair it knows no fear of death (l.318). Thus Orfeo is fortified to reassume his kingly task, "tide what betide" (l.315), to rescue his beloved queen and so restore his kingdom. Though disguised as a poor minstrel in pilgrim's mantle the king shines through and promises to emerge perfected from this final encounter with the Fairy King.

Orfeo goes to meet the Fairy King not in his former knightly armour

nor with his knightly companions but alone, armed only with the faith that flows from deep humility actualized in the green wood. Nor does he set forth as a king, with the harp of his royalty, but as a simple minstrel, with a new song encompassing sorrow as well as joy. As he enters the Faery kingdom to follow his bride in the company of fairy maidens, Orfeo encounters "a fair cuntry" (1.227) filled with light. In the midst of this bright land is the Fairy King's castle, "clere and shine as cristal" (1.334), "all of precious stones" (1.342) and "burnist gold" (1.344). It is like the image of bright glory which the Fairy King himself conveys but, like the King, his castle veils a sinister reality.¹⁷ It is Orfeo's task to pierce this illusion in order to free his bride from captivity in its dark center of living death.

The artificial brightness of this land, lit by the brilliance of "riche stones" (1.347) which makes it "ever light" (1.345) "when it shuld be therk and night" (1.346) reveals the true nature of the paradise reflected here (1.352) for its artificial illumination reveals its falseness, its perversion of paradise. The reflection of paradise perceived here is of sight and surface display,¹⁸ the glory of pride hiding an inner hell, whereas the echo of paradise heard in Orfeo's kingdom (ll. 20-23) is of sound and inward harmony, the joy of innocence removed from reality. The Fairy King's realm reveals the gold which has lost all its virtue by being unallied with the green made clear by the removal of all movement. Its falseness is bodied forth in the image of artificial illumination. Orfeo's realm also reveals the gold without the green except as the half artificial, half natural "ympe-tree." Orfeo's gold is an illusion as well, the delightful counterpart of the Fairy King's demonic

illusion, but its virtue is not entirely lost as the "ympe-tree" is still rooted in nature. Orfeo has learned the implications of this natural rooting. He has yet to awaken Herodis from her sleep under its grafted branches and to make the truth known to his subjects. The golden-green reality glimpsed by Orfeo in the green wood must replace the two illusions and thereby renounce that of the Fairy King and realize that of Orfeo by reconciliation. As Frye has said, romance "is largely concerned with an attempt to present the desirable in human, familiar, attainable, and morally allowable terms."¹⁹ Therefore the desirable gold of Orfeo's kingdom must be made real by being harmonized with and humanized by the green, re-made a reconciled reality, a golden-green world.

As Orfeo passes behind the veil of illusion the reality of living death is revealed for:

Than he gan behold about all
 And seighe ligge and within the wall
 Of folk that were thider y-brought
 And thought dede and nare nought. (ll.363-66)

Thus he sees the maimed and miserable captives of the Fairy King together with "his owen wif" (l.381), indeed, "his lef lif" (l.382), as she sleeps "under an ympe-tree." (l.383) Orfeo has won entrance to this death-like kingdom as a minstrel seeking to "solas" its King with his "glee" (l.359). The natural joy of Orfeo's "glee" is the outpouring of faith born of the reconciliation he has achieved. That Orfeo understands the implications of his "glee", that it is a far profounder power than his former arms, is evidenced by his identifying himself as a minstrel (l.358). With this natural joy, sprung from faith, Orfeo is enabled to awaken his wife from the illusion under which she sleeps, as he was awakened by her loss.

Orfeo's harping which created a paradisaical order within the sheltered circle of his court, and which, once played in the green world, composed an internal order within Orfeo, is now seen to harmonize the death-like kingdom itself by its "blisseful" (1.414) melody that draws from its ruler the promise that releases Orfeo's desire (11.425-28). This melody that wins over the Fairy King is evocative of the meeting of the gold and the green; it is a harmony born of discord disclosing a joy deeper than sorrow, a joy discovered in sorrow and now containing it. And the lowly minstrel thus proves a king of royal degree who knows well the virtue of honour. For when the Fairy King would refuse him his desire, thinking him unfit for such a lady, "lovesum withouten lack" (1.436), Orfeo invokes the bond of royal honour in the Fairy King, a bond which holds good even within this realm. The King cannot but agree that indeed it is "a wele fouler thing" (1.440) for a king to break his word than for a poor minstrel to love so perfect a lady. Therefore he submits unconditionally to Orfeo's desire and bestows his gift of "That ich levedy, bright on ble,/That slepeth under the ympe-tre." (1.431-32) Thus Orfeo reclaims his bride from the land of the living dead; thanking its lord he returns with Herodis to the realm he has forsaken for her.

Though Orfeo re-ascends from the green world in returning to his kingdom he does not yet reassume his royalty but rather remains clothed in humility as final proof of his perfecting. Before reassuming his royal role, the minstrel man assumes the disguise of a beggar (1.475), at once testing the loyalty of his steward in whose charge he has left his kingdom,²⁰ and acknowledging his relationship to man's poor and fallen estate. For he enters his city, in order "That men might him bihold and

see-" (1.478) as the beggar he has chosen to become. Dressed in borrowed beggar's clothes with his long hair and beard that "hongeth to his knee" (1.483), he appears to those he meets as one "y-clongen also a tree!" (1.484) Indeed he returns as the natural man he is, yet concealing the golden king he contains and will become again, just as the tree in the green wood concealed the golden harp it contained. Thus attuned to the reality of the green world, which Orfeo has learned to accept and here acknowledges, he is prepared to bring about its atonement with the ideal of the golden world from which he fell.

On his harp Orfeo now unfolds the new but familiar harmony that heralds the recognition scene and extends reconciliation throughout his realm (11.501-504). Although Orfeo's testing of his steward by the gruesome tale of his death (11.511-15) may seem excessively painful, it elicits the response necessary to effect the reconciliation that re-creates his kingdom, drawing as it does from his subjects the appropriate acceptance, as his music drew from the Fairy King the appropriate promise. For his story brings forth the awakening revelation in the court, as they seek to comfort the sorrowing steward with the words, "It is no bot of manes deth!" (1.528). The golden court that formerly knew only a paradise of joy and resisted Orfeo's self-exile which amounted to an acceptance of death, now recognizes the inevitable reality of death and accepts the undeniable fact of human sorrow.

By his steward's great grief Orfeo knows him for "a trewe man" (1.531). By the comfort his court offers his steward, Orfeo also knows that his kingdom is prepared to include the fact of death, not as a defect but as a green promise of the gold. And so he names his steward as his

heir (1.548), thus creating an eternity including succession which itself is an assurance of eternity, perpetually maintaining his kingdom, just as the green world is an expression of eternity, endlessly turning in a golden ring of recurrence.

The King "underyete" (1.552), in spite of the beggar's clothes, is evident to all (11.551-53). Humanized, Orfeo emerges as divine, his royalty radiating from within confirming the consolidation of his golden virtue. Only now does the King step out of the man, new born and ready to be reclothed in the robes of his royalty (1.562). Herodis is brought forth "with gret processioun" (1.563) and with "all maner menstracy" (1.565) to be reunited with her beloved Orfeo. Together they are "newe coround" to re-assume the rule of their new kingdom, new fashioned golden-green (1.569).

It is from the poet's divine perspective that we view this final vision of pure joy born of the reunion and re-crowning of King Orfeo and his Queen. For

Lord, ther was grete melody!
For joye they wepe with her eighe
That hem so sounde y-comen seighe. (11.566-68)

There is no focus on the former sorrow nor on the future inevitability of this joy's passing. Nor is the tragic implication of this reconciliation expressed, the realization that the original golden world they thought they possessed is not possible here on earth. The Orfeo-poet clearly chooses to emphasize the comic potential implicit in the vision of reconciliation he unfolds from this mythic pattern. Thus the only tears his vision calls forth are the tears of joy at seeing King Orfeo and his Queen "so sounde y-comen" (1.568), made "sounde" by the restorative virtue of reconciliation that heals by making whole, the gold and the green.



Fig. 3. The Knight's Departure

CHAPTER III

A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE: THE PATTERN'S COMPROMISE IN SIR LAULFAL

When we turn to Sir Launfal it becomes clear that the use of this mythic pattern does not limit the things a poet can say. A poet may use the same mythic pattern but he unfolds it with a view to the meaning he intends to express infolded in the final vision. What the poet intends to say with the pattern will vary according to the perspective from which he views it.

The divine perspective of the Orfeo-poet is replaced by a human perspective in Sir Launfal, one which defines a very different final vision, expressive of the poet's more limited intention. Where the Orfeo-poet is concerned with presenting the effects of his hero's achieved perfection on the world as well as the process of his hero's perfecting, the Launfal-poet is solely concerned with his hero and is unconcerned that the world is untouched by his hero's achievement. The comic resolution of Sir Orfeo is derived from the extension of reconciliation attained within Orfeo outward throughout his realm to give us a vision of the world made new. The world remains unredeemed in Sir Launfal and thus its final vision leaves us somewhat unsatisfied. The perfectly satisfying comic resolution of Sir Orfeo is replaced by the more ambiguous resolution of Sir Launfal resulting from the hero's retreat into Faery. But although we may be unsatisfied, the Launfal-poet is not; he is clearly content that his hero

has been saved, satisfied that his hero has achieved the necessary reconciliation and unconcerned that the court resists the redemption it embodies. Thus the tragic potential as well as the comic is glossed over in the Launfal-poet's more naive treatment of this mythic pattern. In order to justify these claims we must turn to an examination of the text which embodies the Launfal-poet's distinctive treatment of this mythic pattern.

Sir Orfeo presents a golden world in the beginning. Uncorrupted by contact with fallen reality, its virtue is innocent, uncompromised by the conflicting claims of experience. Quite different is the situation of virtue in the world of the fall where virtue is always complicated with sin, as good is inevitably interwoven with evil. This is the world Sir Launfal presents. The court of Arthur is situated in the fallen order and the seed of corruption sown reveals it a brazen world, very unlike the innocently golden world of Sir Orfeo's harmonious court. For when Arthur brings the unfaithful Gwenevere home to wed, the court is tainted with her sin. The silent discord of Arthur's knights' unacknowledged disapproval of his bride--those that were gracious "likede her nought"¹--makes false the seeming accord of Arthur's court. Gwenevere's presence makes clear the conflicting claims of virtue in the fallen world. For Arthur's knights to reject his queen would be to renounce their fidelity to him, while to falsely honour her as they do is to forfeit their own integrity. So this world is made brazen as the golden ideal of knighthood is tarnished by the dark fact of falseness which taints its knights by their acceptance of Gwenevere.

Although this world is brazen the possibility of redemption is still

present; the golden aspect obscured in the court is yet implicit in its most gracious and generous knight, Sir Launfal, well known "For his largesse and his bounté" (1.31). But his virtue is also complicated with sin as virtue must be in this world, and compromised by the presence of Gwenevere. His virtue resides in his perceiving evil in Gwenevere's presence in the court and rejecting it. But here he rejects a bad thing for the wrong reason. His pride is hurt by her refusal of a gift and this reveals that he still expects the rewards from the evil thing. Launfal is an imperfect creature whose imperfection, unlike the court's corruption, leads him to the testing ground, to exile in the green world. When he rejects Gwenevere for a second time it will be for the right reason and absolutely.

Launfal's imperfection is imperfect virtue. Although potentially golden, his pride and his generosity are limited virtues, containing the tendency to fallen pride and prodigality.² The golden aspect of his virtue is supplanted by its fallen tendency in Launfal's fall from the court that he may come to terms with the limitations of his virtue and in understanding its imperfection become perfected. Launfal's pride brings him into exile, his prodigality into poverty, but his acceptance of the suffering which the acknowledgement of limitation brings attains for him the unlimited virtues of love and humility. His acceptance of suffering in exile and in poverty brings the green world of Faery to him to show him that suffering is connected with joy, loss with love, poverty with riches, and green with gold, and to reward him with this knowledge. The thing that provoked Launfal's acceptance of exile and poverty, hurt pride and excessive generosity, may have been tainted with the vice, but acceptance

purges those virtues of their imperfection and rewards him with virtuous pride, humility that will not boast of love, and the fulfilled generosity of love, grace's endless treasury of riches.

Launfal's virtue suffers obscurity only when he confronts Gwenevere whose explicitly malicious intent fulfills the function of the evil energy which pervades the order of the fallen world.³ In isolation from Gwenevere, Launfal's virtue is not compromised. In the opening he appears as a proud and noble knight noted for "his largesse and his bounté" (1.31), and respected in the office of "the kinges steward" (1.32). He has fulfilled this function honourably for ten years (1.37). It is only in the tenth year, when Arthur brings home the faithless Gwenevere as his bride, that Launfal's conduct becomes questionable. Though "Sir Launfal likede her nought" (1.45), neither did the "other knightes that were hende" (1.45), for her infidelity was well-known (11.46-48). But Launfal alone becomes the victim of Gwenevere's evil nature and in this his virtue is threatened and appears ambiguous.

At Arthur's wedding feast Gwenevere denies only Launfal the gifts she is bestowing to make her courtesy known. The grief Launfal experiences as a result of this (1.72) can be seen to express a foolish pride, hurt by the refusal of the queen to honour his person. His subsequent self-exile then becomes a spiteful escape and a betrayal of the honour he owes his king. But his grief can also be seen to express a deeply honourable virtue in that it holds the recognition that his personal sense of integrity is compromised in the presence of Arthur's queen. His exile then becomes necessary to defend his nobility and honour. Launfal cannot serve his king honestly while he harbours this disregard for Arthur's queen, nor can he

maintain his nobility thus challenged by the queen's malice.

The care with which Launfal enacts his self-exile, telling Arthur he must go to his father's burial (11.76-78), can be seen either as a cowardly lie or as a noble desire to preserve his proper pride and to shield Arthur from insult. Thus is the dual vision of Launfal set in motion, his actions suspended between a judgment of folly and a concession to virtue. But the suggestion that his virtue is tainted with the vice, made above, is strengthened by the disastrous consequences of Launfal's self-exile. The gold implicit, if imperfect, in him will continually suffer displacement by the fallen tendency that limits it, as Launfal departs from the court to begin his descending journey that inevitably draws him into the green world.

Launfal sets forth as honourably as the circumstances will allow. With his two companions, Sir John and Sir Hugh, he seeks shelter in Karlyoun at the home of the mayor, his former servant. He openly admits to the mayor his estrangement from Arthur (11.100-103), and does not seek to ingratiate himself by the esteem of Arthur's love. Such virtuous honesty is not always rewarded in the world and here proves to be the cause of another lowering in Launfal's estate, drawing him closer to the green world. For the mayor refuses Launfal a room in his home and it is only Launfal's frankness:

"Now may ye se, swich is service
Under a lord of litill prise -
How he may thereof be fain!" (11.118-120)

that forces him to offer Launfal a chamber by the orchard side.

Launfal's generosity which gained for him the honour of king's steward now proves a limited virtue that degrades him to a state of abject

poverty, "Right in the ferst yere." (1.133) For Launfal must come to terms with that tendency to prodigality that makes his virtue imperfect. He must experience deprivation, as did Sir Orfeo, and he, too, must suffer it alone for at the end of that first year Sir Hugh and Sir John take their leave.

As they prepare to depart, Sir Launfal begs his companions to "Tellith no man of my poverté,/For love of God Almighty!" (11.143-44). Though evidence of a virtuous concern to preserve his knightly honour, this also gives evidence of his fallen pride that forbids the full acceptance of his poverty and all that it implies. Seeking to maintain his knighthood, he makes it false and so he must learn to acknowledge the impoverished, fallible man he has become to reclaim his true knightly status.

So Launfal's education in exile continues in solitude. "For his poverté" (1.187) Launfal is ignored by and isolated from the world of man. And in solitude Launfal learns to accept his poverty which is made clear by his rejection of the temptation, though kindly meant, offered him by the mayor's daughter. For in inviting Launfal to dine with her she may be tempting him to be less noble than he potentially is by turning him away from the suffering he has imposed on himself. Rather than this lady, Launfal willingly chooses Lady Poverty who will prove a gracious and generous bride in Tryamour by virtue of this essential acceptance.

Launfal asks only for a horse, "A while for to ride" (1.207), that he may be comforted in a park outside the city (11.208-10). So Launfal enters the green wood willingly. He has accepted his exile by his rejection of Gwenevere and here he accepts his poverty by his rejection of the mayor's daughter. Thus he has realized the limitation of his virtue by his fall

from high estate which exposes the fallible man within the noble knight. By his exile he has suffered the consequences of his fallen pride, and by his poverty, the consequences of his prodigality. Having come to terms with the limited aspect, the imperfection implicit in his potentially golden virtues, he is prepared to reclaim them perfected and so be restored a truer knight than he was before. In choosing to suffer and seek comfort in the green world Launfal exposes himself to its healing vision which restores to him his virtues perfected.

Indeed it is difficult to discover the noble knight within the poor and exiled wanderer, for Launfal appears the perfect parody of knightly conduct in the following scene.

Launfal dighte his courser
 Withoute knave other squire,
 He rood with litill pride;
 His horse slod and fel in the fen,
 Wherefore him scornede many men
 Aboute him fere and wide. (11.211-16)

Yet the effect of this is softened when viewed against the explicitly malicious behaviour of Gwenevere (11.177-80).⁴ "He rood with litill pride," makes it clear that Launfal has been stripped of that tendency to fallen pride as a result of his experience in exile. The imperfection has been purged away to prepare for the entrance of a truer virtue that perfects his pride and fulfills his generosity. Launfal's endurance of his suffering, though presented more ambiguously than Sir Orfeo's, is still to be rewarded and he, too, is to be vindicated by the virtue of his love which reveals his pride perfected in his humility and fulfills his generosity with love's gift of grace, a purse of endless riches.

Launfal's entry into the green world, "a fair forest" (1.222) outside the city, makes him available to the true Faery that resides at its

heart, not the false Faery of Sir Orfeo which is a counter world opposed to the green. As Launfal rests in this fair forest he is met by two fairy maidens who seek to take him to their lady. Their very appearance embodies the natural grace of Faery, its golden-green quality that draws from both the divine and the natural. Unlike the blinding brilliance of the false Fairy King bearing a vision of horror, these ladies are dressed in natural green (1.235) adorned with a touch of gold (1.236), bearing a vision of love. From them emanates the natural joy of Faery's fulfilled desire (11.233-34) so unlike the presumptuous and ponderous presence of the Fairy King and his visions of frustrated desire. Their joy, drawn from the springs of natural desire, is fulfilled a divine thing, signified by the golden basin one bears (1.244). For this golden basin suggests the cornucopia, an earthly image of divine plenitude, the horn of plenty which anticipates the purse of abundance Launfal is to receive.

Launfal is brought by these fairy maidens to the true Faery, set "an high" (1.262) in the midst of the green wood. There he is presented to their lady who has sought him out as her love-choice, as her name, Tryamour, suggests. Her beauty does not give the illusion of permanence borne in the Fairy King's brilliance. It encompasses an allusion both to spring and to winter, both a promise and an anticipation of loss (11.292-93). Her beauty is described in natural imagery (1.292 and 1.295) to reveal her "a swete flour" (1.309), while her hair bestows on her a natural crown of gold. (1.298) Tryamour is the golden-green gift offered Launfal as the reward for the reconciliation he has effected within by his acceptance of his inevitable fallibility. Her presence shows him that joy is connected with suffering, love with loss, riches with poverty, and gold with green.

She offers him her love not because she loves him as "king neither emperoure" (1.306), but because she loves him as the man he has become whose humility will restore him a truer knight by virtue of her gracious love.

With the offering of her love, Launfal is also afforded the opportunity of reclaiming his knightly status. He accepts Tryamour's love with the conditions that he forsake all women for her and never boast of her, for a boast would admit the entrance of pride which his quest has taught him to abandon. Launfal's virtue is honoured by Tryamour with gifts of a magic purse, perpetually bountiful, to accomodate his generosity fulfilled in love, and her steed, Blaunchard, and her knave, Gyfre, to acknowledge his knighthood, fulfilled in humility. This is seen to contrast with Gwenevere's challenging his virtue by withholding her gifts which incapacitated his generosity and denied his knighthood. By virtue of his love, Launfal's achieved humility, which embodies his connection with the green, unfolds his golden knighthood made new by reconciliation. Fulfilled by love, his humility fills the space created by the purging of false pride and prodigality, with true nobility and gracious generosity.

Thus is Launfal enabled to ascend to his former knightly status and so complete the circle of his quest. His re-ascent from the green world is necessary to show forth the perfecting he has achieved there. He has descended from a knight to a poor and humble man to discover love in the heart of the green world and now his love must prove the fulfillment of his knighthood by making manifest his excellence, his generosity, and greatest of all, his humility, dependent upon his pledge to "make no bost" of his beloved (1.362). During this stage of success following the decline in

exile there is repeated stress on Launfal's excellent "nobleness" (1.401). His generosity has increased according to the growth in his knightly stature. He holds rich feasts to feed the poor (11.421-23), gives gifts of steeds and fine clothes to knights and squires (11.424-26), rewards the religious (1.427), frees those in captivity (11.428-30), and "To many men he dede honours/In countreys fere and nere." (11.431-32) And at a tournament held in honour and "For love of Sir Launfal" (1.435), Launfal manifests his knightly valor and prowess to win "the pris of that turnay" (1.487). The final battle with the giant, Sir Valentine, marks the ultimate restoration of Launfal's knightly dignity and proves his love is indeed the fulfillment of his knighthood for this battle is fought "for love of his lemman" (1.523). But as we shall soon see his greatest gift is not so easily sustained.

When news of "Sir Launfales noblesse" (1.612) reaches Arthur, Launfal's quest comes full circle for he is invited to Kardevyle to reassume his role as King's steward and to serve at St. John's Mass. At the end of forty days feasting Launfal is chosen to lead the dance because, "For his largesse he was lovede the bet" (1.644). Launfal's imperfect yet golden potential alienated him from this brazen court and demanded his exile. Now perfected by the fall, which revealed the limitations of his virtue in order to fulfill its golden promise, it yet proves ineffective in this brazen world which seems to exist to frustrate the gold. Launfal has been purged to the point where he can be presented with another temptation. The court does not reject him here and Gwenevere now desires him.

As the Queen confronts Launfal with her advances of love, his brief and honourable refusal: "I nell be traitoure day ne night,/Be God, that all

may sterel" (11.683-84), only serves to arouse the malice and anger of Gwenevere. His virtue is clear in the refusal by which he remains true to his pledge to Tryamour as well as to the honour he owes Arthur. Yet this frank and virtuous utterance serves only to provoke Gwenevere's accusation of cowardice which inevitably draws Launfal into betrayal by the boast he cannot refrain from making and which therefore indicates something is still wrong in him. His pride is not fully purged as his boast makes clear (11.594-99). The brazen world yet assaults and compromises his virtue. Yet Launfal's infidelity is aimed paradoxically at an attempt to remain loyal to his beloved as well as to his king. Nevertheless, new suffering is in store for Launfal and his profounder loss to follow calls for a more perilous if less active quest to complete his purging and perfecting. At least Launfal has rejected Gwenevere this second time without any hope of reward. Indeed the loss he suffers by his second rejection holds little promise of recovery. Launfal may hope his lady will come to him but it is not any firm conviction. He accepts his loss, with little hope, and the death that may follow from this loss.

Launfal has travelled the full circle of his quest, moving through suffering and success, only to arrive at the same paradoxical and perplexing place. His selfless love for his lady and his fidelity to his king are interpreted as the pride of a traitor (11.760-62) by Arthur who believes Gwenevere's lie. His loyalty is seen as a betrayal by Tryamour who has withdrawn from this world with her gifts. Although Launfal is granted a reprieve of a year and a fortnight to substantiate his boast that his love's lowliest maid is more fit to be queen than Gwenevere, he is helpless. As in Sir Orfeo, there is no "amendment" (1.176). No man can help him, not

even the "Noble Knightes twain,/Sir Perceval and Sir Gawain" (11.813-14). Launfal is caught in the bond of the fallen world that always complicates virtue with sin. He can now only accept the inevitable fact of his death, as did Sir Orfeo, and so re-enact his reconciliation in ultimate terms by now accepting his ultimate limitation, his mortality. Only then will Launfal be purged entirely of the pride too easily called forth by the brazen court. Launfal suffers his reprieve and returns to the court a second time to be condemned, believing himself abandoned in the brazen world that persistently frustrates his virtue.

This second visit to the court is important for two reasons: first to see if Launfal's virtue can do something for the court and second to see if Launfal can effect the ultimate reconciliation. He completely lays down his life now. Earlier he submitted to the suffering that realized the limitations of his virtue. In the same way he here submits to the suffering which realizes the limitation of his very life. Launfal does not know his lady will come yet he has to, and indeed does, give up the chance of saving his life by claiming one of the fairy maidens from the two parties of ten that precede her. In each case he is offered a way out (11.854-58 and 11.893-94), and in each he rejects it (11.856-58 and 11.895-97), and he has no guarantee that he will save his love by rejecting these ladies that might save his life.

In thus choosing to lose his life Launfal saves it, for the fairy maidens he has rejected do indeed herald the arrival of his beloved. Tryamour enters the court, "A damsel alone,/Upon a white comely palfrey" (11.927-28), bearing beauty and truth in her presence. Her beauty is the blending of the earthly and the heavenly, the natural brightness of a

"blosme on brere" (1.934) and the gentleness and joy of a "brid on bowe" (1.931), combined with the divine brilliance of a golden light radiating from her crown of precious stones (11.938-42). Her clothes are of "grene felvet", painted with imagery and bordered with golden bells (11.950-54). Again the meeting of the gold and green manifest in her presence is the reward for, and the outward equivalent of, the reconciliation re-enacted in Launfal's heart by his ultimate achievement, the acceptance of his own death.

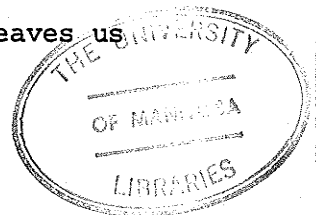
The whiteness of Tryamour's palfrey signifies the truth she bears, opposed to the dark falsehood of Gwenevere which has tarnished this court brazen. "Clad in purper pall" (1.943), she represents the true royalty of which Gwenevere is a false reflection. Her beauty and truth are revealed in an unveiling as:

She ded of her mantil on the flet
That men shuld here beholde the bet
Withoute a more sojoure. (11.979-81)

And as her beauty overshadows that of the Queen and her ladies as the sun does the moon in mid-day (11.989-90), the truth is made clear as Tryamour reveals to Arthur that Launfal:

...never in no folie
Besofte the Quene of no drurie
By dayes ne be night. (11.994-96)

So is Launfal freed from guilt and his love vindicated by the Fairy's truth and beauty. Gwenevere's falsehood and malice are punished by her blinding. Although order is thus restored in Arthur's court, Launfal does not remain here but is swiftly removed to Faery (11.1015-16). His ultimate vindication takes place outside the human realm, and the enigmatic implication that it is only there that man's virtue is secure leaves us



somewhat unsatisfied.⁵ For escape does not answer the dilemma of virtue in the human world of the fall. Nevertheless we understand a very real and human desire to withdraw from the demands of the world into the safety of Faery.

So we see that, where Orfeo's quest gives rise to a vision of reconciliation in reality viewed from a divine perspective, Launfal's quest gives rise to a vision of reconciliation in retreat viewed from the perspective of the merely human. While Orfeo's achievement serves to draw the human world closer to the divine, Launfal's achievement takes him into another world that more easily approximates the divine, and the human world remains as distant from the divine as it was in the beginning.

Thus does the Launfal-poet show us that the brazen world resists perfection: in short, that redemption is not catching. The same mythic pattern presented naively gives us this cynical vision viewed from a human perspective. And yet the very ambiguity which surrounds this very different resolution may be seen to suggest an ironic intention rather than a naive one. An ironic resolution presents the human conflict as unsatisfactory and incomplete unless we see a significance beyond it, a significance not given but left up to the reader, demanding an enlarged perspective on the action it presents.⁶ Though we see the human world is indeed unredeemed in Sir Launfal, there is the suggestion that the possibility of redemption is always open to it. For the poet does tell us that Launfal is yet available to the court and will meet with any knight who would keep his arms from rust (ll.1027-32). Because the poet is more interested in his hero than the world he does not trouble with it and so he may be leaving the resolution of the problem up to us, which is the function of irony.

Whether we choose to enlarge our perspective thus or not, the fact remains the poet does not. And the source of our perspective is the poet's which views the final vision from Faery focusing on his hero's success and not on the court's failure, nor on the compromise implied by Launfal's retreat.

Thus the vision the Launfal-poet presents us is finally viewed from a limited human perspective very unlike that of Sir Orfeo viewed from the poet's divine perspective. It is equally unlike the vision presented us in Sir Gawain, to be looked at next, which is viewed from both the human and divine direction provided by the poet's dual perspective.



Fig. 4. The Sojourn in the Green Wood

CHAPTER IV

A DUAL PERSPECTIVE: THE PATTERN'S FULFILLMENT

IN SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

An examination of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight reveals that it presents a different version of this mythic pattern and one which proves, I think, the most profound. Here the terms I have chosen to discuss the pattern, the gold and the green, appear explicitly as the central images shaping this romance. Therefore they need less explication here for the images explain themselves as they recur throughout the work to reveal a picture of the poem's meaning. By virtue of the explicitness of the gold and green the mythic pattern becomes more apparent and a greater ease is gained in discussing its treatment here, a gain which I trust will disperse its benefits backwards upon the previous chapters to enhance an understanding of them as well.

The romance of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is composed of a series of concentric circles through which we pass in a journey to the centre, to the roots of all things. The outer circle is one of historical time unfolding its alternating currents of "blysse and blunder"¹ as shown forth in the opening vision of historical Britain. Within is the circle of the Round Table, Arthur's court, a still and golden world mirroring the perfection of a paradise before time, as the vision of superlative joy, beauty, and courtesy reveals (ll.37-59). At the centre is the turning green world of nature, the abode of the Green Knight, its passing seasons

expressing the transience and mutability at the heart of all things and recalling the same pattern at the circumference:

Where werre and wrake and wonder
 Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne,
 And oft boþe blysse and blunder
 Ful skete hatz skyfted synne. (ll.16-19)

Containing all is the circle of eternity, the divine presence of God, encircling history, man and creation, a presence perceived in the pattern of order within the cycles of change, in history and nature, and in the Green Knight touched with gold, and in the golden quality emanating from Arthur's festive court. Since there is a divinity sanctioning the turning worlds at the circumference and the centre, the inner circle must acknowledge its connection with the turning of time and not rest in still perfection. Unless that still perfection is unfolded and acted out in time, so that the green world may be reconciled with the gold, and the golden world recognize its roots in the green, it emits only a partial truth prohibiting the full revelation. It is the partial truth of virtue in innocence, a garden goodness untried by the world of experience, rather than the revealed truth of virtue fulfilled in falling which leads beyond the garden of innocence to the city of understanding. For the circles are interlocking; none is separate or self-sufficient.

This structure of unity, the interlocking of centres and circles of reality, is mirrored in the symbol of the pentangle of truth in which:

...vche lyne vmbelappez and loukez in oþer,
 And ayquere hit is endelez; and Englych hit callen
 Overal, as I here, þe endeles knot. (ll.628-30)

Because the circles are interlocking, the most virtuous champion of this inner court circle, Gawain, is called forth into the world, the turning

circle at the centre, bearing the shield of this truth, to realize his perfection in committing himself to the roots of things and in discovering the frailty and mortality that always qualify man's virtue, reminding him of his debt to divine grace which alone maintains him. Only then can the humanized knight emerge out of nature to assume his place once again in the court circle, fulfilled by that fall which reveals the larger truth. And with his return, the golden world of the court is transformed by its contact with the green world, as its innocent and untried virtue is replaced by the virtue of understanding and wisdom. Humanized, it emerges divine, its laughter at Gawain's shame acknowledging and accepting man's frailty and mortality, and betokening a rich and wise faith. Now turning in tune with the green world, the court aligns itself with the true golden world of the divine through faith, which achieves the joyous accord of heaven and earth by the laughter of understanding.

The romance opens in historical time and gives expression to the transience that is its essential nature,² as civilization is shown forth always threatened by "tresoun" and "tricherie" (ll.3-4), in which "boþe blysse and blunder/Ful skete hatz skyfted synne" (ll.18-19). From a world worn by "werre and wrake and wonder" (l.16), the flux of time, we move inward into the world of Arthur's court, seemingly untouched by time or change. Here "glaum and gle glorious" (l.46) reign to create a golden world of superlative joy, "þe hapnest vnder heven" (l.56).³ Here reside Arthur, "þe hendest" (l.26) of kings, Gwenevere, his queen most gracious, "þe most kyd knyȝtez vnder kryste seluen" (l.51), and "þe louelokkest ladies þat euer lif haden" (l.52). It is the paradisaal spring time of youthful joy and innocence, "for al watz þis fayre folk in her first age" (l.54).

The youthful quality of this harmonious world suggests its virtue is yet untried.⁴ The New Year which "watz so ȝep̄ þat hit watz new cummen" (1.60), indicates a threshold, holding the hint of testing to come. For the passing of the old year of innocence and youth prepares for the entry of the new which brings with it the trials of experience. The adventures which follow will be undertaken to earn this former state of well-being, harmonized with human experience, through the encounter with the world at the centre, the turning green world of nature. Through the confrontation with the centre in the green world, the golden world will be re-created anew, and a greater innocence regained in understanding.

The maybe-too-merry aspect of the priests who partake of the Christmas celebrations (1.64),⁵ introduces a slightly discordant note which calls into question this innocent joy. The riotousness of the mass being celebrated is the Christian equivalent of the classical orgies. On this feast day the church allowed chaos to explode under controlled circumstances. Chaos is therefore present in the golden world and sanctioned there but it is not fully understood. Because chaos is sanctioned the court believes this approved disorder is the extent of its powers. They must learn otherwise.

And so with the New Year the natural world makes its entry into the sheltered circle of Arthur's court; innocence is disrupted by the forceful appearance of experience, in the form of "an aghlich mayster" (1.136), the Green Knight. In the ambiguous nature of this wondrous knight is the secret of the green world, its trials that prove a miracle.⁶ For though he seems fearful yet are his features framed with fair accord (11.145-6). Appearing a giant he is in fact but a head or so taller than the knights present

(11.140-41). His ferocious entry is followed by his pledge that he comes in peace but to seek "a Chystemas gomen" (1.283). And the interweaving of the gold and the green within this knight and even his horse (11.161-67 and 11.179-95), suggests the divinity of the natural world they carry within them into the court. The natural world of turning time and trials calls forth the knight from security in a world ordered only by the good into one where the good is inextricably interlocked with evil. But it does this only that the knight may discover the divine in the natural and so fulfill his worth at the source of things. This ferocious Green Knight touched with gold reveals the hard yet blessed way the Golden Knight must travel in order to be perfected.

The Green Knight bears an axe "hoge and vnmete" (1.208), suggestive of the death there is in life, but as it is hewen "of golde" as well as of "grene stele" (1.211), it anticipates the understanding that the blows of experience bring. He also bears a holly branch, "þat is grattest in grene when greuez ar bare" (1.207), indicative of the life there is in death. And Gawain does journey into a dead land to seek his own death but in doing so he discovers his life.⁷ The holly also symbolizes the growth that comes with hardship, the redemption won by suffering and humiliation. Its thorns recall Christ's crown of thorns and this connection is suggested by the epithet the poet selects in his closing prayer (11.2529-30).

This ambiguous quality that is the essential nature of the Green Knight and the natural world of experience, the interlocking of good and evil, gold and green, is unknown and hence fearful to the inhabitants of the solely golden court of Arthur. The potential perfection that resides in the golden court must be unfolded in time in the green world by the

golden world's most perfect champion that he may earn the armour of his virtue and the shield of fulfilled truth through experiencing the implications of each in the world. Thus the Green Knight challenges Sir Gawain, the Golden Knight, to withstand the blows and trials of experience that he may re-create the truth of the inter-locking of green and gold beyond the purely gold of innocence.

With the Green Knight's violent entry "a swoghe sylence" (1.243) sweeps through the formerly festive hall and all the knights are as though "slypped vpon slepe" (1.244). Their innocence makes them defenseless; "stouned" and "stonstil" (1.242), they are incapable of responding to this unknown presence. Gawain is to accept the challenge to cross the threshold from innocence into experience for Arthur and his court; in him their virtue will be tried and tested, in him their renown will be proven or found wanting. At first the Green Knight's challenge (11.285-90) goes unanswered and this occasions his harsh accusation of cowardice (11.309-15) since their silence calls into question "þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table" (1.313). Arthur is reserved but courteous when he accepts the challenge for his silent court (11.323-27). The shameful aspect of the situation does not lie in Arthur's response,⁸ rather it lies in the fact that he must assume the quest himself. Ordinarily, and rightly, knights clamoured for the boon of a quest. Gawain sees this shame and sets it right.

Gawain's courteous intervention reveals his humility which proves his potential worth, his fitness for assuming this quest.⁹

I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
 And lest lur of my lyf, quo latyes þe soþe -
 Bot for me as þe ar myne em I am only to prayse,
 No bounte bot your blod I in my bode knowe; (11.354-57)

Gawain's deep and instinctive humility is the essence of the court's potential perfection and it is the virtue that must be proven by the quest to which the Green Knight calls it forth. And so is the Green Knight "ferly fayn" that Gawain "þis dint" "schal dryue" (1.388), for he is the chosen for this quest and this the Green Knight recognizes.

Gawain's humility here takes the form of courtesy; it is given him by birth and so is founded in Arthur's "blod" (1.357). It is not yet well grounded and for this grounding to be achieved he must enter the natural world. For, as the pattern has persistently shown, restoration comes not only from the divine but also from man's handling the natural part of himself which restores to him his virtue perfected by its grounding in the green.

Arthur expresses a full faith in Gawain's virtue that further reveals him the chosen as he says: "...if þou redez hym ryzt, redly I trowe/þat þou schal byden þe bur þat he schal bede after." (11.373-74). Gawain's instinctive sense of humility, though imperfect, that moves him to take up the challenge, and Arthur's ready belief in Gawain's ability reveal their understanding that this quest is the end to which Gawain was created. And so Gawain takes up the Green Knight's challenge to strike him a blow, confront his reality, and in return to enter his world and withstand the blow it offers him. The pledge made and the blow struck to an unyielding though beheaded Green Knight, the Green Knight withdraws from the court circle into the unknown centre: "To quat kyth he becom knwe non þere,/Neuer more þen þay wyste from queþ en he watz wonnen" (11.460-61).

The interlude between the beheading match and the quest's temptations and trials upon which the final outcome depends, draws us into the flow of

the natural world, the cycle at the centre, that is the reality of the Green Knight. Here the seasons unfold in a succession of change that reveals a pattern of order. The passage of the "ȝere" that "ȝernes ful ȝerne, and ȝeldez neuer lyke, / ȝe forme to ȝe fynisment foldez ful selden" (ll.498-99), shows forth the flux of time and change, the turning of the green world into winter whiteness that holds the fear of mindless mutability. Yet the cycle completes its turning to bring the return of the promise of spring and the summer fulfillment of rebirth which is the evidence of the golden pattern inherent in the green world, as in the Green Knight touched with gold. Change is shown forth as the working of perfection, and mutability is seen governed by order. This world that is the Green Knight's exists for the working of the golden Gawain's perfection. It is into this turning world that he is called forth to suffer its winter trials and be reborn in its returning spring.

And so the circle turns, through Christmas and New Year's to the cold cheer of Lent into a gentle spring and on to soft summer (ll.502-16). With the approach of Autumn and Zephyrus' hard warning, winter again draws near (ll.517-31). The circle complete, time yields the day of Gawain's departure. The eternal spring and summer of innocence past, the autumn of Gawain's existence begins and ushers, in the fall into the winter of experience and the trials that make possible the return of summer fulfillment. Thus with the approaching winter, Gawain remembers "ful sone" his "anious uyage" (ll.534-35).

As Gawain prepares for his setting forth his humility again springs forth in his spontaneous and willing acceptance of his destiny. He "mad ay god chere" (l.562) to control his fear and says:

... 'Quat sculd I wonde?
 Of destinés derf and dere
 What may mon do bot fonde?' (11.563-65)

Once again what Gawain senses, the presence of God within his quest, this destiny for which he was created, and what he is, the potential perfection to be acted out in the quest, are what the revelation of the quest's completion will unveil. For his sense of God's presence becomes the fullness of faith and he becomes the ripeness of fulfilled humility. What Gawain knows as presage in the beginning of his quest he must experience as a living truth in the end.

Thus Gawain dons the armour of his potential perfection and assumes the shield of his help, the truth that is the protection of his potential virtue. Arrayed all in gold, both Gawain and his steed, Gryngolet, stand prepared to meet the green of the Green Knight and his horse. And as the green of the natural knight was woven with a glimmer of the gold of divinity, so is the gold of the pentagonal knight decorated with a touch of the green world. For the helmet Gawain wears has a covering of silk embroidered with birds, "papiayez" and "Tortors and trulofez entayled so Dyk" (11.610-14), which is indicative of the natural joy and desire of the green world, and which recalls the natural imagery of gold and green birds and butterflies embroidered on the Green Knight's belt. (11.166-67) This touch of the turning green world of desire is crowned with the still "cercle," the diadem of the golden world, thus revealing the essential harmony that Gawain must experience and re-create through his earning this armour of perfected virtue. (11.615-19)

The pentangle on Gawain's shield is the ultimate expression of the truth of this intrinsic harmony, of the interlocking nature of the golden

and green worlds. In the Green Knight we view this truth from the perspective of the natural, while in the golden Gawain we view this same truth from the perspective of the ideal. The Green Knight bears a natural world which in its unfolding, its turning in time, uncovers the sanction of divinity in its pattern of order and its rhythm of emergence, withdrawal, and return, of life, death, and rebirth. The Gold Knight bears an ideal world which reveals within the stillness of its perfection the springs of natural desire, the love-birds and love-knots decorating the covering of his golden helmet (l.612). The pentangle which reaffirms this truth in its form which is an "endeles knot" of interlocking lines (ll.625-30), is to shield Gawain's virtue by its golden light as he descends into the centre of the green world. It symbolizes the fulfillment of his perfection, five times in five ways (l.632), to be borne until that perfection is actualized and until that inner and quintessential virtue, the humility of the Virgin painted on the inner side of his shield (ll.649-50), is realized and consolidated within the fulfilled knight. The perfection of the pentangle "of pure golde" (l.620) is won by the descent into the green world which brings the confrontation with the implications of its truth, its interlocking nature. As Gawain descends into the green world, into the roots of things, he simultaneously descends into himself in order to come to terms with the natural man within the knight, "as golde pured" (l.633), with his own frailty and failings, his humanity and ultimately, his mortality, to discover a divinity that alone redeems him and returns him to the golden world.¹⁰

The shield of perfection has within it the human figure of humility, Mary, mother of the man that made falling divine, which is

further evidence that the golden pentangle includes the green. In her golden aspect, Mary is a queen ascending into heaven. In her green aspect, she is a human mother whose natural humility gives birth to a golden son on earth. The perfect knight, Gawain, has within him a natural man who must fall into an awareness of his human helplessness and death to have the divinity of his humility restored. The shield is a shell filled with the spirit of humility and so is the knight a golden shell to be filled with the spirit of grace, through humility perfected in the green world.

Thus these arms, "acordez to þis knyȝt" (1.631), faithful five ways in five virtues, a knight "as golde pured" (1.633). And, as the Golden Knight gayly armed, Gawain sets forth: "He wende for euermore." (1.669) Totally committed to his quest, Gawain sets forth in absolute surrender to his destiny. His is the firmness of an unconscious and unquestioned faith, the spontaneous response of untried innocence. Opposed to this faith and firm conviction of Gawain, as well as to Arthur's ready belief in Gawain's ableness, is the lack of faith and understanding on the part of the critical court.¹¹ The blindness of the court is the blindness of youth, of innocents in a golden world, who are unaware of the larger meaning behind the green world's challenge; hence their lack of understanding. "Who knew euer any kyng such counsel to take/As knyȝtez in cauelaciounz on Chrytmasse gomez!" (11.682-3) The court views Gawain's quest as an "unnatural and apparently absurd action of going into a dead land, in a dead season, to seek his own death,"¹² which is not unlike the manner in which Orfeo's court views his self-exile. Gawain, like Orfeo, does indeed set forth to seek his own death, but in doing so he gains a

greater life informed with the fulness of faith which the court lacks, and returns with his gift of understanding which transforms the court circle. When Gawain departs "hym no gomen þoʒt" (1.692) for he recognizes an undefined divinity in his destiny, a meaning, unknown yet essential, moving in his quest.

Thus the knight sets forth, "on Godez halve" (1.692), into the realm of experience seeking the centre of the green world which proves a mirror-image for the centre within. In seeking the roots of the natural world Gawain seeks the reality of the roots of mortality within the human soul. Such a quest must needs be undertaken alone; there are no guides nor companions except God to direct Gawain in his lonely descent into the circle at the centre.¹³ And this aloneness is emphasized as Gawain is seen journeying with "no frere" (1.695) and with "no gome bot God bi gate wyth to karp" (1.696). It is a world unknown to the golden circle that Gawain confronts in his naked aloneness; it is strange and therefore fearful, a wilderness and winter world unlike the joyful and familiar world he has left behind.¹⁴

The wild animals and woodmen, the dragons, serpents, and giants that inhabit this world (11.720-23) emerge as externalizations of Gawain's internal fears, the natural inhibitions and instincts that must be encountered to be conquered.¹⁵ Far off from friends and forlorn he rides by "warpe oþer water" (11.714-15), the twin realities of chaos which is the experience of the green world at the outset of the journey down and in: a chaos very unlike the sanctioned chaos Gawain knew in court. And had Gawain not "ben duʒty and dryʒe, and Dryʒten had served,/Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte" (11.724-25), overcome by the chaos of this wilderness world. For the creatures of chaos Gawain battles with are not

even as trying as his war with the winter of this natural world. His encounter with the landscape of winter death is a reflection of his encounter with his own death to come on his achievement of the Green Chapel. Though ravaged by battles and the suffering of cruel winter's death-like sting, the presence of grace, the golden thing Gawain serves, still guides him as he travels this wasteland of winter, the dead season of the green world. And

þus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde
Bi contray caryez þis knyzt, tyl Krystmasses, euen,
al one; (ll.733-35)

In his suffering Gawain makes "his mone" to Mary, drawing from that virtue that fills the shield of his perfection, for faith to direct him in the directionless wilderness of this world (ll.736-39). Filled with new faith, "Bi a mounte on þe morne meryly he rydes" (l.740). Having traversed the wasteland and journeyed by strand and water, Gawain now descends deeper into "a forest ful dep, þat ferly watz wylde" (l.741). This forest, enclosed on all sides by "Hiþe hillez" (l.742), grows wild with oak, hazel, and hawthorn "harled al samen", and with "raged mosse" that "rayled aywhere" (ll.744-45). It offers no more comfort than the wilderness, for sorrow is sung here by "vnblyþe" birds "vpon bare twyges" that "pitosly þer piped for pyne of þe colde" (ll.746-47). This waste wood only offers further trials for the wanderer who journeys here.

Gawain continues his journey inward into this wood of the natural world, ever a "mon al hym one" (l.749), through swamp and mire, fearful only lest he should fail: "To se þe seruyse of þat syre, þat on þat self nyzt/Of a burde watz borne oure baret to quelle" (ll.751-52). Thus he beseeches God and Mary "Of sum herþer þer heþly I myzt here masse" (l.755).

"He rode in his prayere" (1.759), enveloped in the presence of the divine, through the natural present. And no sooner has he crossed himself thrice than he is aware of a wondrous dwelling in the wood, built upon a mound and enclosed by a moat, under the boughs of many massive trees (11.764-70). The castle--"Þe comlokest þat euer knyzt aȝte" (1.767)--recalls the golden world of Arthur's court, with its palisade stretching more than two miles which "schemered and schon þurȝ þe schyre okez" (1.722).

Its towers and spires are artfully decorated with fine finials and "Chalkwhyte chymnees" that "blenked ful quyte" (11.777-79). But as the painted pinnacles create the illusion of a castle "pared out of papure purely" (1.802), a discordant note of deceit is introduced into the delightful setting, one which is enough to transform it into the sinister castle set for the trying of virtue. As the brilliant surface of the Fairy King's castle, in Sir Orfeo, hid a sinister centre, so does this shining and finely wrought castle reveal the insubstantial quality of illusion in its paper-like appearance. And the "water wonderly depe" in the "depe double dich" surrounding the castle (11.786-87) further suggests a reality unlike the delightful illusion of its surface display. For these are the waters of chaos, recalling those encountered in the wilderness (1.715), which enclose the castle of temptation and threaten to overwhelm the traveller in the green world unless he remains firm in his trying. Chaos in the natural world is forever disguising itself as something tame and protective as this moat surrounding the castle of temptation. At the Green Chapel chaos is revealed undisguised in the brook that boils and bubbles (1.2174).

Gawain wins easy entrance into this wondrous castle and the lord of the castle welcomes him heartily:

... '3e ar welcum to welde as yow lykez
 þat here is; al is yowre awen, to haue at yowre wylle
 and welde.' (ll.835-37)

Again we sense in the host's warm welcome, as in the Green Knight's glee at Gawain's acceptance of his challenge, the delight of the tempter of virtue, not drawn from evil intent but rather from the desire to prove and fulfill the virtue being tested.¹⁶ For the Green Knight shines through this genial host, "a bolde burne" of massive mold, with "felle face as þe fyre, and fre of hys speche" (ll.843-47). It is the Green Knight within the host who welcomes Gawain into his world to begin the trials which determine the outcome of their bargain at the Chapel in the heart of this world.

With the ritual disarming and cloaking in a rich mantle which follow, we are shown the Golden Knight stripped of the armour of the golden world to be dressed in the clothes of the green world. As Gawain chooses one of the "ryche robes" offered him and clothes himself in its flowing and colorful skirts, he appears as spring itself, "all on hwes" (ll.862-67). Gawain is here clad in the glowing many-colored robes of the natural world. The colors that transform "his visage" into a spring vision (l.866), recall the colorful love-birds and love-knots decorating his helmet covering (ll.610-12), and the birds and butterflies embroidered gold and green on the Green Knight's belt (ll.166-67). The golden presence perceived in this joyous spring vision is not lost in the green world and it is this truth that Gawain must discover by donning its reality, symbolized in this mantling, to experience it in its entirety. The testing to come will be in the guise of the natural desire that is implicit in the imagery of this gown, first in the forms of passion and finally in the form of

covetousness which proves a prideful clinging to the natural world in the desire for life. The latter amounts to a denial of the full reality of this world in the failure to perceive the golden quality inherent in the green of its mutability, the rebirth that ever springs from its death. The fatal consequences of this are realized by Orpheus' backward glance and undone by Orfeo's joyous consent.

Gawain appears newly clad as a "prynce withouten pere" (1.873) before his host to reveal his identity which, when the host hears, "Loud lazed he þerat so lef hit hym þoȝt, / And alle þe men in þat mote maden much joye" (11.909-10). This is again the natural joy of the Green Knight springing forth, delighting to have this "fyne fader of nurture" (1.979), this peerless prince of virtue, present in his world that he may prove that perfection. The joy of the members of this green court circle would seem to spring from the same source (1.910). For they seem to perceive a golden purpose in Gawain's presence in their court as each to other says: "God hatz geuen vus his grace godly for soþe, / þat such a gest as Gawan grantez vus to haue" (11.920-21).

With the entranceⁿ of the host's lady, accompanied by "an auncian" (1.948), the duality and ambiguity of the green world is crystallized.¹⁷ As the mighty fortress has the insubstantial quality of paper, and as the Green Knight is both the fierce challenger of the golden world and the tempter that would only prove the Golden Knight, so are these two ladies the manifestations of the dual nature of the green world. The host's wife is the beauty of the green world that would tempt only to try the knight's virtue, while her ancient companion is the sinister quality in that beauty that would see virtue fail. The "auncian" is that part of the green world

that would deny its connection with the golden; she is the winter of this world unredeemed by spring, chaos uncreated by order, devouring time as opposed to recurrent time. She is what the green world would look like from the demonic perspective, simply the round of chaos, whereas the beautiful wife of the host shows forth a purpose in the chaos, the meaning that creates a pattern of order, in her connection with the Green Knight. Though her temptations bring about Gawain's fall it is a fortunate fall that returns him to his proper golden world humanized and revitalized by its contact with the green world. For his fall reveals a divinity working in the green world. Thus her bright beauty dispells the darkness of her ancient companion in the final vision of the green world, as forgiveness replaces judgment in the golden world, and as communion replaces separation, laughter humiliation, and mirth tragedy. The full force of the green world's destructive potential, present in the blow of the Green Knight's axe and the dark presence of the ancient, can only make a nick in the neck of the fallen knight filled with grace because of that fall brought about by the bright lady.

Thus these two ladies are two visions of the natural world: a dark vision of nature as the chaos of fallen experience, and the bright vision of nature as recurring re-creation out of the chaos of the fall which is the larger truth unfolded in the seasonal passages and realized in the Green Knight. The ancient is but the partial truth of the green world, as Arthur's innocent court is the partial truth of the gold; or she is the green world with all the gold extracted, like the vision offered Herodis by the Fairy King, while Arthur's court, like Orfeo's, is the gold failing to encompass the green. As her black must be tempered with the bright

green of the beautiful lady, the golden purpose in her temptations, so must the potential gold of Arthur's court be fulfilled as the true gold of the pentangle which includes the green, by entering into and experiencing the whole truth of the green world and emerging reconciled with it.

The three day feast which begins with Christmas morning in this court is the first instance of the triplicity that is to recur throughout Gawain's stay in the green world. The symbolic significance of these threes which so beautifully knit the events into a pattern of unity¹⁸ resides in their expression of a divinity unfolding even in the duality of the green world, as three is the number of the Trinity which is the unfolding of God into Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.¹⁹ With the arrival of the third day Gawain prepares for his departure on the "heȝe ernde" that is his destiny. (1.1051) He has but three days left to fulfill the command of that mission and he is "als fayn to falle feye as fayly of myyn ernde." (1.1067). His firm and faithful dedication to his quest is responded to gayly by his smiling host who reveals that he "schal teche" him "to þat terme bi þe tymeȝ ende" (1.1069). As Gawain forfeits his solitude and self-reliance, turning to his host for the achievement of his "chaunce" (1.1081), and pledging himself to him with: "I schal at your wylle/ Dowelle, and ellez do quat ȝe demen." (1.1081-82), he is in fact committing himself to the temptation at hand. For he is immediately obliged to consent to the contest that instigates the temptation. Thus the covenant is made to exchange, as gifts, the winnings of the following day, and, sworn "with trawþe" (1.1108), the pledge is then sealed with wine.

The first day of the contest which is to multiply into three, begins with the sounding of three bugle notes (1.1141). Gawain's host sets forth

on his hunt in the green world which is to be mirrored in his wife's hunt in the bedroom, the hunt of the temptation which seeks to draw Gawain deeper into an awareness of the natural world of desire within himself.²⁰ The deer which is the hunting host's prey on the first day mirrors the timidity and naivety of Gawain in his first encounter with natural desire. With the lady's stealthy entrance Gawain awakens within his own green world lost and unsure. His virtue, defenseless in this unknown wood of natural desire, knows only the timid response of the deer and so he feigns sleep rather than confront the frank desire of the lady. "Compost in his consience" (l.1196), he ponders within this internal world until his virtue awakens and assumes a better defense. He resolves: "More semly hit were/To aspye wyth my spelle in space quat ho wolde." (ll.1198-99). And so feigning wonder he awakens to do the more courteous thing as his virtue sees it.

His untried virtue is learning the dilemma of experience in which courtesy often demands deception, as was demonstrated in Sir Launfal. As the lady playfully claims him her captive Gawain courteously takes up the game, yielding himself eagerly, and entreating her grace (ll.1210-15). Though Gawain indulges freely in her games of wit which follow, courtesy and humility guide his behaviour. In response to the lady's extravagant praise and frank offering of love (ll.1226-40), Gawain replies that he is unworthy of "such reuerence" as she rehearses, though the pleasure of her praise is indeed "a pure ioye" to him (ll.1243-47). His tact is tried as the lady continues her praise of his "prys" and "prowes" that surpass all others' (l.1249). But that praise, given to provoke his pride and passion, serves only to uncover his profound humility for Gawain

returns the praise to the lady, praying Mary to reward her for her "fraunchis nobele" (11.1263-67), as "Hit is þe worshyp of yourself, þat nojt bot wel connez." (1.1267) Even with the lady's avowal that Gawain's courtesy, comeliness, and courtly mirth would make him her choice of husband above all others, her questionable virtue and tact are answered by the unquestionable virtue and tact of Gawain's brief reply: "þe haf waled wel better" (11.1271-76).

A hint of compromise is introduced, perhaps at the same moment in time in which the hunted deer are driven into the valley (1.1159), as Gawain adds, "Bot I am proude of þe prys þat þe put on me," and commits himself as servant to this "souerayn" lady (11.1277-78). As the deer are hemmed in by the hunters in the valley so is Gawain hemmed in by the lady's advances and thus he "ferde with defence" (1.1282). But desire cannot be called forth from Gawain whose thought was all on his quest and "þe dunte þat schulde hym deue" (11.1283-85). It is only the lady's accusation of a lack of "courtaysye" in his failure to claim a kiss of her (11.1297-1301), that moves him to take one at her "comaundement, as a knyjt fallez,/And fire, lest he displese yow" (11.1303-04). With the lady's bestowal of one kiss the deer are captured and killed (1.1320), and so these become the gifts to be exchanged on the first day of the contest.

The lord returns from the hunt to display his winnings and accept Gawain's "by acorde of couenaunt" (1.1384). Gawain bestows his kiss "worthyly wonnen" and awarded "with as god wylle" (11.1385-89). To his lord's jesting that the gift would be better still if it were known from whom it was won (11.1393-94), Gawain replies as playfully: "þat watz not

forward" (1.1395). The virtuous knight is becoming adept at the playful game of deception that characterizes this world. And so the covenant is pledged again "byfore þe court alle" (11.1405-08), and the second day begins the contest anew.

The second day is ushered in by the crows of the cock (1.1412), hinting at the betrayal to come. The hunt of the boar in the green world is matched by the hunt of a deeper desire in the natural wood within Gawain, the violent passion of lust that the lady will try to provoke in this temptation scene. The lady arrives early and begins her assault with swift words condemning Gawain's discourtesy in his failure to act out the lesson of yesterday, that where favour is found kisses must be quickly claimed. When Gawain replies that he dares not ask lest he be denied, and, in being denied, proven wrong, she claims he could always take by force what was not freely given. She thereby provokes a proof of Gawain's manhood in violent passion by her circuitous invitation of herself (11.1485-97). Gawain refuses to act out the potential of the boar within himself, recognizing that to threaten is "vnþryuande" as is "vche gift þat is geuen not with goud wylle" (11.1499-1500). But at her "comaundement" he accepts the kiss that will not be taken forcefully in lust nor without good will (1.1501).

When the lady expresses wonder at Gawain's ineptness in the art of love she admits she has come to him "to lerne at yow sum game" (1.1532). This game of love she tempts him to participate in is the game upon which hinges the outcome of her husband's Christmas "gomen" (1.283). Again the lady twists her temptation to turn on the questioning of Gawain's courtesy as she asks if he is "lewed" or whether he deems her too dull

to hearken to "trweluf craftes" (ll.1527-30). Gawain tactfully manoeuvres himself out of the twists of the lady's trap, just as the boar escapes the hunters' pursuit (l.1467), by replying that to take to himself the task of expounding "trwluf" and to "towche þe temez of tyxt and talez of armez" to one such as she who "weldez more slyzt/Of þat art" were "a folé fele folde, my fre, by my trawþe" (ll.1540-45).

Thus she tests and tries Gawain "ofte,/For to haf wonnen hym to woþe" (ll.1549-50).

Bot he defended hym so fayr þat no fault semed,
Ne non euel on nawþer halue, nawþer þay
wysten bot blysse. (ll.1551-53)

At the lady's departure she kisses Gawain a second time and simultaneously, in the green wood without, the boar that was held at bay by the hunters is slain by the host (l.1595). And these become the winnings to be exchanged on the second day of this double hunt.

The lord's triumphant slaying of the boar is surpassed by Gawain's gift of two kisses as the host exclaims: "Bi saynt Gile,/þe ar þe best þat I knowe!" and playfully claims he will be made rich in a while by the trade that he carries on (ll.1644-47). Again the gaiety evident in the host's remarks springs from the joy he derives from this proof of Gawain's virtue that holds him true to his word. And so the covenant is renewed for a final time as the host vows: "For I haf fraysted þe twys, and faythful I fynde þe/Now 'þrid tyme þrowe best' þenk on þe morne" (ll.1679-80).

At the onset of the third day we are given a glimpse of the winter landscape clothing the green world in the time of the hunt's trials. As the hunters mount they behold the world before them:

Ferly fayre watz þe folde, for þe forst clenged;
 In rede rudede vpon rak rises þe sunne,
 And ful clere costez þe clowdes of þe welkyn. (ll.1694-96)

Here the fearful winter that warred against the well-being of Gawain is touched with the red-gold of dawn and transformed "ferly fayre." And again we perceive the hint of golden promise even in the winterland of the green world.

The prey of this final day of hunting is the fox whose "wyles" (l.1700) and cunning are to be reflected in both the hunted Gawain and his huntress. The huntress of the temptation weaves her webs of desire to entangle Gawain's virtue: her feminine wiles a reflection of the fox's "wyles." The hunted Gawain accepts the fox awakened within him, the cunning that allows him to escape the traps of beauty and offered love, but only to have that cunning close him in the ultimate trap of compromise, just as the fox is descended upon by the host in the thicket in the same moment it had thought itself free (l.1901). Gawain's cunning creates for him the compromise that allows him to accept the girdle that will save his life but break his pledged truth, as its acceptance cannot be discovered to his lord. His covetous clinging to life awakened by this final temptation, supplants his virtue and prepares a place for the entrance of pride. Gawain has now but a short distance to travel in this inward journey; it is but two miles to the Green Chapel. There he must meet the reality of his pride, the fact of his own death, which is the final form pride assumes.

The lady arrives early, "for luf let not to slepe" (l.733), arrayed in "a mery mantyle," her hair entwined with clusters of gems, and her face, throat, and breast displayed openly (ll.1736-41). This

touch of nakedness within her mantling, together with her adornment with jewels, composes the brilliant web of beauty woven to ensnare the hunted Gawain. At the lady's kiss, Gawain awakens from the heavy torpor of a sleep troubled by dreams of that day in which his destiny is to deal him his doom, to be comforted by her radiant beauty (11.1750-62). The chill of his many oppressive thoughts is dispelled by the glow of the lady's glorious beauty and gay attire as her presence soon with "wallande joye warmed his hert" (1.1762). But though Gawain knows only "merþe" wrapped in the "wele" of the lady's beauty, we are reminded that "Gret perile betwene hem stod, / Nif Maré of hir knyȝt mynne" (11.1763-69).

For that "prynces of pris" has "depresed hym so þikke" with her web of desire, and urged him so near the limit that Gawain "nede hym bihoued / oþer lach þer hir luf, oþer lodly refuse" (11.1770-72). Gawain is here trapped in the dilemma of fallen experience that always places virtue in the position of compromise where to act in either direction seems a denial of that virtue. He can neither accept her love and so compromise his truth, nor flatly refuse and so compromise his courtesy in insulting the lady. Gawain's discovery of virtue's vulnerability is but another lesson the green world offers him. The virtue that shone so simply and radiantly in the golden world has been shown the darker possibilities of the defenselessness of the deer and the violent passion of the boar by the green world. But the most difficult disclosure the green world holds is this of virtue's vulnerability in the lair of the fox, in the cunning paradox of the fallen world which reveals the inextricable interweaving of good with evil. Caught in this paradox, Gawain seems incapable of action since refusal will result in the compromise of his

courtesy and acceptance in the compromise of his honour. Enclosed in this scene of the entrapment of Gawain's virtue is a mirror image of the plight of his total quest. For all the hero can do once committed to the quest into the fallen world is to accept his death, as both Orfeo and Launfal do, and as Gawain has begun to do by setting forth into a dead land to seek his own death. This quest demands the hero's acceptance of his own helplessness and indeed his own death in order that he may be acted upon by divine grace, from above, rather than act on resources drawn from below, from pride, which further complicates his entrapment in the fallen world.

Thus Gawain, entangled in the lady's wiles and confronted with the central paradox of her world, seems unable to act except in the compromising of either his virtue or his truth.

He cared for his cortaysye, les crapayn he were,
 And more for his meschef 3if he schulde make synne,
 And be traytor to þat tolke þat þat telde aȝt.
 'God schylde,' quop þe schalk, 'þat schal not befaller!
 (ll.1773-76)

Though Gawain is firm in his refusal to commit sin and break his plighted word he has not escaped. And although Gawain refuses the easy and dishonest evasion of the lady's pursuit by denying he has another love, unlike Launfal, his honesty and virtue are answered only with further trials. For though the lady accepts his pledge that he has no other love, for this "sore" answer she commands a second kiss before she departs to "mourne vpon molde, as may þat much louyes" (ll.1793-95).

This second kiss is still not the seal on the temptation's conclusion as it continues with the lady's expressed desire for a love-token. Gawain's dedication to his "erande in erdez vncouþe" forbids his giving

her a gift for he has "no men wyth no malez with menskful þingez," while his courtesy recognizes it is not to her honour to receive a gift "at þis tyme" from an untried and unworthy knight (11.1806-12). His humility leaves the lady undaunted; she would try the knight further with her offering of "a riche rynke of red golde werkez," its blazing stone "blusschaunde bemez as þe bryzte sunne" (11.1817-19). And still Gawain's virtue rests firm in his refusal: "I wil no giftez, for Gode, my gay, at þis tyme;/I haf none yow to norne, ne nozt wyl I take." (11.1822-23)

But with the lady's offering of the green girdle "with golde schaped" (1.1832), comes the pricking of that passion in the deepest part of Gawain's natural world within, the passion of pride.²¹ In its initial offering, the "grene sylke" with "golde schaped" (1.1832) represents the reality of the Green Knight, in which the gold and the green are reconciled. This Gawain refuses "er God hym grace sende/To acheue to þe chaunce þat he hade chosen þere" (11.1836-38). But when the virtue of the girdle's power over death is made known (11.1851-54), Gawain responds to it as a golden symbol alone, a magical power defying the green of his natural mortality. Though Gawain succeeds where Launfal fails in giving the right answer to the lady when she asks if he has another love, he fails here, where Launfal succeeds, in refusing to lay down his life according to the terms of his quest. The girdle is transformed for him into "a juel for þe jopardé" (1.1856) he is to suffer, a golden gem that will undo death at the hands of the Green Knight. Rather than hold true to the natural flower of faith within, he will trust in the magic jewel of pride, cunningly evading the truth by his gentle justifications.

þen kest þe knyzt, and hit com to his hert
 Hit were a juel for þe joparde þat hym iugged were:
 When he acheued to þe chapel his chek for to fech,
 Myzt he haf dypped to be vnslayn, þe slezt were noble.
 (11.1855-58)

Gawain is faced with two challenges here. He is following two quests simultaneously, the larger quest to expose his life and save it and this smaller quest to resist the lady's temptations. With the lady's offer of the green girdle, the larger quest intrudes and in veering from it Gawain falls towards the hounds. He refuses it as a love-token thus resisting the temptation of his smaller quest, but he accepts it as a magic token that will save his life thereby renouncing the essential requirement of his larger quest. Gawain could have refused the girdle as he did the ring but instead he accepts it, choosing to take action to save his life rather than leave action to God as his larger quest demands. Therefore his action is like pride. It is the oblique attack that is the cause of Gawain's downfall as it is of the fox. Because the way is not presented as forthrightly as it was at the outset of his quest Gawain fails to perceive it. The fox "shunted" and so fell into the way of the hounds. In the same way Gawain's shift to save his life results in his fall from perfection.

Gawain's lust for life, a covetousness which springs from pride awakened by the fear of death, undoes his virtue and makes false his faith. So he is trapped within his own fall. The truth of the pentangle Gawain thought he knew is replaced by the girdle²² and the implications of this replacement multiply endlessly as the many threads of the "endeles knot" of truth are served. For, as Gawain accepts the girdle of little faith in pride, he renounces the full faith of the pentangle borne in perfect humility.

With its acceptance comes the promise to withhold it from his lord and the subsequent breaking of his honour. Then must follow the incomplete confession which cannot wash him clean of his unconscious pride. So does his whole manner assume the falseness of his fall. But even as Gawain is unconsciously entangling himself within the web of his fall with the severed threads of the broken knot of truth, we are constantly aware of the human man within the fallen knight who has simply acted out of the all-too-human and all-too-familiar fear of death. The lady's third and final kiss seals the betrayal and locks the trap shut on the hunted Gawain just as her lord finishes off his fox trapped in the enclosure of the thicket.

With the final exchange of winnings the pledge is broken as Gawain gives his gift, the three kisses of betrayal, and says, "As is pertly payed þe chepez þat I azte." (l.1941) Gawain reminds his host of his promise to provide him with a guide to lead him to the Green Chapel. Irony rings in the host's reply that "'In god fayþe,'... 'wyth a goud wylle/Al þat euer I yow hyzt halde schal I redé.'" (ll.1969-70) Here we perceive the Green Knight in Gawain's host as he promises not only a guide but his own presence at the Chapel for the fulfillment of his first promise made a year earlier at Arthur's court.

The opening of Part Four takes us back into the turning of time in the circle of the seasons' passing which encloses the castle of the Green Knight. It is deeper into this turning world, to its heart in the Green Chapel, that Gawain must venture to the completion of his journey. New Year's draws near and day dispells the dark, "as Dryȝten biddez," and the "wylde wederez of þe worlde wakned þeroute" (ll.1999-2000). Gawain

awakens in the cheerless cold of this cruellest of seasons to the dawn of a new cycle which is to be determined by the final trial of this winter world at the Chapel of the Green Knight. Whether the old cycle ends in the final turn downward into death or begins anew by the turn upward into rebirth awaits the time of the meeting of the Gold and the Green Knights.

Gawain listens "ful wel" to the wild weather that foretells his final trial for "ful lyttel he slepes" (ll.2006-07). With each cock's crow he knows the hour at hand and rises to prepare for its fulfillment. Once again he is armed in a ritual which clothes him in the armour of his virtue but where his arming was formerly completed with the assumption of that shield created to protect and perfect that virtue, here it is replaced by "þe gordel of þe grene silke" (l.2035), remembered "for gode of hymself" (l.2031). The girdle is assumed in pride where the shield was assumed in utter humility. Twice that token he twined him about (l.2033): binding himself doubly in his sin. Though he did not wear it "for pryde of þe pendauntez" (l.2038), he wore it for pride of himself, "to sauen hymself" from suffering death at the hands of the Green Knight (ll.2040-42).

Gawain has forfeited his knightly virtue in renouncing the lot of the natural man within and thus his armour becomes but a shell filled with the emptiness of pride. The knightly humility that is Gawain's virtue is sustained by the natural faith drawn from the human and mortal being within; that natural man being denied, he has no faith to draw from, only pride. The true gold of the pentangle's truth is replaced by the "glyterande golde glent" (l.2039) of the girdle's falsehood, and by its flickering light Gawain is to be guided to the end of his pride which is

his own death, believing that death denied. Rather than seek the gold within the green through the acceptance of death, Gawain chooses a partial truth by accepting the green girdle only as a golden token, which renounces the full truth and hence becomes falsehood.

Gawain again sets forth with his guide to seek that perilous place in the wasteland of a faith frozen into pride. Trees stretch forth their bare winter boughs withholding the blossoming of spring's promise (1.2077). Cold clings to the cliffs and mist mantles the moor (1.2078 and 1.2080). The heavens hold aloft from this threatening world where liquid chaos bubbles and foams in the brooks (1.2079 and 1.2082). The dawn finds them "on a hille ful hyȝe" (1.2087) overlooking the snow-covered waste all about. Gawain must suffer further assault by the final temptation offered by the guide²³ of the green world as he bids his master abide and forfeit his quest.

The guide tempts Gawain's fear with his description of the "stiffe and sturne" knight (1.2099) that dwells in this waste world, one so ruthless and lacking in mercy that "Aȝayn his dyntez sore/ȝe may not yow defende" (11.2116-17). Not even the guide's promise to conceal his default (11.2123-25), can move Gawain to forfeit his quest. For even though the deed were concealed Gawain knows: "I were a knyȝt kowarde, I myȝt not be excused" (1.2131). And

ȝaȝe he be a sturn knape
To stiȝtel, and stad with staue,
Ful wel con Dryȝtyn schape
His seruauentez for to saue. (11.2136-39)

Gawain's response reveals a deep and humble faith that cannot be destroyed by the power of pride he has assumed in the girdle.²⁴ His human fear of death has led him to this sin, a sin he is not even fully aware of, for

faith still moves him as this beautiful expression makes clear. He yet feels there is a divinity which saves its servants, guiding them through death itself. This strong sense of the presence of divine providence even within the fallen Gawain is evidence of his virtue's perfecting, as it shines more brightly by virtue of his fall. Though he knows God is his guide yet he does not truly know; he has forgotten the replacement of the true guiding gold of the pentangle by the false gold of the girdle.²⁵ Hence he must be reminded of his human failing at the Green Chapel, the failing that is his redemption once acknowledged and understood. Then will Gawain truly know this divinity that informs his humanity.

And so the servant directs Gawain to the right path descending by a rocky slope to the bottom of a broad valley, to the Chapel at the bottom of the green world. The servant departs leaving Gawain, there "al one" (l.2155), and in his aloneness Gawain completes his descent into the roots of things in the green world without and within himself, by the difficult way, the twisting path of enlightenment. He continues in complete humility.

'Bi Goddez self,' quoþ Gawayn
 'I wyl nauþer grete ne grone;
 To Goddez wylle I am ful bayn,
 And to hym I haf me tone.' (ll.2156-59)

In his unknown and undiscovered failing, the all-too-human Gawain emits a divinity as he commends himself unto God's keeping in the full acceptance of his destiny. Beneath the girdle of pride that defies death and the claims of mutability shown forth in the turning plot, the seasonal motifs, and the Green Knight himself, is the armour of the Golden Knight which still shines by virtue of the human man within. This unacknowledged humanness from which springs his humility and faith is what Gawain must

acknowledge in the approaching encounter with the Green Knight. The Chapel to which he descends is situated on the "lyfte" (1.2146), and the meeting there is to reveal the right, the truth of this winding journey.

Gawain enters the valley by the winding path and "wylde hit hym þoʒt" (1.1263). This wild and enclosed valley, surrounded by high banks, steep on all sides (1.2165), recalls the deep forest that led to the Green Knight's castle (11.741-42). Ragged rocks seem to graze the sky (11.2166-67), the natural violating the heavenly in this sinister inversion of the green world's delightful vision. Instead of the chapel, the sacred space at the centre of the green world, Gawain discovers but "a lyttel on a launde, a lawe as hit were" (1.2171), a grotesque parody of the expected chapel of his quest's end.

It is but "a bal berʒ bi a bonke þe brymme bysyde" (1.2172), in which the "flode" of chaos and mutability "blubred þerinne as hit boyled hade" (11.2173-74). The image of the flood, indicative of the beginning and end of a cycle, recalls the image of the New Year which has ended the cycle of trials in experience and heralds the beginning of a new cycle, death in experience or passage beyond into the birth of understanding. The image of water is an ambiguous image as is that of the green world. It is a humble or generous thing, lending itself equally to death, by drowning, or rebirth, by baptism. In the same way the green world lends itself to death, the chaos of devouring time, or rebirth, the eternal ring of recurrence which proves that generation is but an image of regeneration. What redeems time in the image of the green world and chaos in the image of water is the insight into each which perceives the inherent connection between the prospect of death and the promise of

rebirth, glimpsed in Orfeo's joyous consent and Launfal's more sorrowful acceptance.

As Gawain explores this chapel that is not a chapel but a mound, he finds it all hollow within, "nobot an olde caue" (1.2182). It is indeed but an old cave, the outward equivalent of the empty cave of his own body, the grave-like reality of his own death he has sought to deny, as opposed to the true chapel filled with faith he must become. He is as this cave all hollow within, filled with pride's emptiness. Gawain sees the chapel as "nobot an olde caue" or else as "a creuisse of an olde cragge" (1.2183), and this image, too, unveils the truth unknown to Gawain. It is a fissure, or a split, in the one stone of the true chapel of faith and humility, cracked by the forced entry of pride. Thus the end of Gawain's inward journey leads to the Chapel of himself, the cave of his own mortality and the split that is his own fall into duality, his own human and fallen frailty. The truth of this vision of the Green Chapel is to be revealed by the blows of the Green Knight's axe. Though Gawain perceives only a demonic presence within this parody of a chapel where well "De dele his matynnes" might "telle!" (1.2188), there is a divine one working behind it. The foul lady, Morgan la Fay, has indeed devised this plot but the death-blow Gawain feared from the Green Knight's axe fulfills her plot otherwise than she expected. For the gold glint in the green axebears a divine revelation which recalls the significance of the holly, greenest when groves are most bare (1.207), as it shows Gawain that life is connected with death, growth with hardship, and redemption with suffering.

The Green Knight works relentlessly at his grindstone, sharpening

the instrument of his revelation, as Gawain approaches (11.2200-04).

Gawain's humility and resignation are again revealed when he hears the fierce and fearful noise for he says,

Let God worche! "We loo" -
 Hit helpez me not a mote.
 My lif þaȝ I forgoo,
 Dred dotz me no lote. (11.2208-11)

Gawain heralds the Green Knight, his human fear heard behind his bold words. The Green Knight first finishes his whetting and then hurtles over the flood--"þer he wade nolde" (1.2231)--on his axe, the golden-green thing that orders chaos and re-creates the world within Gawain.

The Green Knight wastes few words in welcoming Gawain and commending him for his arrival true to his word. He proceeds without "no more debate" (1.2248) to deal Gawain his "pay" (1.2247) with the three blows to match the three days of his temptation: two feints for the two days he held true to his pledged word made at the green court, and a third nick in his neck for his betrayal there and for the fulfillment of his first covenant made in the golden court.

As the Green Knight goes to strike the first blow, Gawain "on þat giserne glyfte hym bysyde" (1.2265), and "schrانke a lytel with þe schulderes for þe scharp yrne" (1.2267). Though doubly protected by the faith he has espoused in the divinity that saves its servants from death and by the magical girdle of invulnerability, yet the all-too-human fear in the well-armed knight emerges to uncover the timidity and cowardice of the deer, the prey of the first day of the hunt. The Green Knight witholds his blow and reproves Gawain "with mony prowde wordez" (1.2269). He claims truthfully: "þou art not Gawayn," that was held fearless and good, for his knightly identity is indeed obscured by this act of cowardice (11.2270-73).

Gawain promises to flinch no more and bids the Green Knight: "Dele to me my destiné" (1.2285), and he "schal stonde þe a strok, and start no more/Til þyn ax haue me hitte: half here my trawþe." (11.2286-87) True to his word:

Gawayn grayþely hit bydez, and glent with no membre,
Bot stode styлле as þe ston, oþer a stubbe auþer
þat rafeled is in roché grounde with rotez a hundreth.
(11.2292-94)

Here we see Gawain implanted a natural man in the heart of the green wood, recalling the image of Orfeo "y-clongen also a tree" (1.484) following his exile in the green wood. As a tree planted firmly in the rocky ground with a hundred roots, so is Gawain rooted in the acceptance of his death that his humility may be well-grounded that was formerly founded only on Arthur's "blod" (1.357). By this rooting there flowers a firmer faith which strengthens Gawain with a natural strength far greater than the magical power of the girdle. When the Green Knight witholds his blow a second time Gawain's anger recalls the violent passion of the boar slain on the second day of the hunt. The Green Knight sees now that Gawain has his "hert holle" (1.2296), healed whole by reconciliation with the roots of his natural being, he is prepared for the third blow that will exorcise the cunning of the fox that led him to compromise his truth and virtue and filled him with pride.

As the Green Knight brings down his axefor the third time he makes but a nick for Gawain, rooted in his humanity and mortality, has been emptied of pride and filled by faith with that divinity that schapes its servants "for to saue." The betrayal of his word on the third day returns to him with the third blow to leave the mark of his human failing but that blow cannot destroy the knightly virtue sustained by grace that returns to

him with his regained faith. And now Gawain can take up his shield once again as he does when he sees his blood red on the white snow (1.2315).

Once Gawain earns the right to reclaim his shield the Green Knight completes his revelation. In his merry unmasking the miracle is shown forth and the tragedy is transformed a comedy. Removing the mask of the fierce challenger of the golden world, a joyful and genial knight steps forth, Bercilak of the Hautdesert, of the desert of pride, the place where virtue is tried to be perfected. As he looks on Gawain doughty and dreadful, armed and ready a restored knight, "in hert hit hym lykez" (11.2334-35). He speaks "muryly" (1.2336), in a ringing voice (1.2337), recalling the golden bells on his green horse (1.195), that touch of divinity in the natural world, and bids Gawain desist from his anger. For "No mon here vnmanerly *ye* mysboden habbez" (1.2339). He has but fulfilled the "couenaunde at kyngez kort schaped" (1.2340).

Gawain has received one stroke according to that covenant. The other two feints were flourished "muryly" (1.2345) for the kisses received and returned, as "trwe mon trwe restore" (1.2354), according to the covenant made at his court. For the third day in which "*þou* fayled *þore*" Gawain must accept "*þat tappe*" (11.2356-57). The Green Knight then reveals that the girdle Gawain wears is his own and that the wooing of the last three days has been his own devising (11.2358-61). He sent his wife to "asay" him as the "fautlest freke," "As perle bi *ye* quite pese is of prys more" (11.2362-64). He has perceived the perfect pearl of Gawain's virtue and has desired its showing forth. Thus was the "juel for *ye* jopardé" (1.1856) offered in temptation but to polish this pearl. Though he finds Gawain lacking a "lytell" and wanting in "lewté" for loving his life, yet

is the pearl intact (1.2366). His virtue has only been humanized, his gold reconciled with the green, as in the Green Knight himself, and thus the Green Knight says: "þe lasse I yow blame." (1.2368) Gawain's shame will not admit the simple forgiveness of the Green Knight. Cursing his cowardice and covetousness he unties the knot of a life loved too dearly and returns the girdle to him: "Lo! þer þe falssyng, foule mot hit falle!" (11.2374-78)

Gawain here begins the long confession that holds his awakening to the implications of all that he has passed through. Care for his life has taught him cowardice and accorded him with covetousness and so he has forsaken his "kynde," his knightly identity which is "larges and lewté" (11.2374-81). He condemns himself "fawty and falce" who ever has feared "trecherye and vntrawþe" (11.2382-83). Thus he confesses to the Green Knight, "Al fawty is my fare" and yields himself to his charge (11.2385-88). The Green Knight only laughs and "luflyly" replies:

'I holde hit hardily hole, þe harme þat I hade.
 Þou art confessed so clene, beknownen of þy mysses,
 And hatz þe penaunce apert of þe poynt of myn egge,
 I holde þe polysed of þat plyȝt, and pured as clene
 As þou hardez neuer forfeled syþen þou watz fyrst borne;
 (11.2390-94)

Gawain's confession confirms his acknowledgement and understanding of his fall. Therefore the Green Knight joyfully forgives him his fault. With this new knowledge of his frailty and mortality, and the penance he bears in his flesh, Gawain is "pured as clene" as if he were newly born. Humanized in the centre of the green world, Gawain is reborn a greater knight, prepared for the re-ascent into the golden circle without.

The Green Knight offers the golden knight now replenished with the green, "þe gurdel þat is golde-hemmed" (1.2395) and as green as his own gown

(1.2396), as an emblem and reminder of the reality of himself and his world, as well as of the knowledge gained therein (11.2396-99). The point in Gawain's flesh carries the reminder of what he shares with the green world, his mortality that is mirrored in its mutability. The girdle "golde hemmed" is a reminder of what the green world shares with his world, a golden pattern and purpose within its turning and trials.

As Gawain accepts the girdle he emerges fulfilled in humility, a more genuine humility than he knew in the beginning. Though he wears this emblem of his virtue's vulnerability he does not renounce the possibility of perfection embodied in the emblem of the pentangle, for he declines the Green Knight's invitation to return with him to his court. This may be seen as the final temptation of the green world to renounce the claims of the gold and retreat from the fulfillment of the heroic task in the world. Gawain's rejection of this temptation redeems him from the failure implicit in Launfal's retreat. To return to the green world would be to deny the quest of the Golden Knight which demands he take up the pentangle of fulfilled truth wearing the emblem of the natural world, seeking to sustain the eternal dream of the reconciliation of the green and gold worlds. Unless the human element is added to the golden ideal, Arthur's court will never know the fulfillment of its innocence. And unless the human element admits the possibility of perfection, Gawain may never leave the green world. With these worlds reconciled within himself Gawain can bear the whole truth of the pentangle home to the golden court circle that the human element may be added there, too, and a new world be reborn golden-green.

Gawain assumes the girdle, "not for þe wyne golde" (1.2430), but as the green "syngne" of his "surfet" (1.2433), to remind him of his "tender"

virtue (1.2436), its vulnerability that needs the protection of the pentangle, and of his humanity that requires the Golden Knight to sustain it. He discovers he has been residing in the Hautdesert, the place of pride's purging. Though it is a land ruled by the might of "Morgne la Faye" (1.2446), who withstands no pride (11.2454-55), the temptations suffered there serve only the working of perfection. Her demonic means lead to divine ends and her dark potential gives way to the bright potential of the Green Knight's wife. And the Green Knight, who is the reconciliation of these two ladies, welcomes Gawain back on behalf of them both. But Gawain knows his quest must move on outward from here. He has descended to the roots and must now re-ascend for the flowering of his fulfilled virtue. And so he departs for the final time.

"Wylde wayez in þe worlde Woven now rydez/On Gryngolet, þat þe grace had geten of his lyue" (11.2479-80). Fulfilled with "þe grace" he carries within as well as in the shield of his help, Gawain completes his homeward journey. The "knot" of his humanness "locken" under his arm (1.2487), and the "endeless knot" of truth in his hand, Gawain re-enters the golden court circle, a "knyzt al in sounde" (1.2489), made sound and whole by the healing virtue of reconciliation. This recalls the joy of Orfeo's court derived from seeing their King and Queen "so sounde y-comen" (1.568). Though the nick of his fault, the emblem of his mortality, is healed "hole" (1.2484), its essence has passed within. And so Gawain confesses to Arthur's court the adventure at the Chapel with the Green Knight, the lady's love and her lace, and lastly, the blow to his neck "þat he lazt for his vnleuté at þe leudes hondes/for blame" (11.2496-2500). Though the wound of "vntrawþe" is healed Gawain knows no hiding can undo it, "For þer

hit onez tachched twynne wil hit neuer." (ll.2509-12) Thus has Gawain learned the nature of the interlocking knot of truth. Gawain's great shame and suffering are met with comfort and laughter as the court lovingly decrees that all shall bear the bauldric of "bryȝt grene" in token of Gawain's achieved humility (ll.2513-20). The laughter and loving accord of this new brotherhood formed of forgiveness and understanding betokens the birth of a new world, golden-green, born of the gift of humanity. Gawain returns with from the green world.²⁶

In this final vision romance's reconciling function is fulfilled to create a perfect balance of heart and wit, celebration and mockery, desire and irony, which creates an enormous feeling of freedom and joy. The tension created by this balance results in a bitter truth coming to the reader with a sense of delight. The golden ideal has been mocked and still it stands by an act of joyous faith, a choosing to remain constant to it while knowing it impossible of absolute achievement. The green world has been mocked as well. It has proven to be a strenuous place of trial and temptation, demanding the knight's eternal vigilance, not the garden of natural innocence he rests in. It has turned into something that makes the hero not happier but wiser. But still it returned to the hero the wholeness of feeling and faith required for the heroic task. Gawain's deep sorrow and shame are drawn from the bitter truth that perfection is always just beyond a man's grasp. But this truth comes to the reader with a sense of delight created by the court's laughter which is drawn from its deeper perception that Gawain has indeed come as near perfection as this world permits. And the reader can no more condemn Gawain for lacking so "lyttel" (l.2366) than can this court, or the Green Knight, or indeed

the poet himself.

The reconciliation of the gold and the green in this new brotherhood re-aligns the court circle with the golden world of the divine which encompasses all the circles of this romance. For with the conclusion we move further outward into the circle of history with the mention of historical Britain where: "Mony aunterez here-biforne/Haf fallen suche er þis" (ll.2527-28), and beyond unto the circle divine with: "Now þat bere þe crown of þorne,/He bryng vus to his blysse! AMEN." (ll.2529-30) The movement from the now golden-green circle of Arthur's court to the golden circle of God is evident in the corresponding images of the green girdle and the crown of thorns. The girdle, green as the Green Knight's gown and hemmed with gold, corresponds to Christ's heavenly crown of natural thorns, and the relation between them was anticipated in the image of holly with its thorns which embodied the inherent interdependence of gold and green.

The girdle Gawain wears in token of his personal suffering becomes as the crown of thorns Christ wears in token of man's universal suffering.²⁷ The transition takes place with the symbolic communion in humility and the forming of a new brotherhood, as the Round Table knights agree to partake of and so alleviate Gawain's anguish. By taking to themselves the symbol of his personal sorrow they prepare for its translation into the larger symbol of the crown of thorns containing all sorrow. The participation of Arthur and his court in Gawain's shame is undertaken humorously and in human understanding. Their laughter is the revelation of the mythic pattern's fulfillment for it is a joyful expression of the comic promise and it is evidence of the final transcendence which still includes the inevitable and

undeniable tragic potential. The act of faith this laughter betokens turns this world upward toward the divine one encircling it. This final turn, upward and outward, into the containing circle of the romance gives expression to the relationship of Gawain and his court to the universal court of man and the eternal court of God through the image of Christ, the Man-God. So are all circles gathered into the harmony of perfect unity that is this romance of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

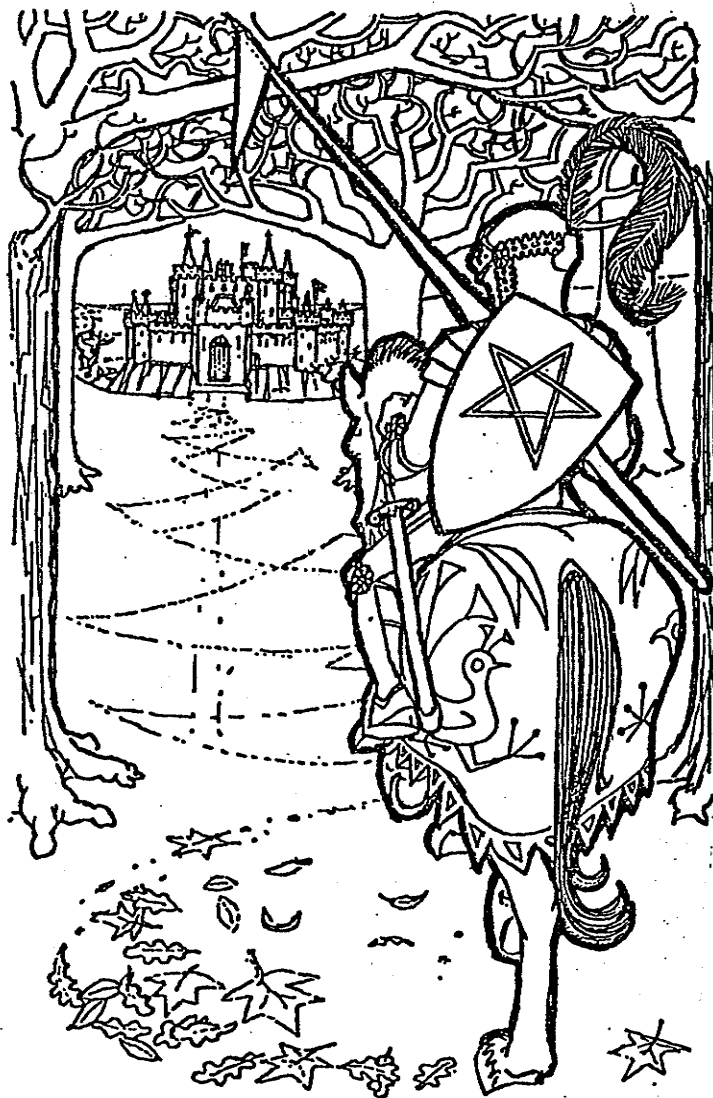


Fig. 5. The Knight's Return

Chapter V

The Reality of Romance: The Significance of the Golden-Green Reconciliation

The initial observation that these three romances share the same mythic pattern might have implied that they could all be reduced to the same significance. This has not, however, proven to be true. When the works are approached in a way which treats them as poetry, it is possible to respect the individual integrity of each poem while examining the pattern each shares with the other. Far from limiting the poets to a single vision, the pattern provides diversity and permits a freedom of expression and intention which has been well exhibited by these three poets.

The Orfeo-poet shows us the re-creation that flows from reconciliation. The human world is re-created and re-aligned with the divine world from which it is viewed. Pure joy and perfect accord resolve this romance which presents an almost super-human success, divinely comic, as Orfeo fulfills the function of redeemer. If Orfeo's success were absolutely super-human it would remove him from the realm of romance to the realm of myth. It is, however, only as nearly super-human as this world permits. As such, it fulfills the comic promise of this mythic pattern.

The Launfal-poet shows us that rejection can follow reconciliation; that the human world is not always willing to receive the redemption embodied in the hero's saving boon. The comic promise is left unfulfilled as retreat rather than re-creation resolves this romance which presents the

mythic pattern from the human perspective. The poem presents human failure but it does not develop the tragic note struck in the reader because the poet's naive perspective focuses on Launfal's success and ignores the world's folly.

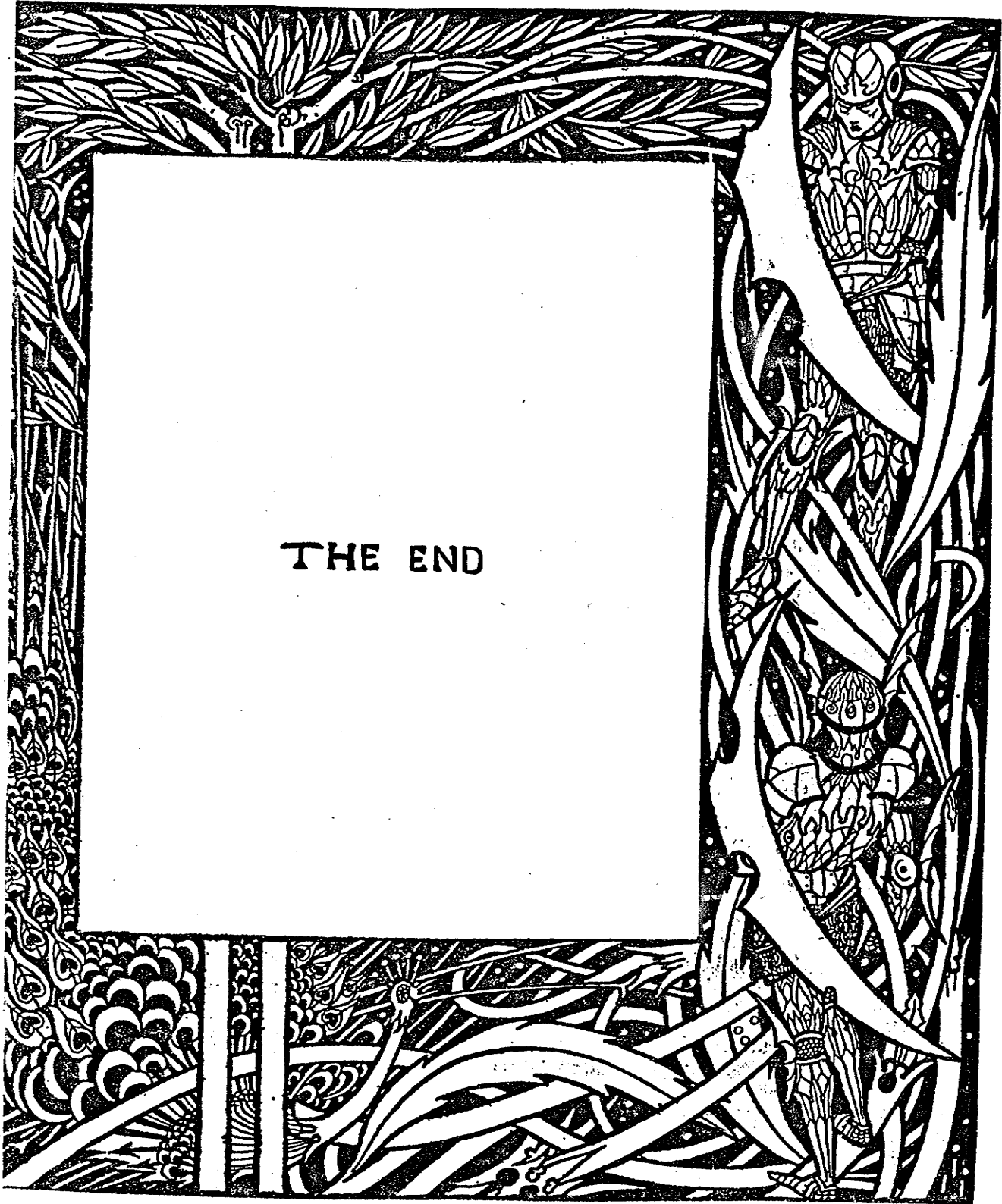
The Gawain-poet does not give us the nearly super-human success of Orfeo nor the merely human failure evident in Sir Launfal, but the human success of Gawain, the significance of which is revealed to us by the poem's dual perspective. The poem's resolution is at once both tragic and comic and hence is the fullest realization of reconciliation. It encompasses the tragic potential, through Gawain's human perspective focused on his failure, and the comic potential, through the court's divine perspective focused on Gawain's larger success. As such, its final vision reveals this romance to be the most complete treatment of this mythic pattern. The Gawain-poet's insight into the pattern's potentiality thus proves the most profound.

The mythic pattern manifesting the meeting of the gold and the green, by the hero's descent into nature, reveals romance's vision of reality in which the ideal and the real are reconciled. Or, to quote Frye's pertinent and perceptive insight once again: romance presents the "desirable" in "human, familiar, attainable, and morally allowable terms."¹ Therefore the realm of romance is not an unreal but a reconciled realm, attainable in reality. As such, it is meant to be taken seriously. The restorative virtue of its vision is imparted only to those who enter into its world fully and faithfully. We are not asked to seek a correspondence between its world and our own. Nor are we called upon to be spectators merely charmed as though by a delightful illusion. We are asked to

participate in romance's delightful illusion which, once we surrender to it, proves a more delightful reality. A deeper correspondence is then discovered between its world and our own as it ought to be and, indeed, can be, as its vision of reconciliation shows.

This discovery affords a profound consolation, deeper than charm and more delightful. It does what faith does in making substantial things hoped for, and giving evidence of things not seen.² The fulness of romance's reconciling vision has the very ring of truth at some deeper level of reality where the divine and the human, the ideal and the real, the comic and the tragic do indeed merge. The reconciliation that fulfills the function of romance, making real the ideal by making whole the green and the gold, includes tragedy but transcends it by the happy ending of comedy's resolution. It still admits the fact of human limitation and sorrow but because of its shift in emphasis the fact is seen as if transformed.

Romance's vision is not simply naive but supremely wise. It is so not in spite of, but because of the happy ending it gives us. It heals by restoring a proper perspective on life that affirms the inherent and enduring connection between the gold and the green in life and in our own hearts if we would have it so.



THE END

NOTES

Chapter I: THE MEETING OF GOLD AND GREEN

¹I am greatly indebted to Northrop Frye whose essay, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," in Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 131-239, has contributed much toward the shaping of my thesis as it concerns romance generally, and the mythic pattern I propose to examine specifically.

²Ibid., p. 137.

³This process of reconciliation resembles what Frye calls the process of "planting and building"; see Anatomy, p. 138.

⁴Support for this suggestion that romance often tells of restoration won by the hero's descent into nature, which is very often synonymous with human nature, can be found in several sources. This pattern is present in the romances of Spenser and Malory. Spenser's Red Crosse Knight, in Book I of the Faerie Queene, must suffer a fall into nature to come to terms with Una's natural innocence and his own natural desire before he can attain his vision of the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. Malory's Tristram, in Book V of Le Morte Darthur, suffers a fall into madness in exile in order to reconcile his love with his honour. Malory's Launcelot suffers an identical fate in Book V. In fact, all of Malory's knights are ultimately called forth from the Round Table to seek the Grail in the green wood, in Book VI, a quest which brings to each the encounter with the thing which interferes with his perfection. And, as this study purports to reveal, so do the three knights, Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal, and Sir Gawain, undertake a similar journey.

This descent into the green wood prepares for the re-ascent, accomplished by virtue of the reconciliation achieved there. This pattern, which I suggest shapes several romances, resembles the pattern shaped by the "monomyth" discussed by Joseph Campbell in his book, Hero with a Thousand Faces (Cleveland & New York: The World Publishing Company, 1949), pp. 3-40. The "monomyth" is composed of three stages: "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return." These stages correspond to the golden knight's withdrawal from the world, his descent into the green world, and his return with the golden-green gift of reconciliation. The passage of the romance hero is not unlike the passage of the mythological hero described by Campbell as being fundamentally "inward--into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world." (p. 29)

This descending journey of the romance hero also resembles the process of individuation outlined by Carl G. Jung, The Integration of the Personality, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (New York: New Athenian Library, 1957),

pp. 1-27. The psychological process by which a human being is made a "whole man" through the integration of the conscious and unconscious, the light and dark, parts of his psyche, is reflected in the romantic process of reconciliation which seeks to effect the integration of the hero's golden potential and the inevitable limitations of his humanness. Jung says this process involves going "the way of the waters, which always go downward" (p. 67), in order to come to terms with the unconscious which, though it first appears chaotic, reveals the meaning which restores the wholeness sought. Similarly, the romance hero's quest takes him downward into the green world that he may effect the reconciliation which restores him a "whole man" and enables him to return to the world from which he fell.

Although the unconscious always appears to be "the anxiously concealed lack of perfection, the painful lie given to all idealistic pronouncements, the remnant of earth that clings to human nature and sadly clouds the crystal clarity that it longs for" (p. 163), the process of individuation proves it is otherwise. According to alchemy, which Jung found to be, "the requisite mediaeval exemplar of this concept of individuation" (p. 28), imperfection is the basis of perfection. It is indeed interesting that the gold and the green are used to clarify this truth. For Jung quotes from the Rosarium Philosophorum, an anonymous medieval alchemistic text which says:

Our gold is not the gold of the multitude.
But you have asked concerning verdigris, deeming the metal a leprous body on account of its greenness, rather than holding what is perfected in the metal to be the sole vitality that is in it, because the verdigris is quickly changed by our magistry into our truest gold. (p. 163)

That only the green rust gives the true gold simply means that there is no completeness without imperfection, as Jung concludes. This is what romance gives us by its vision of reconciliation; not the absolute perfection of gold impossible in life but the completeness of golden-green which life calls for.

⁵ Frye, Anatomy, p. 157.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 139-40.

⁷ The gold and the green and the journey between that seeks to reconcile them are discovered in several romances. Spenser's romance, The Faerie Queene, is set in the green world of Faerie Land, and his knights travel the descending way of this world to act out their individual virtues that they may be perfected and incorporated within the one magnanimous knight, the golden King Arthur.

Tolkien's romantic trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, includes the green wood of Tom Bombadil enlightened by his lovely lady, Goldberry; a wood "where everything was green and pale gold" (p. 151). And only by their dark

journey can Tolkien's heroic Ring Bearers achieve the Gray Havens which evoke the reminiscence of Tom Bombadil's reconciled realm (pp. 1068-9).

In Shakespeare's romance, As You Like It, the miraculous restoration is won only by the characters' withdrawal from the corrupted court and entry into the green wood of Arden. Though the forest proves a strenuous place, very unlike the idyllic place of natural innocence one might expect, yet does it save some from murder, reward some with love, and cleanse the court of its corruption by the natural miracle in the wood.

⁸ Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, in The Complete Poetical Works of Spenser, ed. by R.E. Neil Dodge (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936), Book III, Canto VI, Stanza XLVII.

⁹ Ovid, The Metamorphosis, trans. by A.E. Watts (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), p. 112, Book V.

¹⁰ Frye, Anatomy, p. 158.

¹¹ Northrop Frye, "The Structure of Imagery in The Faerie Queene," in Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1963), p. 73.

¹² J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in the Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1966), p. 51.

¹³ The green world and Faery which is an aspect of it often prove a perilous place and not the romantic idyll one would expect to find. Tolkien describes "Faerie" as a perilous realm which "contains many things besides elves and fays, ...it holds...the earth, and all things that are in it, ...and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted," see "Fairy Stories," p. 9.

Frye says of Spenser's "Faerie" that though its vision "may be the author's dream, ...what the poet dreams of is the strenuous effort, physical, mental, and moral, of waking up to one's true humanity." See "Structure of Imagery," p. 73.

Malory's forests are equally strenuous, demanding his knights' eternal vigilance. Sleep in Malory's forests, as in Spenser's Faerie, implies a slackness in virtue promising spiritual peril.

Shakespeare's bitter forest makes one not happier but wiser. For there is "no flattery" in this forest only nature's "counsellors" that would "feelingly persuade" one what he is; see As You Like It, II.i. 10-11.

¹⁴ Campbell describes the "atonement with the father," Hero, p. 146, as the tragic insight "All life is sorrowful," combined with the creative affirmative "Life must be!" The tragedy is not denied but transformed by a shift in emphasis embodied in the comic consent. From the perfected perspective of the source, in the Father, tragedy and comedy are simply two terms of the single experience that is life. Romance's vision of reconciliation shows us the same thing; when viewed from the perfected perspective, its tragic and comic notes compose the harmony that is life.

This creative affirmative which Campbell says completely validates life's tragedy "in the majesty of Being" (p. 147), is described by Nietzsche as a "golden-emerald rapture," the virtue of the dancer that says Yes to all woe in saying Yes to one joy. See Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For Everyone and No One, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), p. 247 and pp. 331-32.

¹⁵Frye, "Structure of Imagery," p. 78. This "new earth" existing "within the order of nature," but "turned upward" and "aligned with a new heaven" resembles the golden-green world created by King Orfeo, which also "is not heaven" but a "world of recovered human nature," or what I would call reconciled human nature.

¹⁶The restorative virtue of romance's vision of reconciliation heals in the sense Norman O. Brown uses: "To heal is to make whole, as in wholesome; to make one again; to unify or reunify." See Love's Body (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 80. For it unifies the ideal and the real and makes man whole again by reunifying his golden potential and his natural limitations.

Chapter II: A DIVINE PERSPECTIVE

¹Sir Orfeo, in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. by Donald B. Sands (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, Inc., 1966), p. 187, ll. 5-6. All other line references to the text of Sir Orfeo are to this edition.

²Bristol concludes that "Heurodis is clearly some aspect of human experience vulnerable to loss," because she is stolen away despite the fact that she is not tempted or moved by the Fairy King's display; see Michael D. Bristol, "The Structure of the Middle English Sir Orfeo," PLL, VI (1970), 343.

³James F. Knapp, "The Meaning of Sir Orfeo," MLC, XXIX (1968), 269. Knapp proposes that Sir Orfeo presents, from the view point of human finitude, a conflict which poses the question: "What are the conditions of the world in which man must live?" The answer it gives us, by way of Herodis' abduction, is that "it is a world in which man's joy may be snatched away without warning and without explanation."

⁴Penelope Doob makes this conclusion in her book, Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 158-207. Drawing on John Block Friedman's valuable discussion of the medieval Commentaries on the Orpheus legend; see "Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-day Demon," Speculum, XLI (1966), 22-29, and Orpheus in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 175-94; Doob similarly argues the identification of the Fairy King with the Noon-day Demon. But unlike Friedman, Doob argues that

this identification implies that Herodis was guilty of the spiritual sin of sloth. As sloth was traditionally associated with the attack of the Noon-day Demon, Herodis' susceptibility to his attack is given as evidence of her sin of sloth.

Herodis' delight in the orchard is seen as morally suspect, when viewed through the medium of the Boethian reading of the Orpheus legend, a reading which Doob perceives strongly resembles the allegorical interpretation of the Fall propounded by the Church Fathers. She becomes as Eurydice, a reflection of Eve, whose enjoyment of the garden is compared to the soul's delight in fleshly pleasures. But this medium separates us from the poem which surely does not depict Herodis as overly-sensuous. Doob later admits that Herodis' enjoyment of natural beauty may be morally neutral, but yet it indicates, to her mind, a forgetfulness of other obligations and hence her tendency to spiritual sloth.

Herodis' sleep and its consequences heighten what Doob perceives is an implicit condemnation. Her sleep beneath the "ympe-tree" is shown to be analogous to Eve's Fall by the Tree of Knowledge. Her fall through sloth, likened to Eve's fall through fleshly desire, is confirmed by the attack of the Fairy King identified with the Noon-day Demon.

Although Doob's argument is very convincing and indeed valuable, her evidence is drawn, for the most part, from sources outside the poem. Internal evidence leads me to the opposite conclusion. It is Herodis' very virtue, her innocence, which makes her available to the attack of the Fairy King.

⁵Constance Davies would not agree with my interpretation of the significance of the "ympe-tree" which she also discusses in, "Classical Threads in Orfeo," MLR, LVI (1961), 161-166. She proposes that the "ympe-tree" as it first appears in the orchard, is reminiscent of the magic tree in the sacred grove of Celtic fairy lore, and of Virgil's Elm of Dreams when it reappears in the Fairy King's court. In each case she supposes the tree is connected with sleep and carries supernatural significance. Nor would Penelope Doob agree with my interpretation. She suggests a Christian significance, unlike that derived by Davies from Celtic and Classical sources, which makes the "ympe-tree" analogous to the Tree of Knowledge through which man fell. See Doob, Nebuchadnezzar, pp. 175-76.

⁶William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, in Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed., by G.B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1967), IV. iv. 79-97.

⁷See Doob, Nebuchadnezzar, pp. 173-75.

⁸Ibid., pp. 175-77.

⁹This is what I believe Doob does by finding Herodis at fault. The sin of her literary ancestors need not be visited upon her unless the poem finds her similarly at fault. I believe the poem does not provide convincing evidence of Herodis' guilt.

¹⁰See Doob, Nebuchadnezzar, pp. 178-79, and Friedman, "Eurydice," 25-28, and Orpheus, pp. 188-89. Although Friedman refuses to locate blame in Herodis, he is not so tolerant of the Fairy King. Friedman rightly does not believe that Herodis was susceptible to the Fairy King because her nature drew her to temporalia. He rejects this interpretation because her conduct, shown us in the poem is blameless. But though Friedman holds true to the text here, declaring Herodis blameless according to the poem's internal evidence, he goes outside the poem for evidence that the Fairy King is Satan.

Friedman derives his interpretation of the Fairy King from manuscript illuminations of Eurydice's slayer as the draconopede or man-headed serpent, which he translates into the King of the Fairies formed as mortal man. He further suggests that Herodis' "undrentide" abduction identifies her abductor with the noon-day Demon of Psalm 90:3.

The connection is confirmed by attributing lust to the Fairy King, derived from the well-noted lustful character of both Satan and the King of the Fairies. But this is at odds with the fact given in the poem that the Fairy King already has a queen. Though the Fairy King does indeed evoke the energy of a demonic force, that does not make him Satan. It simply identifies him as the demonic representative of a sinister Faery, the inversion of the true Faery of desire.

¹¹Bristol has also noted the "demonic energy" conveyed in the image of the Fairy King; see Bristol, "Structure," 339-47. His perception of this demonic quality does not lead him to identify the Fairy King with Satan. Instead he shows that this quality reveals the Fairy King's opposition to the world Orfeo would create out of his desire, a joyous harmony informed with his love and his virtue. He further perceives that "the important force of the revelation" Orfeo receives on entering the Fairy King's inner court, is "in specifying the content of the demonic."

¹²Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, "The Significance of Sir Orfeo's Self-Exile," RES, XVIII (1967), 247. Doob also comments on Orfeo's willing acceptance of his exile and the death it implies as it contributes to her identification of Orfeo as a "Holy Wild Man," who enters the wilderness to be purified; see Nebuchadnezzar, p. 181.

¹³Gros Louis, "Significance," 248.

¹⁴Ibid., 248.

¹⁵Gros Louis describes this repetitive and purposeless activity as a "purgatory" in which Orfeo "undergoes a kind of purification," (p. 248).

¹⁶See Nietzsche, Zarathustra, pp. 331-32.

¹⁷Bristol ("Structure," 339-47) and Knapp ("Meaning," 270-71) have also discussed the theme of reality and illusion conveyed in the images of

the Fairy King and his castle. Bristol shows how this theme is bodied forth in the recurring opposition between sight and sound, the false display of glory reflected in the Fairy King and his castle, and the true harmony of joy heard in Orfeo's harping, to disclose that "the eye confounds but the ear reveals." The paradise reflected in the Fairy King's castle is one "of pride and surface display epitomized in the image of artificial illumination," an illusion which confounds the eye. But the echo of paradise heard in Orfeo's kingdom reveals a genuine experience of joy.

Knapp similarly sees the theme of illusion and reality in the description of the Fairy King's castle, a marvellous exterior concealing a malevolent interior. He also perceives that this constitutes "a powerful and significant ironic contrast--just as earlier the appearance of the Fairy King was quickly undercut by his threats of bloody violence."

Knapp suggests that this theme of reality and illusion develops from and furthers the central theme of the poem which concerns the transient nature of the human world. He has also noted the poet's use of the same words to describe Orfeo's possessions and those of the Fairy King: "We have already seen how fleeting and unstable are castles and towers in the mortal world; that they grace this sinister land of headless, mad, and murdered human beings only serves to cast doubt on the value of such objects."

¹⁸Bristol's perception of the opposition between sight and sound which is crystallized in the confrontation between Orfeo and the Fairy King at his castle, noted above, has contributed to my discussion here.

¹⁹Frye, Anatomy, p. 157.

²⁰Bristol proposes that the structure of Sir Orfeo is analogous to the structure of revelation. Therefore he deals with this episode as it contributes to that structure; see "Structure," 346-47. He suggests that the final section serves a mythic function which corresponds to the return of the redeemer hero promised in the parable of the good steward, Luke 12: 37-45. Orfeo's testing of his own faithful steward calls forth this biblical echo which serves to cast Orfeo in Christ's role as redeemer.

Chapter III: A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

¹Thomas Chestre, Sir Launfal, in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. by Donald B. Sands (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, Inc., 1966), p. 204, ll.46-48. All other line references to the text of Sir Launfal are to this edition.

²John C. Hirsh ("Pride as Theme in Sir Launfal," N&Q, CCXII (1967), 288-91) and Anthony S.G. Edwards ("Unknightly Conduct in Sir Launfal," N&Q, CCXIII (1968), 328-29) have also discussed the theme of pride and its ambiguous nature and consequently have contributed greatly to my reading of this romance.

Hirsh notes the poet's "heavy emphasis" on the "theme of noble pride" and comments on the double meaning it conveys: "Although 'pride' is a word usually associated with Launfal by his enemies in the pejorative context, what is clearly implied is that the knight is maintaining an individual sense of personal honour and integrity, and what his adversary has found irksome is the outward manifestation of this sensed inner nobility." Although Hirsch perceives the double meaning implied by the word "pride" as it is used by Launfal's adversaries, he does not perceive the essential ambiguity implicit in Launfal's virtue.

Whereas Hirsh fails to take into account the tendency to fallen pride inherent in Launfal's noble pride, Edwards does not. Edwards recognizes this deeper ambiguity and develops it fully in his discussion of the poetic function of Gwenevere. He suggests that Launfal's conduct is defined at certain moments by her role within the poem to create a "dual vision of Launfal as proud knight when seen in isolation from Guinevere and as foolishly proud when seen in relation to her...."

³ Edwards similarly sees Gwenevere's constant malice functioning in such a way as to continually arouse disastrous pride in the otherwise nobly proud Launfal, see Edwards, "Unknightly Conduct," 328-29.

⁴ Edwards also perceives: "Against the moral constant of her [Gwenevere's] evil conduct, Launfal's momentary failing is mitigated." See, Edwards, "Unknightly Conduct," 329.

⁵ Edwards gives us an excellent description of Sir Launfal's final enigmatic vision. Launfal "is removed to a context, the fairy world, where contingency cannot lessen the actuality of his knightly prowess. His pride is finally validated in the land of fairy; and the implication is that it has to be validated there. For it is only there that Launfal is finally secure from the false pride Gwenevere has been able to inspire in him." See Edwards, "Unknightly Conduct," 329.

This is surely a fuller and more valid description of Sir Launfal's final vision than the one Hirsh offers. Hirsh concludes the poem's ending is simply "the final victory of Launfal over the forces that would oppose his pride and his honour." See Hirsh, "Pride," 291.

Campbell's discussion of the "refusal of the return," Hero, pp. 193-207, relates in an interesting way to the mythic pattern present in Sir Launfal. This refusal resists the full round of the monomyth which requires the hero return to "the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing" of that world.

Campbell notes that many heroes have refused this responsibility and that their myths consequently "touch us with the tragedy of life." But this is neither sufficient nor satisfying for "...if the monomyth is to fulfill its promise, not human failure...but human success is what we shall have to be shown." (p. 207)

Although Launfal does not refuse the requisite return, the court rejects his boon and so is this mythic pattern's promise similarly unfulfilled.

⁶My understanding of the function of irony is drawn from Frye's discussion of the ironic resolution; see Northrop Frye, "The Road of Excess," in Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications, ed. by Bernice Slote (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), p. 14.

Chapter IV: A DUAL PERSPECTIVE

¹Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. by J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1, l.18. All other line references to the text of Sir Gawain are to this edition.

²Several critics have noted the essential theme of mutability; see Denton Fox, "Introduction," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Denton Fox (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968), pp. 8-9; Richard Hamilton Green, "Gawain's Shield and the Quest for Perfection," in Sir Gawain and Pearl: Critical Essays, ed. by Robert J. Blanch (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 181; and Charles Moorman, "Myth and Mediaeval Literature: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in Blanch, pp. 232-33.

Fox's discussion of the themes of mutability and the interplay between nature and civilization has especially contributed to my reading of this romance. He also perceives an implicit connection between the natural world and the Green Knight, deeming neither "hostile" but simply "other." The seasonal passages, expressive of the mutability of the world and the inevitable alternation between life and death, reveal a regular cycle not chaos as Fox shows. "Like the Green Knight himself, nature is inhuman, ever-changing, and unavoidable." And, as I hope to show, the pattern present in the cycle of change unfolded in the natural world, corresponds with the purpose present in the cycle of temptation and trial unfolded by the Green Knight. This pattern and this purpose are the evidence of the golden quality indwelling in the green.

³The superlative joy that emanates from Arthur's court has been discussed by others; see Green, "Gawain's Shield," in Blanch, p. 179; and Moorman, "Myth," in Blanch, p. 225. I disagree with Green's suggestion that this joyous description of Arthur's court, in which "everything is superlative," reveals "an excessive self-confidence" that "will or ought to be shaken" by the events which follow.

I also disagree with Moorman's proposal that the high praise Arthur's company receives by virtue of this description is tempered by its contrast with the description of Bercilak's court. I am not convinced of either the "poet's awareness of an excessive self-confidence" or of his intent to contrast the two courts. I believe the poet is showing us the potential perfection Arthur's innocent court promises. Though its virtue is innocent it is not faulty; it is only untried.

⁴Fox has also noted: "The atmosphere is predominantly that of youthfulness and untried innocence; all the people are in their 'first age.'" See Fox, "Introduction," p. 8.

⁵Moorman comments on the fact that Arthur's priests join in the general merriment to conclude that the Christmas season in Arthur's court has no special religious significance; see Moorman, "Myth," in Blanch, p. 233. He suggests this serves to further the intended contrast with Bercilak's court where Christmas is celebrated in a more holy and sober fashion. I find the more joyful celebration at Arthur's court to be another expression of its innocence, not intended as a contrast, implicitly condemning, but as evidence of the need to fulfill that innocence in the experience of reality.

⁶The essential ambiguity implicit in the nature of the Green Knight has been noted by the following critics: Stephen Manning, "A Psychological Interpretation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. by Donald R. Howard and Christian Zacher (Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 285; and Sacvan Bercovitch, "Romance and Anti-Romance in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in Howard and Zacher, pp. 257-66. Manning suggests the ambiguous nature of the Green Knight derives from his identification with the Shadow of the unconscious which is both good and evil while Bercovitch suggests it derives from the duality of romantic and realistic elements which pervade the poem.

I agree, in part, with Manning for the Green Knight, as well as the green world he inhabits, can be associated with the inner realm of the unconscious. But I believe the poem gives us better terms in its images than the psychological terms Manning uses to make this point.

The duality of romance and realistic elements perceived by Bercovitch to define the Green Knight's nature is inherently romance-like. Romance seeks to reconcile the ideal with the real by displacing it in a human direction. The Green Knight performs this essential reconciling function by showing Gawain the natural limitations of his ideal knighthood, by humanizing the perfect pentagonal knight. The Green Knight's dual nature, both golden and green, is an image of the reconciliation Gawain must achieve.

⁷Fox also perceives that Gawain's quest can be viewed as a journey "into a dead land, in a dead season, to seek his own death," which paradoxically leads to new life as the final scene, "so deathlike in its geography and in its season, turns out to be the place of rebirth." See Fox, "Introduction," p. 9 & 12.

⁸Moorman comments on Arthur's response to the Green Knight's challenge; see Moorman, "Myth," in Blanch, p. 226. He proposes that Arthur's response is "almost rude and certainly high-handed," thus proving him unfit for the quest at hand. I do not think the text substantiates Moorman's interpretation. The harshness of the Green Knight's accusation of cowardice may be deemed somewhat rude whereas Arthur's response, though reserved, is

not even "almost rude" but rather courageously courteous in light of this discourteous accusation which calls into question Arthur's very identity which is founded in the integrity of his Round Table. As noted above, the shameful aspect of the situation lies not in Arthur's response but in the cowardly and discourteous silence of his court which makes it necessary for him to reply to the challenge himself.

⁹I obviously disagree with Jan Solomon's thesis which "posits for Sir Gawain and The Green Knight a lesson in humility and moderation regarding Gawain's own self-esteem and pride in his knightly virtues." See Jan Solomon, "The Lesson of Sir Gawain," in Howard and Zacher, pp. 267-78. I believe he wrongly establishes the existence of pride early in Gawain as evidenced by his eager acceptance of the quest in place of Arthur. Surely Gawain's own words indicate just the opposite. Gawain's humility is established here, not his pride, although his utterance proves his humility is not yet well grounded but simply given him by virtue of Arthur's blood. Though the potential of pride is not evident here it is indeed called forth in the trials following. But through the confrontation with his awakened pride Gawain conquers it and so consolidates his humility. Formerly founded in Arthur's blood, Gawain's humility is then incorporated within.

Green also suggests that Gawain's assumption of the Green Knight's challenge is undertaken with "a humility which, as events prove, reflects more social grace than any profounder kind,...." See Green, "Gawain's Shield," in Blanch, p. 180.

¹⁰My interpretation of Gawain's quest shares with Manning's "Psychological Interpretation," in Howard and Zacher, pp. 279-94. He views Gawain's quest as the encounter with the Shadow of the unconscious, personified in the Green Knight, which is essential if self-knowledge is to be gained. This involves making conscious the inferior traits embodied in the unconscious as well as confronting the fact of one's mortality, in order to effect the necessary integration of the personality.

Fox similarly sees Gawain's quest as an inward journey tending toward death; see Fox, "Introduction," pp. 9-12. He rightly proposes that Bercilak's castle is "a place where the hero is tested, not against monsters and physical perils, but against interior dangers--interior both in the sense that they are represented by domestic situations, and in the sense that the dangers are really within the hero's mind." He also shows that in the course of this interior journey Gawain almost loses his life by seeking to keep it, but ultimately finds it by being willing to lose it.

This journey of Gawain's down and in, ultimately leads to the revelation of his limitations and finally, his mortality. The acceptance of that knowledge thus revealed in turn leads to reconciliation, integration in Manning's terms, or rebirth in Fox's terms.

¹¹I certainly cannot agree with Solomon's opinion that the court correctly perceives that it is foolish and wasteful to risk such excellence as Gawain's for a Christmas "gomen." The court's perspective on the action is limited by virtue of their innocence. The perspective of Arthur and Gawain, though also innocent, seems to encompass a recognition of an undefined purpose within this "gomen," even if unconsciously. See Solomon, "Lesson," in Howard and Zacher, p. 268.

¹²Fox, "Introduction," p. 9.

¹³Although I propose that Gawain's descending journey into the centre must needs be undertaken alone, this may be qualified by Campbell's insight concerning the monomyth which equally applies to this mythic pattern defined by the hero's journey; see Campbell, Hero, p. 25. "...we have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world."

¹⁴Campbell's discussion of "the call to adventure," Hero, pp. 49-58, explains the significance of Gawain's experience in this strange and fearfully unfamiliar world. The call to adventure leads to a "spiritual passage which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth." The "passing of the threshold" is at hand when the familiar life is "outgrown," or, as in Sir Gawain, when the familiar life is innocent and in need of growth; when the old ideals "no longer fit," or, as in Sir Gawain, when the ideals need to be acted out in experience. The "herald" of the adventure, judged terrifying by the world because unknown, reveals the dark way "where the jewels glow" golden in the green, as the jewel in the heart of the lotus. The Green Knight is this "herald," representing the "unknown," calling Gawain forth to adventure in his strange land. The adventure marks a new period, indicated in Sir Gawain by the new cycle of the New Year which marks the passage from innocence into experience. That which must be faced is unknown and therefore frightening as is this wilderness world Gawain encounters at the outset of his quest. But if Gawain persists in his quest, Campbell promises the dark will disclose the light, chaos will unfold the meaning, and death will deliver rebirth into a fuller and more genuine life than innocence has known.

¹⁵This interpretation obviously shares with Manning's "Psychological Interpretation," in Howard and Zacher, pp. 279-94, and also with Campbell's understanding of the hero's inward journey.

¹⁶I do not agree with Moorman that the host's display of courtesy and hospitality exists to cast a poor light backward on Arthur's rude welcome; see "Myth," in Blanch, pp. 225-26. I would argue that the host's warm welcome serves to suggest that his impending temptations are kindly meant.

¹⁷My interpretation of Morgan resembles Manning's insofar as he sees her as the negative aspect of the unconscious as a whole, unredeemed by the positive aspect of the anima, Lady Bercilak; see "Psychological Interpretation," in Howard and Zacher, pp. 286-88. In the same way I believe Morgan manifests the negative aspect of the green world, its destructive potential

of chaos, while Lady Bercilak manifests its creative potential, the golden element indwelling in the green, which is realized in the purpose implicit in her temptations, in the gold adorning the Green Knight, the order evident in the seasons' cycle, and finally, in the grace that informs the green world inside Gawain by virtue of his fall into nature.

¹⁸For a specific examination of the poem's symmetry, based on the structural parallels of the narrative units and the symbolism which greatly contributes to the poem's unified pattern see Donald R. Howard, "Structure and Symmetry in Sir Gawain," in Blanch, pp. 195-209, and Stoddard Malarkey and J. Barre Toelken, "Gawain and the Green Girdle," in Howard and Zacher, pp. 236-44.

¹⁹Edgar Wind discusses this process of the unfolding of the divine unit into a triad in his book, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1958).

²⁰Several critics have commented on the parallel between the host's hunt in the forest and his wife's hunt in the bedroom but Howard develops it most fully; see "Structure and Symmetry," in Blanch, p. 205. He also recognizes that the animals hunted by the host suggest those qualities Gawain must conquer inside himself, specifically--timidity, ferocity, and cunning.

²¹Fox also sees Gawain finally "faced with a danger from a totally unexpected direction: although he has resisted so many fleshly temptations, he is finally overcome by the strongest of all natural desires, the wish for self-preservation." See Fox, "Introduction," p. 12. This wish for self-preservation amounts to pride, as I show, and is indeed the failing least expected from our humble hero.

²²Several critics have discussed the correspondence between the images of the green girdle and the golden pentangle, and the significance of the displacement of the pentangle by the girdle; see Green, "Gawain's Shield," in Blanch, p. 202; and Malarkey and Toelken, "Gawain and the Green Girdle," in Howard and Zacher, p. 244.

²³For a detailed discussion of this final temptation offered by the guide see Paul Delany, "The Role of the Guide in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in Howard and Zacher, pp. 227-35.

²⁴I cannot agree with Engelhardt's interpretation of Gawain's response to the guide's temptation as being a self-righteous rejection; see George J. Engelhardt, "The Predicament of Gawain," in Middle English Survey: Critical Essays, ed. by Edward Vasta (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), pp. 57-69. Gawain's brusque reply does not express "self-righteous annoyance" but rather reveals his constant fidelity to his quest which is drawn from the deep faith he espouses following his rejection. I

consequently disagree with Delany's conclusion that Gawain's "show of virtue before the guide was at best self-deception and at worst pious hypocrisy." See Delany, "Role of the Guide," in Howard and Zacher, p. 234.

²⁵ Malarkey and Toeklen also recognize that Gawain is unconscious of the significance of his guilt though he wears the symbol of it openly, see "Gawain and the Green Girdle," in Howard and Zacher, p. 244. These critics draw a valuable conclusion from this showing that it creates "a visualized balance in which the theme of the poem is made specific and external." For, "Gawain after the encounter wears openly and consciously, as a symbol of guilt and a sign of penance, what he wore before the encounter openly and unconsciously as an external manifestation of the fact that, indeed, the green girdle had momentarily superceded the pentangle."

²⁶ Several critics discuss the significance of the court's laughter, often to different conclusions from my own. Among them are: Charles Moorman, "The Stained Knight: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in his book, A Knight There Was: The Evolution of the Knight in Literature (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), pp. 58-75; Larry D. Benson, "The Return to Camelot," from Art and Tradition in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" by Larry D. Benson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965), pp. 240-48, in Twentieth Century Interpretations, pp. 28-34; Green, "Gawain's Shield," in Blanch, pp. 193-94; John Burrow, "The Two Confessional Scenes in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in Blanch, pp. 131-35; and Bercovitch, "Romance and Anti-Romance," in Howard and Zacher, p. 266.

I oppose Moorman's conclusion that "The poem ends in the hollow laughter of the doomed court." To arrive at this conclusion Moorman imposes upon the poem the whole tragedy of the Round Table which is better left to Malory. He suggests Arthur's court is beset by the potential dangers of sexual wantonness, personified in Gwenevere, and unfaithfulness, to be manifested in the impending feuds of the Round Table members, impending in Malory but not in Sir Gawain. There is no evidence at all within the poem to indicate either of these dangers, not even potentially. Because Gwenevere survives and because Gawain fails to keep faith with Bercilak, Moorman concludes both dangers remain. Thus he surmises from the court's laughter that it does not take seriously Gawain's gift of great value which is also a warning of the impending failure of chivalric society. Consequently, in allowing the girdle to become the bauldric of a new brotherhood, Gawain accepts the false standards of the court, being unable or unwilling to communicate his lesson.

Surely it is just the opposite. The court's standards are true and virtuous--witness the significance of the pentangle--but they must encompass the reality of human limitation. Gawain brings this knowledge to the court which willingly accepts it--witness the wise and loving accord with which they form the new brotherhood. Gawain's recognition of his failure does tend toward the tragic but the court's comic perspective redeems the poem from tragedy as it recognizes Gawain's larger success. It is in Malory that we find this mythic pattern unfolding a truly tragic vision.

I agree with Burrow that the court's laughter is not meant to be taken as frivolous or satirical, any more than it is to be taken as an implicit

condemnation of the court, as Moorman suggests. Burrow's deeper insight into the court's laughter rightly reveals that its mirth does reflect on Gawain to furnish a kind of corrective to his extravagant shame.

Green believes the court's laughter suggests that it will probably not profit from Gawain's lesson in humility. But he does qualify this conclusion: "amid the relieved laughter of the knights and ladies one sees the wry smile of the amiable poet. It is enough if some of the laughter is directed at themselves." I am certain that much of it is.

Though Benson proposes that Gawain does not change because he does not join in the court's laughter I must argue that he has already changed simply by returning to the court and not renouncing the claims of his knight-hood though aware of his limitations. Although his shame forbids his joining in the court's laughter, as his humility blinds him to the success his failure also entails, Gawain is clearly not the same knight he was in the beginning. He has changed by being humanized and a new knight has emerged from this change. The Golden Knight is now Golden-Green. Gawain is still prepared to uphold the pentangle of perfection but he will do so with a new awareness of his own imperfection and of the natural and inevitable limitation of earthly ideals.

I agree entirely with Benson's evaluation of the laughter as it concerns the court, being evidence of the change effected in it. The court's laughter makes light of Gawain's fault but does not reject chivalry for it is possible to laugh at him yet receive him back into their membership. The court laughs at itself in laughing at Gawain who has represented it in this quest, and in doing so the court accepts both his fault and his virtue as its own. Thus, "the fame of the Round Table and the ideal it represents is now modified by the bend of bright green and the tolerant acknowledgement of human limitations that it implies."

Benson sees this final movement downward into failure as unlike romance but, as this thesis proposes, romance often tells of illumination won by falling. It is not unlike romance to reveal the ideal to be limited. It is the function of romance to humanize the ideal to make it familiar and attainable.

Bercovitch shows that the "anti-romance laughter" of the court ultimately re-affirms the poem's romance values. Though I would not call the court's laughter anti-romantic it does what Bercovitch says it does. It "tempers Gawain's anguish," and "far from decrying the knight's morality," it "adds another dimension to it." Thus it functions in an inherently romantic fashion reconciling Gawain's human failing with his greater success which has proven him to be as near perfection as this world permits. "Though Gawain is sometimes ridiculed, his courtesy, because thus humanized, provides the pattern of civilization, of good breeding, and proper conduct."

²⁷For an examination of the relationship between the symbols of the green girdle and the crown of thorns, see Paul Piehler, The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971), p. 153.

Chapter V: THE REALITY OF ROMANCE

¹Frye, Anatomy, p. 135.

²Hebrews 11:1.

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