L.O. 4300



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

'Ther is a Byrd Men Calle an Owle, and Yett a Lady I am:'[1] Liminality and Women in Middle English Arthurian Romance.

By:
Elizabeth Avis Fisher

Thesis for the degree of Ph.D.
Department of English
National University of Ireland
Maynooth

Head of Department: Professor Brian Cosgrove
Supervisor of Research: Dr. Margaret Robson

May, 2006

Summary

This thesis explores the liminal condition of the female characters in five Middle English Arthurian romances. It argues that the common critical perception of these women as marginalised individuals changes when their liminal identity is acknowledged. Rather than occupying peripheral space within the narratives, the female characters straddle borders of identification, resulting in their inhabitation and experience of two realms simultaneously. It examines the ways in which these women exist as individual characters in their own right, rather than instruments of male-dominated culture. The five narratives examined in this thesis are: *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell; The Awntyrs Off Arthure; Lybeaus Desconus; Ywain and Gawain;* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. These texts were chosen owing to their definition as anonymous, late Middle English Arthurian romances and due to the significant presence of women within these narratives. The first chapter discusses previous critical approaches to the texts and the employment of the theme of liminality in relation to Middle English literature. The second chapter explores liminality and women in the *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, with particular emphasis on female sovereignty and transformation. The third chapter discusses the concept of liminality as it relates to *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*, examining the issue of the physical body, speech and the supernatural. In the fourth chapter, the liminal nature of motherhood in *Lybeaus Desconus* is examined, as well as the issue of female sovereignty and the body. Chapter five discusses *Ywain and Gawain* and the concept of heroism and gender. In chapter six, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is discussed as a complex culmination of

female liminal identity and the ways in which it facilitates a new understanding of women in Middle English Arthurian Romance.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	**1**
Supernatural and Otherworlds	13
Loathly Ladies, the Abject and the Female Body	21
Discourse	31
Conclusion	35
Chapter 2: *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*	**43**
Sovereignty	44
Borders, Wilderness, and the Female Body	58
Transformation	65
Discourse	70
Chapter 3: *The Awntyrs off Arthure*	**82**
Otherworlds and the Supernatural	83
The Female Body: Speech, Queenship and Adultery	92
Sovereignty	99
Chapter 4: *Lybeaus Desconus*	**113**
Motherhood and Liminality	114
Maternity, Paternity and the Identity of the Hero	118
Elene	129
Identity, Quest and the 'Other'	134
La Dame D'Amour	140
Male Magic and the Phallic Woman	142

Chapter 5: ***Ywain and Gawain*** **154**

The Female Liminal Experience and 'Male' Heroism 155

Alundyne 161

Lunet 170

Liminality and the Female Body 172

Heroism and Male Identity: An Exploration 173

Male Heroism and Identity in *Ywain and Gawain* 177

Chapter 6: ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*** **194**

Heroes and Otherworlds 195

Liminal Women and Otherworlds 207

Morgan Le Faye 208

Guenevere 210

The Virgin Mary 212

Lady Bertilak 214

Conclusion **225**

Bibliography:

Primary Sources 233

Secondary Sources 236

[1] *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. Lines 316-317. When faced with Arthur's repulsion at her appearance, Ragnell makes this statement. In the Middle Ages, the owl was traditionally associated with night, decay, filth and death. However, it was also symbolically associated with Christ, whose inhabitation of darkness represented Christ's forgiveness of sinners. Ragnell associates herself with an ambigous and 'otherworldly' animal, while simultaneously emphasasing her humanity, status and femininity. In two lines she reveals her identity as a liminal individual and the liminal condition of the female protagonists within this thesis.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Gregg and Shireen, whose continuous love, support and encouragement have made this thesis possible.

To my husband Ken, for his constant love and never-ending faith in my ability to finish.

Huge thanks to Dr. Margaret Robson for being such an encouraging and exceptional supervisor, and for maintaining such a positive attitude in every situation.

Thank you also to the English Department, in particular Prof. Brian Cosgrove, Dr. Margaret Kelleher, Dr. Joe Cleary and Amanda Bent.

Also to all the staff in the NUIM library for your constant support.

Thank you to my fellow postgrads in the English department, especially Eoghan Smith and Ariane Hans for copious amounts of tea and conversations that did not involve Sir Gawain.

Introduction

This thesis sets out to explore the ways in which liminality impacts upon the female characters in five Middle English Arthurian romances. My position is that liminality is a significant theme within Middle English romance in general and in relation to women in Middle English romance in particular. Criticism has tended to focus on women as peripheral or marginal characters, existing on the edges of social and textual inclusion. When reading a text from this point of view, it is relatively easy to argue that the female characters exist only in relation to the male protagonist and his society. By placing women on the periphery, it is assumed that they are marginal individuals who are powerless and lack the ability or social position to inspire change. If we are to follow Sheila Fisher's argument that women in Middle English romance 'often figure significantly, not so much for their own sakes, but in order to become involved in the construction (and at time, destruction) of men's chivalric identities'[1] our reading of the texts is affected by negative presumptions of 'place', with regard to these female characters. However, if we are to examine the ways in which these same women appear, not as marginal, but as liminal characters, a new and more positive reading of women within the genre is facilitated. By acknowledging the liminal nature of these characters, they become inhabitants of two realms simultaneously and our reading places them, not on the periphery, but on the threshold, of experience. This automatically transfers them to a space wherein they exist as autonomous individuals, rather than women condemned to textual, physical and social margins. In this thesis I will explore how the female characters in the five romances, *Ywain and Gawain,*

Lybeaus Desconus, The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell, The Awntyrs off Arthure and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, may be characterised as liminal individuals whose constant existence on a threshold between various realms enables new readings of the texts.[2] This thesis will use feminist criticism and anthropological analysis in order to re-direct the standpoint away from the typical male-centred position, to one that contributes to an understanding of the characterisation and significance of the female protagonists.

In this chapter I intend to examine the critical approaches which have been employed to explore women in insular Middle English Arthurian romance. Specific emphasis will be on the five texts *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell, The Marriage of Sir Gawain, The Awntyrs off Arthure, Lybeaus Desconus,* and *Ywain and Gawain*, and the critical approaches to these texts. I will review and examine how particular aspects associated with female representation within the texts are both investigated and overlooked. The summary of existing research on the topic will, in this chapter, be divided categorically by theme and motif. The theme of female discourse and how female speech impacts upon the male protagonists and the action within the text and the various ways in which it has been critically examined with reference to Middle English Arthurian literature will also be a category of investigation. I also intend to summarise how motifs of sovereignty, transformation and the supernatural, or 'otherworld', with regard to female characterisations, have played a major role in the shaping of modern criticism on Middle English texts, with specific regard to the five texts previously outlined. Through this summary of existing critical

work, I intend to show how the issue of liminality and the feminine has been either briefly touched upon, or overlooked entirely by modern critical investigation on Middle English Arthurian literature. While it has remained a point of extensive research in fields such as anthropology and medieval Irish literature, investigation into the ways in which female representation in Middle English Arthurian literature, while including specific and separate study, has not combined these motifs in relation to their impact on the liminal sphere in which the female characters ultimately exist. My purpose is to investigate the ways in which modern critical inquiry has analysed the varying aspects of female characterisation, such as the loathly lady motif, female discourse, the otherworld, transformation and sovereignty, but has not combined them under the aegis of one aspect that connects them all; that of liminal space and experience.

The term liminality was first coined by anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (published 1909). Van Gennep examines liminality as it relates to ritual and transition, dividing the process into a three-part structure; separation, the liminal period, and reassimilation. In the 1960s, anthropologist Victor Turner expanded on Van Gennep's model, focusing on the liminal stage itself, and he defines liminal individuals as in a state of being 'betwixt and between'. Mary Douglas also explores liminality as a state in which an individual may become powerful, dangerous, or both, owing to the potential for pollution within the liminal area.[3] The anthropological interpretation and analysis of liminality implies a definition of existence between two realms simultaneously. This placement, therefore, implies a simultaneous occupation of two realms. While it can be a transitional phase, it is, more

significantly, a position which enables a perspective of two separate and sometimes opposing realms. In this thesis, liminality will be defined as a condition which allows for mediation between physical, social or psychological territories. The combination of anthropological and feminist models of examination complement each other through the emphasis on borders and women. In feminist criticism, the concept of marginalisation of women within the texts is an issue that arises consistently, however, by applying anthropological concepts to the study, women become repositioned at the centre. This facilitates a strategy of reading which confers women with power that is absent in male-centred criticism of the narratives.

The texts I have chosen to analyse in this thesis may be categorised as Middle English Arthurian romance. These texts were chosen as a result of their inclusion of women who possess sovereignty. This is manifested as sovereignty over the men in the romance, which results in submission to the women or the feminisation of the men themselves. In the three 'quest' romances, *Ywain and Gawain, Lybeaus Desconus* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the narratives relate the male protagonist's search for identity. However, the tests undertaken, as well as the motivational influences, are different in each narrative. In *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Arthurian society is itself subjected to the threat of the 'other'; the former through a manifestation of its own misplaced preoccupations, the latter through the incorporation and regenerative capabilities of the female 'other'. While each romance differs in its emphasis, they all display women whose liminality is identifiable, who exist as autonomous, sovereign individuals within the narratives and

are dominant over the male characters. In these romances, sovereignty, female discourse, transformation, the supernatural and the female body are crucial areas of exploration. These themes exist in relation to the liminal nature of the female protagonists: discourse and the female body emphasize the physical liminal areas and actions of speech, sex and reproduction; female sovereignty highlights the liminal existence between social acceptability and autonomy; the transformation of the female protagonist places her between realms of experience, in which she maintains a knowledge of both realms simultaneously, while the supernatural element facilitates her placement within those realms and defines physical and geographical areas accordingly. My decision to exclude Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, Sir Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal* and Malory's *Works* stems from a decision to analyse anonymous narratives which lack the preconceptions that invariably arise from a text with a known author.[4] The texts chosen all date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. *Ywain and Gawain* was composed in the Northern regions, between 1300 and 1350; *Lybeaus Desconus* was probably composed between 1325 and 1350; *The Awntyrs off Arthure* dates to the latter part of the fourteenth century and was written in Northern England, while *The Weddyng* dates to the end of the fifteenth century and was most likely composed in the East Midlands. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the most well known romance in this study, dates to the end of the fourteenth century, its dialect attributed to the Northwest Midlands.[5]

This thesis consciously positions the analysis of the texts it discusses in an order

designed to emphasise the development and progression of the key concepts addressed. The question of the 'abject' in relation to women, is posited as a fundamental issue within this study. Julia Kristeva examines the abject in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. She states that it is 'not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambigous, the composite.'[6] The inextricable link between the liminal female and abjection is simultaneously surprising and expected: for if a woman is to be liminal, if she is straddling boundaries, she automatically questions the implications of those boundaries and becomes abject in her unwillingness to be defined in one world, by one role. Abjection is therefore not achieved as a result of the woman's 'otherness', but rather through a combination of both the other and the familiar. The development of this concept occurs throughout the thesis, as each chapter engages with textual examples of the abject, beginning in relation to the singular and seemingly marginal female that is Dame Ragnell, and ending with the dynamic interaction between the abject female figure of Morgan le Faye, and the untested chivalric paragon that is Sir Gawain. The subsequent inversions of gender and socially-based power structures which place the abject at the centre of human society in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are the culmination of the progression of the female liminal abject as wholly 'other' to that which is central. The sequencing of the texts represents a deliberate and conscious positioning that illustrates the extent to which the chosen texts not only relate to each other in terms of subject and genre, but emphasise the development of the concept of liminality through the abject as it is applied to the characters within the texts themselves. The first two narratives examined, *The*

Weddying of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell and *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*, are both texts in which the female protagonists appear as obvious examples of the abject outside society. Both Dame Ragnell and Guenevere's mother's ghost seem to be marginal figures who exist on the outskirts of society, both physically and in terms of their sovereignty or power. The physical appearance of these two women inspires repulsion and fear of the abject in society while simultaneously provoking curiosity of the 'unknown'. By the end of the texts, however, the liminal nature of these women becomes clear as their position in both categories of foreign and familiar is indicative of their sovereignty to influence both realms at once. In chapters four and five, *Lybeaus Desconus* and *Ywain and Gawain* demonstrate the development of the female abject, as the women in these texts begin from a position of social inclusivity, yet are nevertheless liminal. The heroic quests which define these two texts emphasise the position of the hero, the male, as the socially excluded individual, while the women provide the link between realms of the 'other' and society. The abject nature of these women is not only emphasised through their physicality or even their location, but rather through their increased positions of power and autonomy, which occurs as a result of social acceptance. Unlike Dame Ragnell or the ghost, these women begin in positions of power that are acknowledged and accepted by society, yet this is in itself an indication of their liminal, abject identities, as women who straddle boundaries between social conventions and gender-defined roles of acceptability. The culmination of this development occurs in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the liminal, abject Morgan le Faye becomes the central force within the romance and instigates the testing of the unrealistic chivalric codes of Arthur's realm. The failure of this code

subsequently achieves an inversion of realms which places Morgan and Hautdesert at the centre of the romance. Hence, the female abject becomes the acceptable, the powerful, the human. Kristeva states:

> if it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than the abject.[7]

If we are to accept Kristeva's argument, abjection in relation to the female characters in this study is experienced with regard to the 'self' as well as society. The abject becomes the experience of both the individual and the culture (or cultures) of which she is a part. The concept of selfhood arises here, as the female characters are evaluated as individuals who do not conform to traditional archetypes. Stephen Greenblatt discusses how notion of 'self-fashioning' comes into existence in the sixteenth century. He argues that through this acceptance of self-fashioning, the stability of social orders is disrupted and hierarchies challenged. In effect, self-fashioning becomes a confrontation of established systems and powers. The idea that an individual can shape their identity and subsequently re-shape social structures takes hold and 'the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity—that of others at least as often as one's own'.[8] Greenblatt's argument is significant in this study because he presumes that self-fashioning was a foreign concept prior to the Renaissance. However, Greenblatt acknowledges that the idea of the self is innately human, regardless of time or place and that one's awareness of their self, their selfhood, is indeed present prior to the sixteenth century. I agree

with Greenblatt's position and would add that the notion of the self, the individual, is clearly demonstrated in Middle English Romance. While the purpose of this thesis is not to engage in debate on historical concepts of the self, it must be noted for purposes of clarification that my analysis of the texts uses a modern critical approach that acknowledges notions of selfhood, or individual identity, in relation to the characters in the narratives.

Sheila Fisher is one of the critics who examines the treatment of women within the texts. In her article 'Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance', she provides an interesting examination of the *Gawain* poet, Chaucer and Malory, emphasising the lack of interest shown to women by the authors of these works and most specifically, the reflected concern with the inherent anxiety about masculine identity. She argues that women appear in these texts to aid in construction or deconstruction of the male protagonist rather than for their own sakes.[9] Fisher examines the centrality of women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde* and Malory's *Works*. She goes on to demonstrate how women threaten the masculine system of values that exists through the codes of chivalry, saying:

> If men dismiss women, is it because women are inferior and trivial, or is it because women pose a fearsome threat to the masculine "status quo"? If women betray or endanger men, is it because they are as putatively fickle or evil as Eve, or is women's fickleness constructed and determined by the very circumstances of their position? Are women victims or agents, or sometimes the one when they seem most the other?[10]

Fisher concludes that these three 'male' writers display their anxiety about women by placing them in the margins of the texts. While Fisher's argument is interesting, she presumes the gender of the author of the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and subsequently builds her argument upon this presumption. Fisher maintains that women inhabit a peripheral space within Middle English romance. However, by examining women in relation to men, Fisher precludes any analysis of these women as individual characters; they are simply relegated to the margins, not by the narrative itself, but through the critical approach to the text. In contrast, Arlyn Diamond examines the representation of women in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*. She argues that the female presence in the poem 'imbeds its heroic action in a civic domain the perspective of which is never directly articulated or fully realised, but nevertheless, present'.[11] Diamond discusses how seemingly peripheral female figures within the text, are in fact, central to the poem as a whole. This approach contributes to a new understanding of these women, who exist as characters in their own right. Both Fisher and Diamond explore how women appear in Middle English romance. However, neither examine how these women exist as central characters themselves. While Diamond acknowledges the central significance of women and their impact on the action within the narrative, she maintains a perspective which does not allow for the evaluation of these female characters as liminal individuals. Rather than examining the women as individual characters, both Fisher and Diamond approach them as products of male-dominated culture.

Present scholarship on Middle English Arthurian women has both its strengths

and its weaknesses. While much attention is paid to the more 'famous' women, such as Morgan le Faye, Guenevere, and Lady Bertilak, there is still much room for expansion with regard to women of the lesser-known romances. I could find virtually nothing regarding the women in the romance *Lybeaus Desconus*,[12] despite the significant female presence within this text, and was surprised by the lack of criticism relating directly to the women in *Ywain and Gawain*. While much is written on Chrétien de Troyes' romances and the women within those romances, very little is available regarding the later, Middle English characterisations of the female protagonists. While critics such as Matthews, Busby and Hamilton point out the value of *Ywain and Gawain* in its own right as a Middle English romance and not only as an adaptation of the French romance, little attention is paid to Lunet and Alundyne, the two women whose existence propels the romance forward. The lack of critical interest in these female characters is surprising, considering the critical attention paid to this particular text postdates 1970 and therefore occurs in the era of feminist criticism. The scarcity of scholarship relating to the loathly lady motif, sovereignty and transformation in romances other than *Weddyng, The Marriage* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale* was unexpected, as it is something that is thoroughly researched in other areas of medieval literature.[13] Scholarship on *The Awntyrs Off Arthure,* a text which combines the loathly lady motif, sovereignty and the supernatural, made little remark on the way in which all of these themes join together within the text. I propose to examine these motifs in relation to the liminal space in which the characters, both living and dead, exist at the point of ghostly visitation. I will also explore how women become liminal individuals when they assume traits traditionally associated with and central to male-dominated

medieval society, such as troth and courtesy. In modern criticism these concepts are rarely applied to the female characters. Alundyne and Lunet, the loathly lady, Lady Bertilak and Morgan are never measured against the standards of their male counterparts. Likewise, those positive values inherent in the female protagonists are rarely extolled by critics, or even acknowledged.

There has been considerable scholarship produced on the subject of women in Middle English insular Arthurian Romance, however my concern is the paucity of research into the ways in which liminality impacts upon the female characters in Middle English Arthurian romance. My aim is to contribute new scholarship which will integrate the motifs of sovereignty, female discourse, transformation, the loathly lady and the supernatural under a common theme of liminal experience. Liminality is defined by Joseph Falaky Nagy as:

> the state of being in between separate categories of space, time, or identity. A boy who is on the verge of manhood is a liminal figure, as is someone who crosses from one world into another. Such figures belong only marginally to one or several categories; they are unclassifiable persons, or, they are classifiable in more than one way.[14]

Liminality does not imply marginalisation, although an individual may become marginalised as a result of being liminal. It is a state of existence on a threshold, and as a result, has inspired research in Celtic scholarship into the ways in which liminal space lends itself to a power almost supernatural in nature.[15]

The liminal nature of the romance genre itself is an interesting concept and relates

to categorisation as a 'female genre'. Diane Elam examines romance from a postmodern feminist perspective, arguing that:

> by revaluing the romance of women's desires as "postmodern" rather than simply "unrealistic" or "foolish", I want to link feminism to postmodernism's calling into question of the established rules of historical and cultural representation. If realism can only deal with women by relegating her to romance, if real history belongs to men, and women's history is merely the fantasy of historical romance, postmodern cultural analysis of history and the "real" offers a way of revaluing female discourse.[16]

Elam's argument opens up new ways of thinking about romance as a liminal genre. While Elam's study spans several decades and is focused more on modern romance, her position that romance is fluid, dynamic and seemingly 'in excess of itself, stepping beyond the lines which have always limited its definition',[17] emphasises the ability to regard romance as a genre which straddles boundaries of opposing definitions and simultaneous multiplicity. Its associations with women further establish romance as liminal genre, as it acknowledges the fundamental centrality and autonomy of women within its own textual borders while at the same time promoting realism within a fantastical context.

The Supernatural and Otherworlds

Perhaps the most outstanding factor in these Middle English Arthurian romances is the constant presence of the supernatural, or 'otherworldly' and its relationship to the

female characters. In this thesis I argue that the association between the supernatural or otherworldly and women is a fundamental feature within Middle English romance. When women are associated with magic or the otherworld their liminal nature is stressed, as they exist as individuals who straddle boundaries between literal worlds. The associations, therefore, with women who possess supernatural qualities are often negative, as their liminal experience between worlds inspires a perception of the abject. This thesis begins by examining *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*; texts in which female 'magic' is percieved as culturally threatening and traditionally abject, to the romances *Lybeaus Desconus* and *Ywain and Gawain*, in which the feminine supernatural is both threat and heroic aid, to the final text *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the otherworld which is dominated by the feminine becomes the central culture. In *Magic in Medieval Romance: From Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer*, Michelle Sweeney remarks that:

> Magic is one of the few elements which may be said to unite the body of literature which is considered to be the genre of romance. The interest of the adapter in magic is clear; even in the tales where dialogue or plot structures are severely reduced, detailed references to incidents of magic are retained. The use of magic within the insular tales reveals the inner turmoil which the character is experiencing without forcing the author to indulge in lengthy descriptions.[18]

The use of magic within romance, either as a plot enabler or as a representation of an individual's state of mind, not only emphasises its overall significance as an element within the genre, but highlights the significance of the individual to which it is attributed. When that individual is female (as is usually the case) the methods through which magic is employed become a direct reflection of their users and denote the

liminal status of that individual. For example, when Alundyne presents Ywain with the magic ring, not only is she acknowledging her own supernatural attributes, she is simultaneously displaying her autonomy as an individual and therefore her liminal identity as an autonomous female in a male-dominated society.

While criticism has centred around those elements of the supernatural within the romances, little has been said about its relationship to women and its impact on the course of action within the text. Sheila Fisher touches on this point with regard to Morgan in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* stating that 'Morgan is, as Bertilak admits "þe goddes." Although Bertilak makes her magic secondary by attributing it to Merlin, that magic, as Morgan practices it, is powerful stuff. Bertilak may be bent out of shape by it, but he can still grow a new head'.[19] Magic, when possessed by a woman in Middle English Romance, can be both a danger and an aid. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Helen Cooper examines how the green girdle is instrumental in Gawain's journey of self-realisation. She says:

> As well as turning the idea of the talisman of invulnerability inside out, the Gawain poet also gives it a meaning directly opposite to the normal significance of the magic object: it symbolises, not Gawain's achievement, his attainment of the superhuman absolute, but his failure, and his failure on that very same issue—that he is not, after all, superhuman, but human and therefore fallible.[20]

Cooper explores the uses of magic in *King Horn*, Marie de France's *Les Deux Amants* and Chrétien's *Yvain*. She argues that magic, when put to the test, is never proven to work for its user. As a narrative device it serves well to engage the reader through its marvelous nature, but its real magic is never tested or confirmed. She argues that

Yvain,

> is given a ring by Laudine that will protect him against all evil, sickness and imprisonment, and so on; at the end of a year, when the ring is taken back, he is certainly still healthy and free, but whether the ring had anything to do with it we are simply not told. Once again, it may be magic, but it is not being seen to be done.[21]

Cooper's argument is interesting, however her evaluation of magic relies on a simple understanding of its significance. While the objects themselves are never proven to be magical, what is important is the power the object signifies and how that magic, whether 'real' in the traditional sense or not, places its wielder in a powerful position. As earlier stated, it is when this individual is female that the consequences of that power aid in identifying her as a liminal character.

The Awntyrs Off Arthur portrays the supernatural as a modern audience might interpret it; a ghost or risen, decomposing corpse.[22] However, not all of the romances exhibit the supernatural in such an obvious presentation. Critical evaluation of the otherworldly in Middle English Arthurian romance has focused on many aspects of this motif, from the supernatural hideousness of the loathly lady and her magical transformation, as seen in *The Weddyng, The Marriage* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale,* to the more alluring magical power of Alundyne's ring in *Ywain and Gawain* and the beautiful realm of faerie in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal.* [23] In 'The Other Worlds of Romance', Jeff Rider argues that:

> Other worlds have a complementary function in medieval romances in addition to their narrative one of setting the story going, keeping it going, or changing its direction. These worlds, that is, also define the central aristocratic world by

> valorizing certain of its elements or aspects and offering visions of what it is not, and provide representations of its materially and morally unrealisable aspirations.[24]

Michael Twomey examines Morgan as a character whose association with the wilderness can be seen in the etymological study of the word Hautdesert [25] in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* He discusses Morgan's role as primary instigator of the action within the romance and the collaborative effort of Morgan and Bertilak in the testing of the Round Table.[26] Maureen Fries also looks at the ways in which women are portrayed, in her article 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes; Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition' in which she discusses the definitions of heroes and heroines examining the possibility for female heroes in Arthurian literature and augmenting our understanding of the female counter-hero. Fries argues that the female counter-hero's existence is directly connected to her subversive position within the narrative and that the female counter-hero 'holds values which are not necessarily those of the male culture in which she must exist. Her actions are as likely to hurt the hero as to help him'.[27] Fries places Morgan within this category, as well as the loathly lady. She states:

> her double nature as nurturer and destroyer illustrates even more aptly than the figures of heroine or female hero the ambiguity and ambivalence of medieval male authors generally, and Arthurian writers particularly, towards women. Thus she can be at the same time the most alluring of presences (her aspect as supernatural beauty) and the most revolting (her aspect as hag).[28]

Here, the supernatural is employed with sexual connotations, just as it is in relation to concepts of sovereignty, for, as Fries points out, the female counter hero is never

virginal.[29] In her article 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance', Maureen Fries explores the ways in which Morgan le Fay regresses from a character whose magic and power are benevolent in the earlier works of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to the negative 'counter-hero' she becomes in the later romances. Fries argues that:

> [Morgan's] gradual change (one can hardly call it growth) from a connector of life with healing, as mistress of Avalon, into a connector of death with illicit sex and wrongful imprisonment as she appears in most subsequent romance, indicates the increasing inability of male Arthurian authors to cope with the image of a woman of power in positive terms.[30]

Fries discusses the loathly lady motif as it is embodied in Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. She points out the duality of the juxtaposition of the old hag that is Morgan, and the young hostess who physically represents all that Morgan once signified in earlier literature. The categories Fries creates, while establishing the possibility for the autonomy of a female character, nevertheless inhibits an examination of the women as individuals. By placing them in categories, the female characters become the tools through which male objectives are either achieved or fail, rather than individuals who exist in their own right.

According to John Stevens, the supernatural in medieval romance can be divided into three categories: the mysterious, the magical and the miraculous. In the first, the supernatural event is 'unmotivated, unexplained and inexplicable'. The second category 'shows the marvelous controlled by man', while the third shows 'the marvelous controlled by God'.[31] In those texts with which I am concerned, the

supernatural generally falls into the second category. Guenevere's mother's ghost controls her own magical and still inexplicable appearance; Alundyne's ring is imbued with a power that is activated through her own personal choice of partner; Dame Ragnell and her loathly lady sisters are involved in a magic controlled by a woman, as is Sinadoun in *Lybeaus Desconus* and the instigator who controls the action in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is, of course, Morgan.

In her article 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the *Auncian* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', Lorraine Kochanske Stock investigates the connections between Morgan le Faye in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the iconography of the 'loathly lady', and the Sheela-na-gig. Stock examines the liminal space which the Sheela-na-gigs occupy on the gates of castles and lintels of church doors, making connections between the placement of these overtly sexual carvings and the placement of Morgan le Faye. She argues that Morgan is also placed within a castle and a chapel. Stock examines Morgan's physical description within the romance and her associations with sex, as the typical loathly lady. She points out that 'Sheela-na-gigs occupied architectural thresholds or the physical boundaries between inside and outside, between us and them, between the self and the other…positioned thus they were the icons of both figurative and literal liminality'[32]. Stock goes on to argue the etymological significance of the name Morgan le Faye and the connotations with the Celtic otherworldly 'Sidh' mounds or fairy forts. She says:

The actual names Morgan and the Sheela-na-gig share an analogous provenance

as well. Recall that in one likely derivation of "Sheela" from the Gaelic "Sile", the "Si" refers to the Old Irish word for "fairy" or "otherworld creature" whose underground dwelling or "fairy hillock" was known as a "Sidh."[33]

Twomey also examines the liminal implications of the setting for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* arguing that the castle Hautdesert's position at the edge of the wilderness and its associations with Morgan le Faye, or Morgan the fairy, implies a liminal and therefore otherworldly space.[34] The short article by Melanie McGarrahan Gibson titled 'Lyonet, Lunete and Laudine: Carnivalesque Arthurian Women' in which Gibson briefly touches on the theme of liminality in relation to Arthurian female characters, is somewhat misleading. She defines liminality by interpreting it as marginalisation. Gibson argues that Malory's Lyonet and Chrétien's Lunete and Laudine exist as marginal figures for various reasons. While Lyonet and Lunete are marginalised because of their supernatural powers, Laudine is marginalised through her status as widow and then abandoned wife.[35] Gibson goes on to argue that it is the female use of language, particularly when it is employed by Lyonet and Lunete, that further marginalises these women because it violates the prescriptions of male-dominated culture, while at the same time incorporating carnivalesque performance which serves to restore order in Arthurian society.[36] The extent of research and scholarship on liminality and Middle English Arthurian women is limited. However, the importance of such scholarship is by no means trivial. For as Nagy contends 'A liminal figure or object offers a key to the categories between which it exists and can even mediate between other pairs of separate categories'.[37]

Loathly Ladies, the Abject and the Female Body

The appearance of a loathly lady, a woman who exists within a text as both a problem and a necessity, a keystone and an obstacle, is central to many Middle English Arthurian texts;[38] she exists, too, as a primary motif in some medieval Celtic texts, particularly Irish.[39] Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this character and literary motif is her ability to appear in varying forms within the Middle English Arthurian texts. The most obvious utilisation of this motif is the hag in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell, The Marriage of Sir Gawain* and Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* (to be referred to in this chapter as *The Weddyng, The Marriage* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale*). Modern critical approaches to the loathly lady motif have focused primarily on her associations with sovereignty and social marginalisation. However, I will argue that the loathly lady is a liminal individual, whose ability to straddle borders of cultural inclusion and exclusion emphasises both her liminal nature and autonomy. The texts examined in this thesis which possess a loathly lady are *The Weddyng, The Marriage, The Awntyrs Off Arthure, Lybeaus Desconus* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The occupation of the loathly ladies in all of these narratives on physical borders, whether they be forests, tarns or wildernesses, emphasises their liminal condition from the outset. Their associations with sovereignty, be it personal or feudal, also highlights their liminal positions as women who are culturally 'other' in their possession of power yet simultaneously inclusive. In the 1986 'Sovereignty and the Loathly Lady in English, Welsh and Irish', J.K. Bollard examines the thematic function of the loathly lady motif cross-culturally, exploring the primary differences between the

English and Celtic texts and the functions of the loathly lady within these two strands. Bollard examines the nature and definitions of sovereignty as they exist within the texts themselves, pointing out that 'Flaithius', or 'sovereignty' as it exists in the Irish texts, differs substantially from the way in which sovereignty is presented in the Middle English texts of *The Weddyng, The Marriage* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale.* Where, in the English literature, sovereignty is the property of the male protagonist, who is capable of giving it away, in the Irish *Echtra mac Eochaid Mugmedon* and *Echtra Mac Daire*, and the Welsh *Peredur*, Flaithius is possessed by the loathly lady, whose connection to the land is evident and whose bestowal of Flaithius upon the man who agrees to either kiss or sexually consummate the relationship with her signals the bestowal of kingship upon the rightful ruler. Bollard points out that the relationship between the Celtic and Middle English texts cannot be viewed simplistically; the sequence of events, the test, the promise of marriage, the transformation and the granting of sovereignty all connect to a central loathly lady motif. He warns of the danger of connecting this motif cross-culturally without the proof of intermediary texts. These would point to a path of transmission for the motif. He also cautions against ignoring the extent to which authors may rework motifs themselves to suit specific, individual and cultural purposes.[40]

The differences between the English and Irish texts and their treatment of sovereignty and the loathly lady are discussed in Manuel Aguirre's article 'The Riddle of Sovereignty'.[41] However, Aguirre focuses on the similarities between the two strands, looking at the continuity between the two and the ways in which the changes

that are prevalent are a result of historical and cultural changes in the perception of women. He points out that:

> The main difference between the English and Irish versions would seem to be: the presence of the riddle-motif in all the English versions; the presence of a hostile character to explain the transformation of the women in three of the four English versions (not in Chaucer)[42]; the difference between the two concepts of sovereignty.[43]

Aguirre also looks at the contradictory nature of the loathly lady, how in both cultures she poses the challenge to the protagonist while at the same time requiring him to act against social custom and personal instinct. Aguirre concludes that:

> there is throughout the Middle Ages a clear trend towards reducing woman's direct participation in the making of society. She is at the same time exalted and degraded, both protected and subjected. She becomes more and more (and precisely because of her rich numinous symbolism) the object of oppression by a mentality which fears the Numinous, stresses linear thinking and rationality and frowns upon change, cyclicness, and variability as so many signs of faithlessness.[44]

Aguirre and Bollard present an interesting comparative analysis of the motif. While it is true that in the Celtic strand the loathly lady embodies the sovereignty of the land, giving her both authority and dominance, it is also the case that that position is something which is given away. Sovereignty, or Flaithius, is personified as a woman. As a personification, the loathly lady possesses a power, which is ascribed to her, not as an individual, but as a representation. When viewed in this way, the perceived power of the individual becomes transferred to the male protagonist well before he is himself aware of his destiny. Sovereignty of the land is something that must belong to a male

ruler and she is wilderness, loathly, untamable without his guidance and protection. In the end of the Celtic stories, it is the female who loses her power and control, if she ever had such authority. While Bollard may argue that, in the Celtic texts, sovereignty belongs to the female who is able to bestow it upon the worthy ruler, he fails to acknowledge the fact that this is something she *must* do to maintain balance. Both Bollard and Aguirre argue for the differences in sovereignty between the Middle English and Celtic texts, pointing out the primary differences in their definitions; however, the perception with which they approach the Middle English loathly lady tales contradicts their approach to the Celtic tales. While they argue for the Celtic loathly lady's position of power as bestower of sovereignty, they fail to see the English loathly lady's acquisition of authority at the end of the romances. While it is all too easy to accept the 'happily ever after' ending of such tales, the fact remains that the resolution of the English romances leave the lady with the autonomous authority of her body and mind, while the Celtic tales end with the lady's acquiescence to the king; the ruler of her body and future. In his article 'The Dame and the Knight: Marriage, Sovereignty and Transformation', Michael Van Baker makes a connection between Dame Ragnell and the land, defining her 'sovereignty' in both a Celtic and 'English' manner, thereby uniting the two. He says:

> The knight's inexplicable outrage over the "land" unlawfully given to Gawain can be seen as a reflection of Dame Ragnell's position in marriage at the time. Dame Ragnell has the answer to the riddle because she is the answer to why the riddle is asked. She will not become a husband's property.[45]

Similarly, Helen Phillips examines the connections between the loathly lady and

sovereignty in her article '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure*: Structure and Meaning' in which she makes the connection between the royal identity of Guenevere's mother's ghost and the message she has come back from death to impart. Phillips says:

> Though the representation of death and mutability here is a female, we should not see her as exclusively representing women, or moral issues of special interest to women; she is presented from the beginning very much as representative of the ruling and territory-controlling class. Though her feminine gender is significant we should not let this aspect of her identity eclipse response to the fact that she functions also as a *dead royal*.[46]

Here, the loathly lady appears with an identity that connects her to the courtly realm; a world from which she has been removed. Ironically, her removal from this world is connected to the same corruption that exists within King Arthur's realm and which will eventually result in its downfall. The ghost's warning is exceptionally significant because it indicates a shared corruption; her otherness in death is accomplished as a result of her courtly inclusion in life.

In 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady', Edward Vasta examines the marginalisation of the loathly lady. While Vasta goes into detail on the Bakhtinian carnivalesque nature of the loathly lady and the characteristic juxtapositions that accompany her identity as a marginal figure,[47] he also points out her position within the English romances as a marginalised individual and as a woman. He argues:

> The Loathly Lady of the English romances…neither possesses personal sovereignty nor serves as the agency of a sovereignty officially recognised. She

> has no place within the official culture. She is rather an individual woman who lives outside the court's official culture and who can be brought to beauty and happiness only when personal sovereignty is bestowed upon her from within that culture by a man. She has a degree of personal power and knowledge, but she can not act with sovereign independence and the court's approval unless she wins a male-bestowed sovereignty by saving the life of a troubled man.[48]

While this statement reflects the common perception of the loathly lady's position within (or, as argued, outside) society, her transformation from what Maureen Fries would argue as the counter-hero to the hero is not taken into account.[49] Under Fries's categorisations, the Loathly Lady in the Middle English romances begins as female counter-hero. Her hideous appearance creates her marginalisation and the perception of her as a threat to the male dominated courtly culture, as does her power of speech, knowledge (she is, after all, able to answer a riddle that even the king can't solve) and ability to influence the action of the text autonomously. However, the culturally threatening individual transforms into a heroic woman, who through her knowledge and skillfulness with words becomes the savior of the courtly realm and its values. In this light, it becomes possible to view the male protagonist's 'gift' (as Vasta would argue) of sovereignty as a gift to himself.

The issue of the loathly lady and specifically *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is the subject of 'Women Displaced: Rape and Romance in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*' by Corinne J. Saunders.[50] This article explores the historical position of rape and examines its implications within Chaucer's tale. Saunders points out how the tale is a reflection of the teller and that the ambiguities within the tale mirror those within the teller. She examines rape as a motif in other romances and then looks at how the *Wife*

of Bath's Tale is placed within a realistic structure which is simultaneously contradictory to what the Wife intends to achieve. Saunders argues that, in the end, the rapist is reinstated into society and 'rewarded' with a beautiful young wife. While this thesis will not examine Chaucer's work, Saunders's article addresses the pertinent issue of the violation of the female body, which will be explored further in this study.

In *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Dame Ragnell's behaviour upon entering society emphasises her foreign nature. She insists upon the publicity of her marriage and, at the nuptial feast:

> She ete as moche as six that ther wore;
> That mervayled many a man.
> Her nayles were long ynches thre,
> Therwith she breke her mete ungoodly;
> Therfore she ete alone.[51]

Ragnell's lack of social etiquette and refinement places her in a position whereby she stands apart from society; however, by partaking in the feast, she is instantly included within that same society. Arnold Van Gennep explores how feasting is a rite of incorporation, which can serve to identify a community, and assimilate the stranger into society.[52] Similarly, Martha Rampton examines the significance of feasting in the Middle Ages arguing that 'feasting was part of the conversion experience itself and a symbol of acceptance into the Christian community. The meal that followed baptism was a celebration of the unity created by this sacrament and ensured the child or adult catechumen inclusion into the community'.[53] Like baptism, the nuptial feast is also

symbolic of social unity and exists as a celebration of the sacrament of marriage. In *The Weddyng*, the feast is the first public and communal gathering after that sacrament has been made. Ragnell's non-conformity highlights her liminal nature, as she is both included in and abhorred by the community. The consummation of the marriage coincides with Ragnell's transformation into a socially acceptable figure however, it only occurs after Gawain has promised to engage sexually with his wife. By adhering to society's expectations of marriage, both outside and within the bedroom, Gawain precipitates Ragnell's physical transformation and it is through this adherence that Ragnell gains sovereignty over her husband. Gawain's feudal submission to Arthur, which is displayed through his agreement to marry Ragnell, becomes the catalyst for Ragnell's achievement of marital autonomy, as Gawain observes the duties of a married man. Ironically, that which enabled the appearance of full social integration is also that which truly places Ragnell in a culturally unique position as the dominant partner. Ragnell's marriage to Gawain facilitates the perception of social assimilation however, it is her marriage to 'the best of Englond' that facilitates her marital sovereignty. Indeed, it could be argued that it is her inherent sovereignty throughout the course of the romance that enables her constantly to enact what all women desire; her will.

Perhaps the most well known loathly lady exists within the character of Morgan le Faye. Indeed her very associations in such texts as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* identify Morgan as a marginal individual with direct associations with the otherworldly and supernatural. However, while Morgan may be

explored time and again as a 'goddess' on the outskirts of society, it is her influence as a loathly lady figure within the realms of culture and civilisation that identifies her as a force to be contended with. In her article 'Leaving Morgan Aside, Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*' Sheila Fisher argues that:

> Morgan and her marginalisation are the means to the poem's end, because women are centrally implicated in the collapse of the Round Table and the end of the Arthurian Age. If women could be placed on the periphery, as Morgan is in this poem, then the Round Table might not have fallen. To deny the female would be to save the kingdom and, in its reversionary agenda, that is precisely what *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* attempts to do.[54]

Fisher examines marginalisation rather than liminality and points out the extent to which Morgan's *marginalisation* does not preclude her ability to influence the course of action or, in true loathly lady fashion, present the hero with both the riddle and the means for solving that riddle. I disagree with Fisher's presumption of negativity surrounding Morgan and Hautdesert, as well as Morgan's presumed marginal inhabitation. I would argue that Morgan's realm and influence are central within the romance and that this inversion of power is visible only when the text is approached with a perspective of human reality and its weaknesses rather than unrealistic chivalric perfection. Morgan's liminal condition, however, is emphasised by Fisher's argument, as she exists in both realms simultaneously and is not peripheral, but central.

In her article titled 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in the *Awntyrs Off Arthure*', Margaret Robson points out the significance of bodily, physical decay as it relates to a very specific and identifiable woman: Guenevere's mother. Here the

loathly lady motif, as Robson argues, is laid out in terms of pairs, where:

> Guenevere and the ghastly figure identified as her mother are conflated by the text. Guenevere is faced with one (possible? Inevitable?) version of her future self, the image of her fate should she continue along the path of adultery (as we, the readers, know she will).[55]

The problem which Robson identifies is the inability of the living to heed the message of the dead, or loathly lady herself. Existing as an 'antitype' to the Lady of the Lake,[56] Guenevere's mother issues a warning that is never heeded, a warning, Robson argues, not about the individual, but about Arthur's government and weaknesses. Here, the loathly lady's discourse is disregarded and the voice of the ghost (as will be further examined) is left to rot with her decaying corpse.

The transformation aspect of the loathly lady motif has also been examined by critics. Aguirre maintains that the hag's ability to transform enables her to pose a challenge and thereby a threat to the male protagonist, simultaneously aiding and damning him.[57] Vasta argues that Dame Ragnell,

> Suspends all rules and expectations, recognises no inequalities sustained by the court's hierarchical structure, and ignores all forms of terror, reverence, piety and etiquette. She remains persistently merry and confident, she fearlessly rejects every attempt to be imposed upon, she blatantly violates every protocol, she refuses to be shamed by the court's intimidations…Such behaviour accords with Ragnell's appearance, for her ugliness, her obscene behaviour functions as a carnival mask.[58]

I would agree with Vasta that Ragnell upsets the social order through her appearance

however, I do not believe that Ragnell's physicality is the sole defining feature of her character, but rather one of many significant features that define her as a liminal being. It is not only her physical distortion, but her gender and influence, that makes her simultaneously fascinating and terrifying.

The transformation of women in Middle English Arthurian Romance can also be viewed in a less conventional form, when taking into consideration Sheila Fisher's arguments regarding female marginalisation in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: Fisher argues that Morgan exists on the margins throughout the romance. However, Lady Bertilak, the initial common denominator between Guenevere and Morgan, becomes a marginalised, unacceptable female.[59] By the end of the romance, she transforms entirely into the 'vanished' lady: a character who was at one point central but has now 'vanished from the realm of its [the girdle's] signification. She has become marginalised so that Gawain and the girdle can become publicized'.[60]

Discourse

Female discourse and the female body are two of the most signifianct aspects within the texts and are consistently connected to the abject. The body itself exists as the location for the birth of the liminal constuct of language. What makes the female body significant in this regard is its position as a liminal area, which is also a location of trangressable borders. The female body is capable of arguably the most liminal experience possible, that of childbirth. This position of power enforces the threat of the liminal in society through a breech of boundaries that is at once terrifying and

necessary. By contrast, the birth of language by the female subject becomes even more threatening, as it issues from a source, which has the capacity to create matter. Hence, female discourse, when leaving the 'vaginal' space of the mouth, becomes power, just as a child leaving the womb becomes matter attributed to the mother.[61] The abject is also the liminal, as the female body is at once autonomous and taboo, the foundation of social influence and its most subjugated member.[62]

The connection between the loathly lady and female discourse is one that is crucial to an understanding of the loathly lady as an important character in her own right. Much critical examination has taken place regarding the female voice in Medieval Irish and Old French literature. Joanne Findon discusses the characterisation and impact of the discourse of Emer, the wife of Cú Chulainn, in *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle*. [63] Likewise, E. Jane Burns examines female speech in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide*. In 'Rewriting Men's Stories: Enide's Disruptive Mouths', Burns argues that:

> When Chrétien's lovely heroine Enide "wakes up" from her slumber in the land of silence and begins to talk…she tells unsettling stories. Altering the standard scenario of courtly romance in many ways, she speaks within, but apart from, the master narrative, significantly rewriting the very *conte d'aventure* that creates her as a silent object of the heroic knight's desire. From this perspective, Chrétien's romance shows how women, who are essential to the working of the courtly world, can nonetheless make "gender trouble" within it, not only with their bodies, but more significantly with the voices that issue from them.[64]

As has already been pointed out, the riddle motif, as presented by the loathly lady figure, is crucial to the entire structure of the romance. As Aguirre observes, 'It is the

old hag who poses a challenge to the protagonist, whether she gives it a verbal character or not. Her very existence is a contradiction: she is both young and old, both fair and loathly'.[65]

In her article '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure* at the Terne Wathelyhe: Reliquary for Romance', Krista Sue-Lo Twe argues that the tragedy of the romance is the characters' inability to comprehend their fates, despite the ghost's prophecy.[66] Here, Twe makes clear that it is the discourse of the female ghost that not only provides the prophecy, but warns in advance of the dangers associated with the neglect of this female voice. She argues for the unified nature of the text, stating that 'at the height of its powers, we see the elements of the Arthurian court's eventual fall. The intrinsic failure to mitigate violence and effect justice in this display of the court's ostensible power returns us to the Ghost's prophecy with its invocation of Fortune, "that wonderful whelewyrghte,/[who] Shall make lordes lowe to light" (271-272), as the driving force behind history'.[67]

While the loathly lady motif employs female discourse as an intrinsic element within the romance, female speech and its impact within Middle English Arthurian romance have come under limited critical scrutiny. When commenting on the Middle English *Ywain and Gawain*, Ojars Kratins notes that 'While Lunet prepares Ywain for the meeting with the Lady, she repeatedly instructs him on how to behave and what to say'.[68] In *Ywain and Gawain*, the presence of female discourse is both subversive and motivating; Lunet's verbal manipulation and Alundyne's powerful discourse are

elements not lost in critical analyses of this particular text. However, focus has tended to remain on *Ywain and Gawain* in relation to its French predecessor, Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier au Lion*.[69] Critics such as Keith Busby, David Matthews and Ojars Kratins primarily examine the differences between the two versions, paying particular attention to concepts of courtesy and troth. Matthews argues that *Ywain and Gawain* can be seen as more than a mere translation of Chretien's work and that while events may be the same, 'the narrative mechanisms through which events unfold are quite different, deriving as they do from different socio-cultural intertexts'.[70] Matthews goes on to argue that, in *Ywain and Gawain*, troth becomes the central focus of the romance, rather than love. He argues that this is done in an attempt to adapt the text to suit a contemporary audience. Writing in 1964, Kratins states that, in *Ywain and Gawain*, 'the hero fails primarily as a knight who has broken steadfastness to his word'.[71] J.K. Bollard also examines the theme of courtesy and Ywain's actions in *Ywain and Gawain*. He says that:

> the theme of courtesy can be traced throughout the tale, not merely as a theme implicit in the action but as one made explicit by the author's use of vocabulary and the careful balancing of the poem's narrative and thematic structures.[72]

Gayle Hamilton examines how the breaking of troth affects the male protagonist's placement in courtly society, looking specifically at discourse and its influence on the male protagonist. However, she does not examine female discourse or concepts of troth with regard to the female characters in the text.[73] While criticism of this particular romance may touch upon issues of feminine discourse, the primary focus thus far has

been upon the hero's adaptation in comparison with his earlier characterisation in Chrétien's romance.

Conclusion

Although it may be true that the romances themselves are products of male composition, reflecting the values inherent in a feudalistic, paternal culture, the tendency to ignore the concepts of femininity and female values is evident.[74] Historically, critical analysis has approached these texts with a view towards male centred values, which has led to an imbalance of interpretation. I have noticed this pattern of critical investigation with specific regard to the texts *Ywain and Gawain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Criticism on each of these texts tends to focus on the male constructs of patriarchal discourse and authority, while disregarding the other side of that construct. Instead of examining the male protagonist in relation to the female protagonist, her character, trials and victories, the emphasis is on how the women relate to the male protagonist in his quest for an identity within the realms of patriarchal society. John Stevens's *Medieval Romance,* written in 1973, discusses the concept of heroism as it differs between romance and epic in his book. He says:

> The heroism of romance is often and characteristically of this searching pattern: the hero is involved in a mystery; he is on a quest but does not know what he has to look for; he is engaged in a struggle but does not know who his adversary is. Where epic is static, romance is dynamic. In epic, the world around closes in, inexorably, predictably, on the hero, whereas in romance the hero goes to search for the final meaningful encounter will crown his quest and, one often feels, enable him to know himself.[75]

The values of troth and male courtesy are topics common in the discussion of both *Ywain and Gawain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight;* however, both of these themes are only examined in relation to the male protagonist and his identity and quest. Cathalin Buhrmann Folks recognises the importance of women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, stating that:

> Pursued and dominated by Bertilak's wife, Gawain fails to realise how much his actions at this critical juncture will affect the outcome of his quest, nor does he see that behind the seeming sincerity of a young wife's desire lies the malicious cunning of an older, more sinister woman, the traditionally evil Morgan.[76]

Here, not only is the duality of the two women overlooked, but the focus throughout the article remains on Gawain's identity and characterisation. In his article 'Beginnings, Middles and Ends: Some Interpretative Problems In Chrétien's *Yvain* and its Medieval Adaptations', Tony Hunt examines *Iwein*, *Ywain and Gawain* and *Le Chevalier au Lion*. Here, Hunt looks at three aspects of medieval poetics in relation to problems of literary interpretation. He examines the ways in which each poet approaches the story differently, producing various effects on the narratives themselves. His central argument is that each of the three romances 'are so strongly individualised that they deserve the status of autonomous works in which the source has acted as a stimulus rather than as a constraint'.[77] Hunt also examines the themes of courtesy and troth within the text, focusing on how they influence the course of action and Ywain's character.

Current research and scholarship dedicated to the study of women in Middle

English Arthurian romance has been extensive and varied. However, there has been a lack of examination of the extent to which various motifs overlap and relate to each other and a scarcity of scholarship relating to the more obscure romances. While much has been written regarding the position of female characters in society and female characters marginalised by society, little to nothing has been researched regarding women existing in 'threshold' or liminal situations. In viewing these women as peripheral individuals, they inevitably become incapable of central or significant influence: their actions are converted to parodies and imitations of male exploits; their sexuality becomes subversive or rendered passive, and their voices become the echoes of patriarchal inhibition. Margins are indeed dangerous and polluting places, especially when they imprison and confine. Yet when our perception is altered to include rather than exclude the 'marginal', the 'abject', we are able to see beyond borders: what we previously defined as peripheral becomes the significant and central link between realms and the individual becomes liminal rather than marginal.

---

[1] Sheila Fisher. 'Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance.* Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 153.

[2] All references to the five specified texts within this thesis will be to the following editions: *Lybeaus Desconus*. EETS, O.S. 261. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) *Ywain and Gawain*. EETS, O.S. 254. Ed. Albert A. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. Second Edition Revised, Norman Davis. (Oxford: Claredon, 1925, 1967) *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne*. Ed. Ralph Hanna. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974). These editions were chosen due to their strict adherence to the manuscript originals and their preservation of language in its original form. The accuracy and provision of adequate glosses provided further reason for use in this thesis.

[3] See Arnold Van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909, Reprint, 1960) Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1969). Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. (London: Routledge Press, 1966).

[4] These texts are not included due to the fact that this thesis explores a concept and its function within the text itself. By including anonymously written narratives, the basis of evaluation is not clouded by issues of authorship, agenda, or purpose. Therefore, this facilitates an equal approach to the five specified narratives within this study.

[5] *Ywain and Gawain* is preserved in the manuscript Cotton Galba E. ix, an early fifteenth-century manuscript. This is the only extant edition of this text. *Lybeaus Desconus* is preserved in six manuscripts, all written in the fifteenth century. They are as follows: Cotton Caligula A ii., Bodleian 6922 (Ashmole MS 61), Percy Folio, Lambeth MS 306, Lincoln's Inn 150, and Naple's Royal Library XIII, B 29. *The Awntyrs Off Arthure* is preserved in four fifteenth-century manuscripts; Lincoln Cathedral 91, Lambeth Palace 491.B, Bodleian 21898, and Ireland Blackburn. *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* survives in one early sixteenth-century manuscript, Bodleian 11951. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is also preserved in a single fifteenth-century manuscript, Cotton Nero A.x.

[6] Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4

[7] Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection.* 5

[8] Stephen Greenblatt. *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 1 For further discussion on concepts of selfhood see Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

[9] Sheila Fisher. 'Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance' 152.

[10] Sheila Fisher. 'Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance' 152.

[11] Arlyn Diamond. 'Heroic Subjects: Women and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*'. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain.* Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol Meale and Lesley Johnson. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000) 294.

[12] Writing in 1967, Dieter Mehl devotes pages 71-77 to *Lybeaus Desconus* in *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries.* However, the focus is on the differences between the Middle English 'Fair Unknown' romance and its French predecessors, arguing that it is 'the brief biography of a hero whose knightly perfections are illustrated by a series of loosely but not arbitrarily connected adventures and his progress from obscurity to honour'.(London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 77.

[13] Scholarship devoted to Medieval Irish literature has concentrated on transformations of women both in secular literature and hagiography, emphasising both sovereignty connotations and religious suitability. See Kim McCone's *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, and Myles Dillon's *Early Irish Literature.* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994)

[14] Joseph Falaky Nagy. 'Liminality and Knowledge in Irish Tradition'. *Studia Celtica* 16-17 (1981-1982). 135. Liminality is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a transitional or initial stage, at a boundary or threshold'. However, liminality is a more complex concept. It may be used to describe the inhabitation of a position between two regions. Mary Douglas argues that 'Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable'. I would argue that transitional states encompass both states and are definable in different ways: that danger exists as a threat to society, rather than the individual . *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Polution and Taboo.* 119.

[15] Liminality has been explored by critics of medieval Irish literature. While I was able to find critical sources relating to the liminal condition of various male heroes in medieval Irish literature, I could find very little that addressed the issue of female liminality. Joseph Falaky Nagy and Mark R. Scowcroft address the issue of liminality as it relates to the Fianna, or outlaw, it early Irish literature and society in 'Liminality and Knowledge in Irish Tradition'. and 'On Liminality in the Fenian Cycle'. *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 13 (1987) When liminality is applied to women, it is in relation to hagiography and their status as saints. Kim McCone points out the ways in which heroes usually exist either at some point, or throughout their lives within liminal spaces. He cites the birth and life of Saint Brigit as an example along with the more secular *Echtra mac nEchach* and the death tale of Cú Chulainn, *Brislech Mor Maige Muirthemne. Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature.* (Kildare: Maynooth Monographs, 1990). Tom Sjöblom also examines liminality in 'On The Threshold: The Sacredness of Borders in Early Irish Literature' *Ulidia: Proccedings on the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales.* Ed. J.P Mallory and G. Stockman. (Belfast: December Publications, 1994). Sjöblom examines the significance of borders in the Ulster cycle and in relation to Cú Chulainn, and also historically in relation to the Tuath. Female representation in the Irish literature is well examined by Muireann Ní Bhrolchain in 'Re Tóin Mná: In Pursuit of Troublesome Women'. Ann

Dooley, 'The Invention of Women in the Táin'. Erica Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb: Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism'. All in *Ulidia*. Joanne Findon, *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). While this lack of discussion on liminality and women is puzzling, it may be due to the fact that historically, the Fenian bands were composed of young men, who existed on the outskirts of society. Therefore space and borders may be viewed as tangible and crucial social elements that preserve and protect. The inhabitation of the threshold of this space would have serious implications for both society and the individual.

[16] Diane Elam. *Romancing the Postmodern*. (London: Routledge, 1992) 2, 3

[17] Diane Elam. *Romancing the Postmodern*. 7

[18] Michelle Sweeney. *Magic in Medieval Romance: From Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000) 120. See also Anne Wilson. *The Magical Quest: The Use of Magic in Arthurian Romance*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988).

[19] Sheila Fisher. 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. (New York: Garland, 1996) 77-95

[20] Helen Cooper. 'Magic That Does Not Work'. *Medievalia and Humanistica* 7 (1976) 144.

[21] Helen Cooper. 'Magic That Does Not Work'. 133.

[22] Margaret Robson. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'.

[23] All of these texts portray otherworldly elements. While Chestre's *Sir Launfal* is not included in this study, its abundant otherworldly imagery cannot go unmentioned. Laurence Harf-Lancner examines the fairy mistress, or fairy lover in his article 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers'. He discusses how the fairy mistress appears in folklore and medieval romance. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. (New York: Garland 1996). 133-151.

[24] Jeff Rider. 'The Other Worlds of Romance'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. 120.

[25] Twomey argues that the word Hautdesert comes from *haut and desert*, meaning 'high wasteland' or 'high hermitage' compounded.

[26] Michael W. Twomey. 'Morgan le Faye at Hautdesert'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*.

[27] Maureen Fries. 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. 68.

[28] Maureen Fries. 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. 68.

[29] Maureen Fries. 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. 68.

[30] Maureen Fries. 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance'. *Arthuriana* 4 (1994) 2.

[31] John Stevens. *Medieval Romance*. 100-101.

[32] Lorraine Kochanske Stock. 'The hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the Auncian in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst. (Dallas, Texas: Scriptorium, 2001)147. For further discussion on Sheela-na-gigs, see also Juliette Dor 'The Sheela-na-gig: An Incongrous Sign of Sexual Purity?' *Medieval Virginities*. Ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).

[33] Lorraine Kochanske Stock. 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the *Auncian* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. 130.

[34] Michael W. Twomey. 'Morgan le Faye at Hautdesert'. *On Arthurian Women*.

[35] Melanie McGarrahan Gibson. 'Lyonet, Lunete and Laudine: Carnivalesque Arthurian Women'. *On Arthurian Women*. 214.

[36] Melanie McGarrahan Gibson. 'Lyonet, Lunete and Laudine: Carnivalesque Arthurian Women'. 225.

[37] Joseph Falaky Nagy. 'Liminality and Knowledge in Irish Tradition'. 136. The danger of pollution in relation to the mediation between different categories is examined by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1966).

[38] The loathly lady appears in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, *The Awntyrs Off Arthure* (as I will argue in chapters 2 and 3), in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, and in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. I also argue that the loathly lady motif occurs in *Lybeaus Desconus*

and *Ywain and Gawain* (see chapters 4 and 5).

[39] The loathly lady motif appears in the Irish *Echtra Mac Daire*, and *Echtra Mac Eochaid Mugmedon*. The latter relates how Niall Noigillach, the eponymous ancestor the Uí Neill dynasty, acquired the kingship of Ireland. The story relates how Niall and his foster brothers depart on a hunt and, after a successful hunt and feast in the woods go looking for water to quench their thirst. Each brother sets off in turn to find a well and comes across a hideous old crone by the well who offers water in exchange for a kiss. Niall is the only brother who both willingly kisses and engages in sexual intercourse with the crone. In exchange for this the crone transforms into a beautiful woman who identifies herself as the sovereignty of Ireland and bestows the gift of sovereignty upon Niall who, having consummated his relationship with the woman, the representation of Ireland and the land itself, is entitled to the kingship. See Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. 107-137.

[40] J.K. Bollard. 'Sovereignty and the Loathly Lady in English, Welsh and Irish'. *Leeds Studies in English XVII*. (University of Leeds: School of English, 1986).

[41] Manuel Aguirre. 'The Riddle of Sovereignty'. *The Modern Language Review* 88 (1993, April).

[42] The three texts he names are *The Marriage of Sir Gawain, The Weddyng of Sir Gawain* and John Gower's *The Tale of Florent.*

[43] Manuel Aguirre. 'The Riddle of Sovereignty'. 275.

[44] Manuel Aguirre. 'The Riddle of Sovereignty'. 281.

[45] Michael Van Baker. 'The Dame and the Knight: Marriage, Sovereignty and Transformation'. *Parabola*. (Spring, 2004). For discussion on sovereignty in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, see also Stephen H.A. Shepherd 'No Poet Has His Travesty Alone: *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996).

[46] Helen Phillips. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure*: Structure and Meaning'. *Arthurian Literature 12*. Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) 75. For further discussion on sovereignty in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*, see A.C. Spearing 'Central and Displaced Sovereignty in Three Medieval Poems'. *Review of English Studies* 33 (1982).

[47] Vasta argues that 'The language of carnival—that is, the complex of disguises, actions, gestures, and the like—is neither literary nor, according to Bakhtin, translatable into concepts; it is therefore not adequately translatable into verbal, let alone literary, language. The carnivalesque, however, is transposable into literature through certain images: that is, through images that share the concrete, sensuous nature of carnival forms. Through such images, literature can be carnivalised, and it is through such carnivalisation that grotesquery or carnival realism or carnival humour finds a place, function and meaning in medieval literature. It is through such images, studied in this Bakhtinian context, that we can trace the progress of the Loathly Lady's English liberation'. Vasta, Edward. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. *Exemplaria* 7 (1995) 400.

[48] Edward Vasta. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. 397.

[49] Fries argues that female characters in Medieval Arthurian tradition fall into one of three categories: the female hero (unusual, but possible), the heroine and the counter-hero. The heroine, she argues, is the most common in Medieval Arthurian literature and is the passive female who inspires the male protagonist. The counter-hero is the marginalised woman who 'possesses the hero's superior power of action without possessing his or her adherence to the dominant culture or capability of renewing its values'. Fries, Maureen. Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition. 61.

[50] Corine J. Saunders. 'Women Displaced: Rape and Romance in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*'. *Arthurian Literature 13*. Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1995) 115-131. See also Erik Kooper 'Love and Marriage in the Middle English Romances' *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. (Amsterdam: V.U. University Press, 1990).

[51] *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell. Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Ed. Thomas Hahn. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995) Lines 605-609.

[52] Arnold Van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960)

[53] Martha Rampton. 'The Significance of the Banquet Scene in the *Bayeux Tapestry*'. *Medievalia et Humanistica* 21 (1994) 35.
[54] Sheila Fisher. 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. 78.
[55] Margaret Robson. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*. Ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert. (England: Longman Publishing, 2000) 231.
[56] Margaret Robson. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. 230.
[57] Manuel Aguirre. 'The Riddle of Sovereignty'.
[58] Edward Vasta. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. 413.
[59] Sheila Fisher. 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'.
[60] Sheila Fisher. 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*''. 89.
[61] For a full discussion of medieval beliefs in conception and childbirth, see chapter four.
[62] For an interesting study of gender, rhetoric and discourse, see Patricia Parker. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property*. (London and New York: Methuen, 1987)
[63] Findon examines how Emer's speech is positive in the texts, in direct opposition to most Medieval Irish literature, in which female speech and discourse has strong negative connotations. She points out that Emer 'not only spends more time on the narrative stage than most other women, she also has a good deal to say. Her words play prominent and powerful roles both in generating the plots of the tales and in their construction of meaning. Most significant is the uniformly positive portrayal of Emer in these texts, a factor which sets her apart from many of her sisters in medieval English and continental literature'. *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 20.
[64] E. Jane Burns. 'Rewriting Men's Stories: Enide's Disruptive Mouths'. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 159. For discussion on women and discourse, see Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou ' "This Creature": Discourses on Women and Discourses by Women in the Middle Ages'. *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 1 (1993).
[65] Manuel Aguirre. 'The Riddle of Sovereignty'. 276. See also Margaret Robson, who examines the unusual bodily voice of the decomposing corpse in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. She states that 'Although this particular figure [Guenevere's mother's ghost] is represented as having unusual powers of speech and movement, it must be remembered that decomposing bodies do both move and make noises, which may be interpreted as moaning...The "original" figure may, in actual, literal fact, have burst out of the marsh moaning and squirming'. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. 226-227.
[66] Margaret Robson argues that, in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, the message of the female body becomes clear as both warning and a prophecy of the inevitable, yet also as metaphor for the decomposition of King Arthur's state. Robson argues that 'The causes which will lead to the end of his empire are not ultimately, or not only, the unethical personal behavior of his subjects whose unruly private lives spill over into the public domain. It is his government which is at fault. Social division and inequality, aggressive imperialism, these are the problems which bring down kingdoms'. Margaret Robson. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. 233.
[67] Krista Sue-Lo Twe. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure* At The Terne Wathelyne: Reliquary For Romance. *Arthurian Literature 20*. Ed. Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003) 14.
[68] Ojars Kratins. 'Love and Marriage in Three Versions of "*The Knight of the Lion*"'. *Comparative Literature* 16 (1964) 38.
[69] Criticism from Busby, Kratins, Matthews, Bollard and Hamilton have examined the Middle English Romance in direct relation to its predecessor.
[70] David Matthews. 'Translation and Ideology: The Case of *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Neophilologus* 76. (1992, July) 457.
[71] Ojars Kratins. 'Love and Marriage in Three Versions of "*The Knight of the Lion*"'. 39.
[72] J.K. Bollard. '*Hende Wordes*: The Theme of Courtesy in *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Neophilologus* 78

(1994, October) 669.

[73] Another interesting phenomenon in criticism of *Ywain and Gawain* is the focus on male sovereignty. Even though it is Alundyne's property and fountain, criticism has focused on the sovereignty as something that belongs solely to Ywain merely through his marriage with Alundyne. Hamilton examines Ywain's sovereignty in her article 'The Breaking of Troth in *Ywain and Gawain*'.

[74] Romance is commonly acknowledged as having associations with women. In medieval romance, women are generally present and actively participate, in contrast to the epic narratives and chronicles, which are dominated by men. Historically, romance was popular with women, who were both readers and patrons. See Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Culture.* (New York and West Sussex; Columbia University Press, 2003).

[75] John Stevens. *Medieval Romance.* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973) 80.

[76] Cathalin Buhrmann Folks. 'Gentle Men, *Lufly* and *Loothly* Ladies, *Aglich Maysters:* Characterisation in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Noble and Joyous Histories.* Ed. Eilean Ní Cuilleanain and J.D. Phiefer. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993) 70.

[77] Tony Hunt. 'Beginnings, Middles and Ends: Some Interpretative Problems in Chrétien's *Yvain* and Its Medieval Adaptations'. *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics.* Ed. Leighy A. Arrathoom. (Rochester, Michigan: Solaris Press Inc., 1984) 110.

Chapter 2: *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*

In *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, the female protagonist exists in a liminal condition throughout the romance. It is her liminality, her ambiguous and simultaneously multiple classifications that propel the narrative and its characters forward and thus enable the positive outcome and conclusion of events without the loss of the female protagonist's autonomy. In this chapter, I will argue that central to the narrative are the motifs of female sovereignty, transformation, the supernatural or otherworldly and the consequences of feminine discourse and their relationship to the liminal experience of the female protagonist. That the loathly lady, however foul or fair she may appear at any one particular moment in the narrative, is simultaneously and constantly both, will also be explored. The presence of the abject female and her subsequent integration into society provides the first instance of this type of inclusion of the female liminal which will be further developed throughout the thesis. Dame Ragnell's liminal identity as an individual who exists on the boundaries of wilderness and culture highlights her as a character that appears to belong to the otherworld, however, her true identity as both otherworldly and conventionally 'civilised' is discovered at the end of the narrative. I will begin by examining examples of sovereignty within the narrative, in relation both to Dame Ragnell and Arthur. I will then explore the ways in which geographical and physical boundaries and borders contribute to an understanding of the inherent liminality of the female protagonist. A discussion of the effects of the transformation of the female protagonist will follow,

with an examination of the liminal nature of female discourse within this romance and its overall significance in relation to Dame Ragnell and Arthurian society.

Sovereignty

I will begin by discussing the significance of sovereignty within *The Weddyng,* how it applies to both Dame Ragnell and Arthur, and how it may be employed individually, socially and politically. J.K Bollard and Manuel Aguirre both examine the different definitions of sovereignty through a comparative analysis of Old Irish, Celtic texts and the Middle English romances in which the loathly lady appears as the central instigating force within the narrative. Bollard argues that 'we do not appear to be dealing with a single concept—sovereignty—used for two groups of purposes within the different tales; it is perhaps closer to the mark to state that we are dealing with two entirely distinct motifs—flaithius [as in the Old Irish tales] and sovereignty in marriage [as in the Middle English romances.]'[1] Following this line of argument, *The Weddyng* also relies upon separate definitions of sovereignty in relation to Ragnell and her role as the central character in the romance.[2] For the purposes of this study, sovereignty may be broadly defined as an independent authority either over oneself or in relation to others. It is described by Michael Van Baker as 'the ability to be, simply, [oneself]: to feel an autonomous self-hood, and to gain self-rule'.[3] Bollard points out that, 'in the English tales sovereignty is something which resides in the male and which…he can choose to grant to his wife'.[4] While Ragnell must acquire this from her husband to be free of the enchantment, her sovereignty can also be defined as an

independent existence outside the realm of the court. In this world, Ragnell's own autonomy is as recognisable as her marital autonomy within the realm of the court.[5] It is in this independent role of wild, unknowable loathliness, that Ragnell conforms to Maureen Fries's 'female counter-hero'.[6] In this position, Dame Ragnell appears to be an individual who exists outside the confines of male-dominated society and influence. As the loathly lady, Ragnell appears to fit the criteria for the female counter hero; she does not adhere to the protocol of male culture as it is she who sets down the conditions which Arthur and Gawain must follow.

Following Fries's definition, Ragnell may be compared to Morgan in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which Gawain's tests are formulated by Morgan herself to disprove the superiority of Arthur's court and humiliate the Round Table and to kill Guenevere. Morgan's appearance in this alliterative romance also provides a direct parallel with that of the loathly Dame Ragnell. When Morgan appears at Mass the first night of Gawain's stay in Lord Bertilak's castle, her appearance is juxtaposed with that of Lady Bertilak:

> Bot vnlyke on to loke þo laydes were,
> For if þe ȝonge watȝ ȝep, ȝolze watȝ þat oþer;
> Riche red on þat on rayled ayquere,
> Rugh ronkled chekeȝ þat oþer on rolled;
> Kerchofes of þat on, wyth mony cler perleȝ
>
> Hir brest and hir bryȝt þrote bare displayed,
> Schon schyer þen snawe þat schedeȝ on hilleȝ.
> þat oþer wyth a gorger watȝ gered ouer þe swyre,
> Chymbled ouer hir blake chyn with chalkquyte vayles,

Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
Toreted and treleted with tryfeȝ aboute,
þat noȝt watȝ bare of þat burde bot þe blake broȝes,
þe tweyne yȝen and þe nase, þe naked lyppeȝ,
And þose were soure to se and sellyly blered;
A mensk lady on molde mon may hir calle, for Gode!
Hir body watȝ schort and þik,
Hir buttokeȝ balȝ and brode;
More lykkerwys on to lyk
Wat þat scho hade on lode. [7](950-968)

Here, the contrast between the two women is highlighted and Gawain is unable to recognise the significance of the loathly Morgan, turning his full attention to Lady Bertilak.[8] This inability to recognise the importance of the loathly lady also occurs in *The Weddyng*: both Gawain and Arthur are unable to comprehend the profound influence and power that Ragnell holds over their lives. Like Morgan, Ragnell provides the challenge and the salvation for the male protagonists. Where in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan's beautiful counterpart is Lady Bertilak, in *The Weddyng*, Ragnell is simultaneously both loathly and beautiful damsel. Ragnell's liminal nature and experience also aids in defining her as a female counter- hero. Fries contends that 'the Arthurian female counter-hero is a fluid figure, always at least double and usually multiple in her manifestations'.[9] By saving the life of the sovereign and ensuring her place within his realm, Ragnell conforms to the position of the typical hero of medieval romance. Ragnell's position is, therefore, unique. While she does not maintain the criteria of the heroic biography, as defined by Jan De Vries, due in part to her mysterious origins and nature, she does accomplish that which the hero commonly seeks to achieve; the preservation of society and subsequent inclusion into that society.[10] The conscious achievement of such is rare in Middle English romance,

where the actions which save an individual or civilisation are employed by a male heroic figure. Elizabeth Archibald argues that, in medieval romance, the female protagonist is not allowed to 'grow' in any way, except to come to a realisation that she is in love.[11] However, in *The Weddyng*, Ragnell acts in response to her own situation, which subsequently serves to provide the salvation of society. There is no mention of love, unrequited or satisfied, in relation to the female protagonist. While Ragnell does state her intention to marry Gawain, it is because he is 'the best of Englond', and, as such, has the capacity to break the enchantment. While it may be argued that Gawain's definition as 'the best of Englond' relates to his associations with love and 'luf-talking', Ragnell's 'desire' for a husband is inextricably linked to her freedom from the spell.

Contrary to Archibald's argument, Ragnell acquires autonomy of character as a result of her own abilities. Her motivation is more than simply the desire for a good husband. It is the realisation of her true self and the autonomy that accompanies that sense of self, rather than the acquisition of a husband for its own sake that is Ragnell's primary concern. I would argue that Gawain himself is incidental in this relationship. It is *he* who is defined by platitudes: Gawain is so good, so courteous, and so loyal, that little is left to explore in his character. He is 'the best of Englond', the embodiment of chivalric perfection and it is this and only this which makes him of use to Ragnell. In the forest, Ragnell's sovereignty is defined as a pronounced influence over the king and a heroic ability to save him from Sir Gromer Somer Joure. However, Ragnell still relies upon the bestowal of sovereignty from Gawain to enter fully into the world she has

single-handedly preserved. As a result, Ragnell exists as a character both autonomous and dependent, both free and yet confined, both wild and civilised. The liminal nature of Ragnell is thus defined by the very concept central to the romance; that of sovereignty.[12]

In the later fifteenth-century text, *The Marriage of Sir Gawain,* the loathly lady does not request Gawain's hand in marriage, as she does in *The Weddyng*. Instead, Arthur offers Gawain to her as a reward for the answer to the Baron's question. As a result, the transformation at the end of *The Marriage* takes place without a knowledge of the enchantment's conditions which, in turn, indicates the loathly lady's ignorance regarding her own transformation. The narrative differences between these two texts emphasise significant areas within the story. In *The Marriage*, the loathly lady is not given a name and her appearance is more monstrous than Dame Ragnell: she is described thus:

> There as shold have stood her mouth,
> Then there was sett her eye;
> The other was in her forehead fast,
> The way that she might see.
>
> Her nose was crooked and turnd outward,
> Her mouth stood foule awry;
> A worse formed lady than shee was,
> Never man saw with his eye.[13](57-64)

While Dame Ragnell's appearance is described as being physically ugly, her features are not inverted or in the wrong place. The loathly lady of *The Marriage* however, is distorted and grotesque; she appears more otherworldly than Ragnell in her appearance and therefore more abject. That Arthur's first inclination is to offer his best knight and kinsman to such an individual is peculiar: that he offers Gawain as a potential husband immediately raises the issue of sex and procreation. By proposing the marital amalgamation of these two individuals, Arthur proposes a legitimate sexual union with the potential for offspring. Therefore, true social incorporation of what is, in part, 'other', would occur through the loathly lady's children. Rather than reluctantly accepting the loathly lady's conditions, as he does in *The Weddyng*, Arthur, in *The Marriage*, proposes the integration of this abject woman into his society. The emphasis on sexuality in *The Marriage* becomes more apparent when the Baron, upon learning of his sister's involvement in answering the riddle, calls her a 'misshappen hore'.(111) Another significant difference between the two romances is the presence of the 'humiliation scene' in *The Marriage.* Here, the knights gather around the lady while Kay voices his disgust at her appearance and horror at the prospect of marriage to her. While Gawain is not as cruel, he is, nevertheless, reluctant. The obvious lack of courtesy contrasts sharply with Gawain's response in *The Weddyng*, in which he enthusiastically agrees to the marriage. Rather than portraying the traits of chivalry, loyalty and courtesy, the knights in *The Marriage* appear as negative individuals who have failed to live up to the codes of conduct to which they subscribe. Perhaps the most notable difference is the absence of a child and the extent to which, after transforming into a beautiful woman, the loathly lady recedes, as Arthur and Kay

congratulate Gawain on his luck at escaping an unhappy marriage. Nor is she given a name, but becomes merely another lady at court. In this version of the romance, the characters appear to exist within a childlike state and like Arthurian society in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, they appear to be unable to comprehend their own flaws. Like the knights who adopt the feminine green girdle as a sign of their chivalric ability, in *The Marriage*, Arthur and his knights adorn themselves with a false sense of security; they are content in their ignorance of the loathly lady and as a result they drastically underestimate her significance. While the implications of her social integration, sexual potential and liminal existence between wilderness and culture, the abject and the acceptable, are recognised in *The Weddyng,* they are entirely ignored in *The Marriage*.

From the beginning of the narrative, the issue of sovereignty is shown to be a primary theme within the romance in relation to the character of Arthur. This introduces the concept of sovereignty, an inherent motif in relation to Dame Ragnell and her primary role within the narrative. When Arthur and his knights set out into Inglewood forest to hunt, almost immediately the question of Arthur's authority, his own sovereignty as a ruler, is challenged. The hunt motif is a common and significant element within Middle English romance. Anne Rooney discusses the Christian associations of the hunt in her book *Hunting in Middle English Literature*. She points out that the hunt was often used to emphasise mortality and worldly vanity. She states that 'Just as the hunt is often used in secular contexts to show that a character is worthy and courtly, so it can be used in a religious context to show secular activity or a

concern with worldly vanities'.[14] While it is not my intention to undertake a discussion on the presence or absence of Christian influence within *The Weddyng*, I would accept Rooney's argument that the hunt serves to emphasise the frivolities of secular aristocratic life and highlights the superficial nature of the court later in the romance when they are confronted with Dame Ragnell.

The hunt takes place in an area that is liminal in itself. Traditionally the king's property, the forest provided the landscape for the hunt. However, it was simultaneously a place that was unknown and wild.[15] Corine J. Saunders discusses the historical significance of the forest, stating that:

> the great and unknown expanses of forest which did form a part of medieval reality were themselves strangely populous and mixed landscapes, playing an important economic role in the agrarian history of Europe, and harbouring the criminal or outlaw…Parallel to the concept of the forest as the wild and wooded landscape beyond the city or castle, both feared and inhabited by the medieval population, stands the other, more specialised definition of the forest as a place set aside by kings for hunting[16]

The presence of Arthur and his knights in the forest signifies an excursion into a place that exists on the threshold between the wilderness and civilisation.

The question of Arthur's sovereignty is not unique to this text. In several Arthurian romances, Arthur's suitability as king is questioned. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Arthur is described as 'sumquat childgered, '(86)[17] as he enjoys the Christmas festivities. When the Green Knight announces his challenge, Arthur allows his kinsman Gawain to participate, in spite of the supernatural danger that is evident

from the knight's appearance. In this romance, the entire reputation of Arthur's society is questioned through the king's actions, Gawain's human failures and the Round Table's response to those failures. One of the most interesting reactions within this text comes, not from Arthur's opposition, but from his own people, who criticise the king's actions directly, saying ' "Who knew euer any kyng such cousel to take/ As knyȝteȝ in cauelacounȝ on Crystmasse gomneȝ!'"(682-683) Here, the suitability of the king and his judgments are challenged by the very people who rely upon the king for justice and protection. In *The Awntyrs off Arthur,* the just nature of the king is also questioned through the ghost's accusations and with the arrival of Sir Galeron. In *The Awntyrs*, Arthur is accused of unjustly usurping lands from Sir Galeron and bestowing them upon Gawain. Not only does this accusation call into question Arthur's suitability as a ruler, but the method which he chooses to resolve the conflict is also dubious. The tournament results in a clash of two equal strengths and risks the loss of one, if not both, knights, yet it is Guenevere and not Arthur who challenges this with her plea for mercy.[18] The question of Arthur's maturity and good judgment also arises in *Sir Launfal*, in which Arthur fails to listen to his loyal knights regarding the innocence of Launfal and the queen's guilt, resulting in the loss of Launfal from the Round Table and the blinding of Guenevere by the Lady Tryamour.[19]

In *The Weddyng*, as soon as Arthur leaves his companions, he metaphorically leaves behind his power as king. This act of detachment from the representation of Arthur's world, his knights, confers a liminal quality upon Arthur himself and stands in direct relation to Ragnell's own solitary independence. It is when Arthur ventures out

alone in pursuit of the deer, that his sovereignty is both called into question by Sir Gromer Somer Joure and concurrently acknowledged. Sir Gromer Somer Joure addresses Arthur uncourteously and without adherence to the rules of Arthur's world of chivalry, yet at the same time, recognises Arthur's dominance of the land through his ability to bestow that land on whomever he wishes. He says to Arthur:

> "Welle imet, Kyng Arthour!
> Thou hast me done wrong many a yere
> And wofully I shall quytte the here;
> I hold thy lyfe days nyghe done.
> Thou hast gevyn my landes in certayn
> With greatt wrong unto Sir Gawen,
> Whate sayest thou, Kyng alone? " (54-60)

Not only does this place Arthur within a liminal context, it provides a juxtaposition to Ragnell's situation. It is at this point, as Michael van Baker argues, that 'the negotiations between King Arthur and Sir Gromer Somer Joure are mirrored by the relationship between Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell. The knight's outrage over the "land" unlawfully given to Gawain can be seen as a reflection of Dame Ragnell's position in marriage at the time. Dame Ragnell has the answer to the riddle because she *is* the answer to why the riddle is asked. She will not become a husband's property'.[20] Here, Ragnell's sovereignty may stand in direct conjunction with the masculine values that surround her. However, she remains impervious to those values and the male reaction itself, through her ability to remain autonomous, even when existing within the constraints of male-dominated culture. Sir Gromer Somer Joure recognises Arthur's liminality, his simultaneous strength and weakness. However, Arthur later fails to recognise Ragnell's liminal nature, seeing only the one

classification of her character and failing to see the other. He sees only her hideousness and at this he 'mervayled securly'(230). Arthur is unable to see that he has left behind the world in which his values are upheld. He expects Sir Gromer Somer Joure to acknowledge his sovereignty and thus behave according to the rules of his realm. When Arthur appeals to Sir Gromer's sense of chivalry and fair play, he does not receive a request for the expected, land or wealth; rather, he is met with a challenge that spells almost certain death.[21] Arthur in turn responds with an oath based on his own innate belief in chivalry and courtesy and departs with his knights to Carlylle. As a result, the issue of sovereignty becomes an obvious theme within the romance, as the traditional association of sovereignty, that of the king, is challenged and questioned from the outset through the coexistence of Arthur in two realms simultaneously; that of the courtly, to which his principles adhere, and that of the wilderness, in which he temporarily exists. The temporary liminal position of Arthur in this romance offers insight into the situations of both male and female characters within Middle English romance. The question becomes; 'if women possess autonomy and power by virtue of their status as liminal individuals, why does Arthur become vulnerable when he enters a liminal state of being'? This has much to do with the conventional expectations of gendered positions. When women are viewed as liminal individuals, they are taken out of a context which places them at the bottom of the gender hierarchy and are placed in a position whereby they must break with social expectations and inhabit borders. This enables a degree of power and autonomy to an individual who would, in conventional society, lack either. When women are viewed as liminal, they maintain that liminal status and it becomes a fundamental component of their identity. However, when men

become liminal, as Arthur in *The Weddyng*, or Lybeaus, or Ywain (as will later be discussed), it is a temporary position. Because these men possess the conventional attributes of their gender, they already have power and autonomy by virtue of their sex. When they then become liminal individuals, that power is automatically diminished because their experience is divided between a realm in which they are singularly powerful and one in which they are not. The temporary nature of their liminal status emphasises the fact that in a feudal and male-dominated society, men cannot be dynamic in their categorisation as individuals or they risk a total loss of power in society.

It is interesting to note that in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, the issue of sovereignty and land is also of great significance as it is this which is at stake rather than the chivalrous concerns of personal honour. Criticism of Arthurian society is demonstrated within *The Marriage*: Arthur places his lands in danger by failing to live up to the expectations placed upon him as leader and king. Rather than fight the Baron (it is never mentioned in this text that Arthur is unarmed), Arthur chooses a quest instead. This immediately questions his suitability as a military leader and, when Arthur returns and written answers to the question do not suffice, the Baron 'cryd himselfe a king' (91) implying that Arthur's failure is about more than simply honour, but kingship and territory. The Loathly Lady, when she appears, is described as wearing scarlet clothing, sitting 'betwixt an oke and a greene hollen'(55) at the Tarn Wathelyne in Inglewood forest. Again, Arthur is associated with the Tarn, and the Tarn is associated with an otherworldly woman, as in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. Here,

the loathly lady straddles the boundaries between society and wilderness in a place commonly associated with the supernatural.

When Arthur re-enters Inglewood forest at the end of his year's quest and meets Dame Ragnell, he enters again into that liminal sphere where he exists as both a king with chivalric ideals and influence, and as an outsider within his own kingdom. It is here, in this liminal space and from the liminal, sovereign Dame Ragnell, that Arthur receives the answer for which he has been searching. Ragnell herself displays that liminal experience of maintaining her individual and solitary sovereignty, which places her within the realm of the wilderness of Inglewood, and the need to attain sovereignty within the realm of Arthur's society. When Arthur accepts his position of dependence upon Ragnell, he also accepts Ragnell herself into society and the sovereignty she has over him. Bound by his own code of honour and courtly conduct, Arthur, ironically, must submit to what appears to be the antithesis of that code.

Ragnell's final achievement of personal sovereignty, within the confines of the bedroom and within the realm of the court depends upon a lesson she herself has taught. By providing the answer to the question of women's chief desire, Ragnell has already provided Gawain with the means for her emancipation. However, it is due to Gawain's own adherence to the rules of courtliness and 'luf-talkying', that he is able to grant Ragnell sovereignty in marriage [22] and thereby break the spell. The choice Ragnell puts to Gawain [23] would, if followed, place Ragnell permanently between two worlds, maintaining her liminal existence between wilderness and culture, but

extinguishing her claim to sovereignty in any realm. However, by granting her the choice, Gawain enables Ragnell's autonomy in both realms. Her liminal nature is preserved, as she is both a wife and self-ruling, autonomous partner to Gawain. She explains to Gawain:

> "For I was shapen by nygramancy,
> With my stepdame, God have on her mercy,
> And by enchauntment;
> And shold have bene oderwyse understond,
> Even til the best of Englond
> Had wedyd me verament,
> And also he shold geve me the sovereynte
> Of alle his body and goodes, sycurly.
> Thus was I disformyd;
> And thou, Sir Knyght, curteys Gawen,
> Has gevyn me the sovereynte serteyn. " (691-701)

However, her liminal nature is positive and allows her legitimate admittance to her husband and society.[24] In her examination of fairy tales, Marina Warner explores the motif of the 'wicked stepmother', devoting a chapter to this significant theme. She argues that, in various traditional tales, from ancient Greece through the late nineteenth-century, the wicked stepmother's presence is indicative of the tensions that arise from a sense of domestic usurpation between women within the household. Warner argues further that it is because these tales are generated within patriarchal societies the older women are faced with the threat of displacement within and possibly from their home. In *The Weddyng*, reference to a woman who appears to possess the characteristics of the traditional wicked stepmother points to two issues. Her placement in a negative position establishes a dichotomy whereby Ragnell herself *must* become a positive figure; she is the traditional heroine, who has to overcome the evil that has

been placed upon her. Perhaps even more significant is the 'cure' for the stepmother's evil enchantment. Warner states that:

> One of the reasons for the fairy tale prince's impeccable reputation is that, in a marriage where a bride enters the husband's family, he becomes her chief ally, and his love her mainstay against the interests of others. Many of the most famous and best-loved tales, like "Bluebeard", and " Beauty and the Beast", tell of the struggles the heroine undergoes in the quest to secure this love.[25]

In *The Weddyng*, Gawain appears as the 'prince', who lives up to his own flawless reputation through his loyalty to Arthur and kindness to Ragnell. By proving to be the perfect knight and courtly lover, Gawain helps to end the stepmother's malign influence.

Borders, Wilderness and the Female Body

I will now turn to examine the ways in which the loathly lady may be defined and the significance of her otherworldly, liminal physicality and character. In *The Weddyng*, she is an individual who straddles the world of the unknown and that of ordered society.[26] She exists as both a product of magic and a mortal woman.[27] As a being of the 'otherworld', she inspires the traditional conventions of a supernatural being. According to Jeff Rider, otherworlds,

> disrupt the order of a peaceful, stable aristocratic world, bring about the hero's departure from that world, and launch the narrative. Narrative launching otherworldly interventions may also occur, however, in response to pre-existing problems or tensions within the central aristocratic society which it cannot resolve on its own, in order to bring to light the faults of that society which might

> otherwise go unnoticed and uncorrected. In this case, the otherworldly intervention is not a threat to be countered but a catalyst that helps the central aristocratic society attain a new order by provoking a process through which a problem in that world is resolved or a fault in it is exposed.[28]

Dame Ragnell's inspiration as an otherworldly being serves to resolve the unseen imbalance within Arthur's society. The otherworldly Sir Gromer Somer Joure initiates the narrative through his challenge and accusation, both exposing Arthur's unjust conduct regarding the distribution of land, and instigating conflict between the otherworldly realm and Arthur's society.[29] However, it is the loathly lady, in her position as an otherworldly individual and human woman, who enables the reconciliation between realms and, ironically, brings about regeneration within Arthur's society through the birth of Gyngolyn.

Thomas Hahn points out the otherworldly element present in *The Weddyng*. He says that the romance:

> deploys another common romance convention by setting the marvelous—especially the unanticipated but fatefully indispensable encounters and compacts that begin the poem—within a wood. The forest is a place for both recreation and mystery, where Arthur and his court go on holiday but where anything can happen.[30]

Indeed, throughout the narrative, the forest and the world of Arthur's court are placed in direct opposition. Where one is wild, the other is civilised; where one is unknowable and irregular, the other is ordered and predictable. It is this dichotomy that establishes the setting for the romance itself. Throughout the narrative, the characters struggle with these two realms and how they may be reconciled to effect a positive

outcome. Dame Ragnell's liminal nature and experience is itself a result of this conflict between the feral, 'otherworld' that is Inglewood forest, and the courtly society of Carlylle as she exists as both noble woman and loathly lady. Arthur says to his knights:

> "Hold you stylle, every man,
> And I wolle goo myself, yf I can,
> With crafte of Stalkyng."
> [then]The Kyng in hys hand toke a bowe
> And wodmanly he stowped lowe
> To stalk unto that dere. (28-33)

Here, Arthur visibly crosses the border between the world in which he is king and the untamed wilderness that is Inglewood forest. It is only at the end, with Ragnell's transformation and the final reconciliation between Arthur and Sir Gromer Somer Joure, that a true harmony is effected.

Dame Ragnell herself achieves the position of both hero and female counter-hero within the romance through providing the information that will save the king, and as a result, the kingdom. That her motivations may be self-serving does not detract from the positive influence her actions provoke. As female counter-hero, Ragnell's sovereignty and influence are unquestionable. While she is representative of wilderness, Ragnell can not, as Edward Vasta argues, be a marginalised figure.[31] However, once she moves within the social realm that is Arthur's court, marginalisation becomes an inevitable consequence of her liminal nature. Here, her existence between worlds, that of wilderness and society, autonomous sovereignty and abject dependence, inspires a fear that results in the marginalisation of Ragnell from

the courtly realm. When she arrives at Arthur's court, her appearance causes commotion amongst Arthur's subjects who wonder at Ragnell's place of origin and her ugliness. Her parade through Carlylle causes great embarrassment to Arthur himself:

> Of her had greatt shame,
> Butt forth she rood, though he were grevyd;
> Tylle they cam to Karlyle forth they mevyd.
> Into the courte she rode hym by;
> For no man wold she spare securly-
> It likyd the Kyng fulle ylle.
> Alle the contraye had wonder greatt
> Fro whens she com, that foule unswete;
> They saww nevere of so fowlle a thyng.(515-523)

The physically grotesque nature of Ragnell supports an argument for a Bakhtinian interpretation of the text, which has been undertaken by Edward Vasta and by Rebecca A. Davis in 'More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent in *The Weddynge of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*'.[32] Both approaches examine the carnivalesque nature of Ragnell's parade into Carlyle and the wedding feast itself. However, I shall argue that the description, not only of Ragnell's physical appearance, but also of her behaviour at the feast, serves as a further reminder of Ragnell's liminal nature. While it has been argued that her grotesque behaviour at the wedding banquet displays her overzealous sexual appetite, and her therefore inappropriate inclusion in the courtly domain of Arthur's society,[33] it is the implication of that sexual overtness that is crucial in the understanding of Ragnell's character.

The importance of food generally and banqueting or feasting in particular, is of great significance within medieval literature and iconography. Martha Rampton

examines the banquet scene in the Bayeux Tapestries, and discusses the ways in which the feast demonstrates the community through allusion to the Christian Eucharist and the liminal experience of feasting as a rite of passage.[34] The significance of the feast as a rite of passage is also examined by Arnold Van Gennep in his anthropological study *The Rites of Passage*, in which the communal partaking of food can highlight the reintroduction of an individual into society after a period of absence. In *The Weddyng*, Ragnell's hunger may not only mirror her absence from society and emphasise her 'otherness', it also emphasises the liminal area into which food, the symbol of communal involvement, is unceremoniously guzzled. Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the role of food and drink in relation to the grotesque body. He says:

> Eating and Drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense.[35]

Here, Ragnell's mouth functions as the 'vagina dentata' in reverse. David Williams examines the 'vagina dentata' stating that:

> Although in the sexual act, as in castration, the genitals "disappear", in the legend of the vagina dentata, this disappearance represents the absorption of the male by the female and his destruction. In the normal sexual act, such disappearance betokens the transcendence of both gender restrictions.[36]

Ragnell's metaphorical absorption of the male is displayed in her acquisition of sovereignty over the king. The devouring mouth parallels the equally insatiable vagina in its hunger for social inclusion: for it must be remembered that the production of

offspring is not a consequence of sexual intercourse, but its purpose. Julia Kristeva also examines the significance of food as occupying liminal territory. She states that '[when] food appears as a polluting object, it does so as oral object only to the extent that orality signifies a boundary of the self's clean and proper body. Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories'.[37] Ragnell's purpose is the breaking of the spell through legitimate social integration via a husband. In her article 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the Auncian in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*, Lorraine Kochanske Stock examines the relationship between the characterisation of Morgan le Faye in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the medieval iconography of the Sheela-na-gigs. She points out that their positions in liminal spaces and apparent sexual displays can be seen as a model for Morgan le Faye herself. She explores the similarities between Morgan, as described in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* and the Sheelas.[38] Stock also points out the position of Morgan as loathly lady, arguing that 'Morgan is the quintessential literary "loathly damsel" in a graphic portrait of feminine otherness whose details also suggest the Sheela-na-gig'.[39] As the loathly lady, Ragnell herself is situated on the threshold of two very different territories. The interpretation of her behaviour as somehow 'polluting' to courtly society relates to Mary Douglas's theory that that which is liminal, 'that which cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as "polluting" and "dangerous."'[40] Victor Turner also examines the connection between the liminal and the perceived "dangerous," maintaining that 'from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of "structure," all

sustained manifestations of communitas must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions'.[41] In this light, Ragnell's repulsive and terrifying conduct implies not only her perceived impurity, but her position on the threshold of individual representation. She exists, along with the Sheela-na-gigs, in a 'category of extreme female otherness'.[42]

Arthur's embarrassment extends beyond the mere physical loathliness of Ragnell, to what she symbolises. As bride to the knight famed for his 'luf-talkyng' and courtliness to women, Ragnell upsets the order of Arthur's realm through her opposing contrast to that world in which she must be admitted as a noble wife. Edward Vasta examines the carnivalesque nature of *The Weddyng*, arguing that this particular romance is the culmination of loathly lady narratives, resulting in her 'literary liberation'. He points out that:

> At the end of the romance, when the loathly Ragnelle changes into the beautiful wife, we learn that her ugly body has indeed been a carnival mask, one that "disformed" (694) her so that she "shold have bene oderwise understond" (694). Ragnell's enchantress stepmother imposed the mask in precise defiance of the culture's established norms and possibilities, for the mask can be removed only by the loathly Ragnell's success in winning the truly ("verament," 696) offered body and the completely ("sicurly," 698) granted sovereignty of England's best man.[43]

Vasta's carnivalesque interpretation of the text implies Ragnell's liminal experience. He argues that 'Ragnell's body identifies with things and animals outside it, and not as a particular body but in a universal way, sharing colour, size, and shape with the world; in otherworlds, she is not, according to official canon of body imagery, a finished, completed, limited body, viewed from the outside as something individual, but a dual

body, one encompassing both life and death, in that its very corruption and decay are full of vitality'.[44] Therefore, Ragnell's liminality and sovereignty over king and country becomes apparent as she appears, as Vasta points out 'precisely at a time and place that unite life and death: Arthur's life is in her hands…and only through her, she says, may the king save his life'.[45] Through a seeming inversion of an order and balance that defines Arthur's society, held together by an oath made under those very principles, Ragnell herself assumes Arthur's own sovereignty. In a world turned upside-down, where the desires of a wild woman dictate the order and outcome of events and where a king finds himself indebted to this same woman, it becomes inevitable that the possessor of sovereignty also shifts to the most unlikely of candidates; Dame Ragnell herself. While the interpretation of Ragnell as a carnivalesque individual is interesting and aids in defining her liminal nature, I would argue that by identifying Ragnell as allegory, a representation of the world beyond her own physical limits, it becomes easy to dismiss her altogether as a woman. It is her individual body, her sexuality, her simultaneous abject nature and socially inclusive self that emphasises her significance. To relegate Ragnell to the insipidity of allegory is to strip her of her sexuality.

Transformation

The transformation of Ragnell directly relates to her liminal nature. She is human yet can be classified as such physically in many different ways; both young and old, both ugly and beautiful, both independent and dependent. To fully comprehend

Ragnell's transformation, it is important to examine the nature of the aspects of her character that undergo transformation. The obvious is, of course, the physical representation of the body: Ragnell's unsurpassed loathliness. Ragnell's physical detestability would seem to indicate moral corruption and a depraved character.[46] The monstrosity of Ragnell's body is significant in itself. The prevalent medieval views of the body were dictated by theories relating to Neo-Platonism. According to medieval medical thought, the body 'is related to the allegorical concept of microcosm, in which the cosmos is contained in the "little cosmos" of the world and both are represented in miniature in the human body'.[47] This in turn leads to the misconception that,

> The transgressions of the body's natural boundaries through disease or deformity constitute not only a threat to the body, but as well, a kind of denial of the systems modeled on it, rendering vulnerable the principle of order that is bodily structure and system.[48]

In this light, Ragnell's physical body becomes representative of the 'disorder' of the forest which she inhabits. The threat, therefore, to the civilised world of Arthur's court becomes not only a superficial aesthetic threat, but a threat of social and sexual chaos: it must not be forgotten that at the heart of the narrative is the issue of marriage and regeneration. In this text, the link between female sovereignty and sexuality is apparent. The relationship between these two elements is a common element in medieval Irish literature, in which the sexual union of the loathly lady and the legitimate male partner marks the physical transformation of the lady herself and the male protagonist's entitlement to the kingship. While the kingship of the country is not bestowed upon Gawain in *The Weddyng*, his marriage to Dame Ragnell results in the

birth of a son whose status is legitimate within society, but who is also the product of a union between a woman who straddles the borders of society and wilderness, and a man who enables the sovereignty she holds in both realms. Gryngolen is marked, not only by his paternity, but also by maternal associations. Ragnell's marriage to Gawain places more at stake than the inconvenience of an ugly bride; it calls into question the future order and structure of an entire society. The threat of a society bound to the same liminal definition as Ragnell herself is the most terrifying of all. It is through the body and its liminal areas, the mouth and genitals, the areas of regenerative and discoursive initiation, that the perpetuation of this liminal existence becomes the perceived risk. However, the negativity that surrounds Ragnell through much of the narrative is in itself transformed into a positive appreciation for her aid and subsequent marriage, once she appears to become the physical embodiment of that goodness.

When Arthur first meets Ragnell in Inglewood, he is appalled, not only by her physical deformity, but also by the juxtaposed beauty of her mount and its adornment, for:

> She satt on a palfrey was gay begon,
> With gold besett and many a precious stone.
> Ther was an unsemely syghte:
> So fowle a creature withoute mesure
> To ryde so gayly, I you ensure,
> Ytt was no reason ne ryghte. (246-251)

That this is described as 'no reason ne ryghte',(251) merely enforces the idea that 'beauty and the beast' cannot be linked together (ironically, it is Ragnell who is the

beast and not the animal upon which she sits) and it is this idea that inspires the disapproval of Arthur's realm. Ragnell's marriage to Gawain is not only at odds with the cultural order of society, but at odds with Arthur's moral obligation as ruler to defend his people from corruption. The fact that Ragnell is positive in nature, something she herself admits,[49] is lost through the contradiction her appearance inspires. Ragnell's physical appearance is described a second time when Gawain sees her on their wedding day. Again, there is a juxtaposition of her hideous appearance and the beauty of the clothes she wears:

> She was arayed in the richest maner,
> More fressher than Dame Gaynour;
> Her arrayment was worthe thre thowsand mark
> Of good red nobles, styff and stark,
> So rychly she was begon.
> For alle her rayment, she bare the belle
> Of fowlnesse, that evere I hard telle-
> So fowlle a sowe sawe nevere man. (590-597)

This contrasting description emphasises Ragnell's liminality, as she is truly between both worlds at once however, it is only she who is aware of her true nature.

Ragnell's transformation is brought about by two catalysts, the first being her own actions which provide the means for her liberation from the spell; the second, the influence of the male characters, which also enables her transformation. Ragnell herself initiates the course of events leading to her marriage through her bargain with Arthur only she knows that this is the course which must be followed in order to break the spell. Likewise, Arthur's oath to Ragnell and Gawain's subsequent loyalty to his

king, also enable the transformation to occur.[50] Gawain's loyalty to Arthur is made clear when he enthusiastically agrees to:

> Wed her and wed her agayn,
> Thowghe she were a fend;
> Thowghe she were as foulle as Belsabub,
> Her shalle I wed, by the Rood,
> Or elles were nott I your frende.(343-347)

The result is the unexpected preservation of the kingdom through the marriage and transformation of Dame Ragnell. Indeed, it is Ragnell's liminal experience that drives the narrative forward, as she strives for reconciliation between both worlds. This she achieves at the end of the romance when she asks Arthur to pardon her brother and restore his lands, and gives birth to Gawain's son. However, the joyful ending of the romance does not anticipate an ending to Ragnell's liminal knowledge. Ragnell's transformation into the beauty merely redefines her liminal experience. She is both the perfect wife and yet, as the partner with sovereignty granted to her, contradicts that role entirely. Instead of defining Ragnell, her transformation serves to make her even more liminal, as she cannot be the perfect wife while she has sovereignty over her husband. It is clear by the end of the narrative that this sovereignty is preserved through the final transformative act which occurs. Gawain's submission to Ragnell is marked by his lack of will to leave her side, for:

> As a coward he laye by her bothe day and nyghte.
> Nevere would he haunt justyng aryghte,
> Theratt mervayled Arthoure the Kyng. (808-810)

Here, Gawain transforms from chivalrous, loyal knight, into docile lover and the conditions of the spell are met as Gawain grants Ragnell 'the sovereynte/ of alle his body and goodes, sycurly'.(697-698)

Discourse

The significance of speech lies in its designation as a distinctively human activity. Because spoken language acts as a primary means for communication between individuals, its importance relates to its existence within a social context. Speech is, in itself, a liminal construct. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas discusses how bodily orifices represent the vulnerable margins of the body and may be constituted as dangerous. She argues that the matter which transgresses those margins becomes marginal and therefore polluting.[51] However, to regard these orifices as liminal, rather than marginal, assumes that that which is emitted from them becomes liminal as well. Speech crosses the boundaries between the internal that is the individual, into the external, communal realm through the orifice of the mouth. Therefore, it both defines the human ability to create societies through verbal communication, while simultaneously existing as a construct of the individual. In Middle English romance, the significance of human discourse is evident in both the male and female characters. In the romance *Ywain and Gawain*, the male protagonist's loss of speech occurs when he rejects his human identity and enters the wilderness as an animalistic individual. The rejection of society often results in the loss of language. In *Sir Orfeo*, Orfeo enters the wilderness after Heurodis's abduction where his lack of human speech is replaced

by his music, which acts as the device of communication between him and the natural world which he inhabits. Orfeo's music alone speaks to the otherworld of the wilderness:

> Into alle the wode the soun gan schille,
> That all the wilde bestes that ther beth
> For joie abouten him thai teth,
> And alle the foules that ther were
> Come and sit on ich brere
> To here his harping a-fine--
> So miche melody was therin;
> And when he his harping lete wold,
> No beste bi him abide nold. [52](272-280)

The loss of speech and language may also operate as punishment or penance, as in *Sir Gowther*. In this romance, Gowther must reject his human identity and assume the identity of a dog. His lack of speech, combined with the prohibitions relating to food (he may only eat scraps fit for a dog) both emphasise the significance of the mouth as a liminal orifice through which identity may be maintained or determined.[53]

While the employment of speech by male figures in Middle English romance portrays the status of their identity, the connotations surrounding female discourse are varied. [54] In romance, women's speech may be positive or negative. In her study of Medieval French literature, E. Jane Burns examines the ways in which women speak through their bodies, as well as their mouths. In a discussion on Chrétien de Troyes's heroine, Enide, she states that :

> If we read *Erec and Enide* not as a master narrative of Chrétien de Troyes's rhetorical skill but as a tale of female voices speaking against that tradition of storytelling, we get a new picture of love and courtliness, romance and adventure. We begin to see how the objectification of the lovely lady, so crucial to the working of the courtly milieu, where she provides the inspiration for feats of prowess, the audience for chivalric combat, and the supportive listener for tales of adventure, focuses principally on the female body. The heroine's speech more staunchly resists colonisation and appropriation; her constructed voice cannot be fetishised as easily as her fictive flesh.[55]

The ability of the female voice to transgress gender boundaries is indicative of its influence within narratives. Women's discourse may provide the impetus for heroic action, or exist as a cause for chivalric failure. In either case, its true significance lies in its ability to disrupt social orders and prescriptions. If speech is a cultural construct unique to humanity, which enables the existence and continuation of community and society, its employment by women should imply their social integration. However, in texts where female speech negatively impacts upon the designations of a civilisation, the speaking woman becomes associated with otherworlds beyond social boundaries. Whereas in *Ywain and Gawain, Sir Gowther*, or *Sir Orfeo*, the male protagonist's lack of discourse exists as a result of their placement in otherworlds or wildernesses, in texts in which women's speech provides potential negative social disruption, they are associated *with* otherworlds. This contradiction places these women in a liminal space, whereby their prolific use of the social construct that is language places them in realms outside society. When Gowther's mother vocalises her desire for a child, she is physically outside the domestic space to which it is traditionally assumed women were confined.[56] In *Sir Degaré*, the vocalisation of her fear at being outside the social safety of her community of ladies, in the wilderness, precipitates Degaré's mother's physical

violation and results in the birth of Degaré.[57] Similarly, Morgan le Faye's instigation of action within *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* stems from a communication of her motives through both language and magic within the otherworld of Hautdesert. Morgan's use of both language and magic occurs outside Arthurian civilisation, but is able to transgress these boundaries and initiate the action within the narrative. However, in romances in which women ascribe to social norms and gender hierarchies, their voices often go unheard. In the 'Constance sagas', such as *Lay Le Freine, Sir Tryamour* and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, the accused yet innocent women proclaim their virtue and are ignored.[58] The exoneration at the end of the narrative occurs, not as a result of the female voice, but through factors beyond their immediate control.[59] This discounting of the female voice also occurs in Middle English fabliau, in which women's speech is used to sexually tease the male characters.[60] In Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* and *Merchant's Tale*, both Alison and May verbally discourage their suitors, who not only ignore their discourse, but pursue them further and are successful.[61] Here, female speech, when employed, contradicts the speaker's intentions. As a result, the female speaking subject conforms to the negative stereotypes of womanhood as overly sexual, indecisive, foolish and cunning individuals.[62] The ambiguous nature of women's speech in Middle English narrative may appear problematic, but is indicative of the liminal nature of the female speaking subject. She is simultaneously classified as human, due to her ability to speak, yet gendered social constraints define the speaking woman as somehow 'other'. As a result, she may be ostracised, mistrusted, violated, or ignored: however, she is never extraneous or insignificant.

In *The Weddyng*, Ragnell's discourse provides the means for the salvation of Arthur and his society and offers the clue as to how the spell placed upon her can be broken. Though it appears she belongs to the same uncouth world of her brother, Sir Gromer Somer Joure, she speaks with decorum and civility. She herself tells Arthur her name and her honourable intentions, saying "'Syr Kyng, I highte Dame Ragnell, truly,/ That nevere yett begyled man.'"(319-320) When Arthur first meets Ragnell, she says:

> "Speke with me, I rede, or thou goo,
> For thy lyfe is in my hand, I warn the soo;
> That shalt thou fynde, and I itt nott lett."(255-257)

When Arthur responds, it is Ragnell who sets the conditions of the bargain, saying:

> "Thou must graunt me a knyght to wed:
> His name is Sir Gawen.
> And suche covenaunt I wolle make the,
> Butt thorowe myne answere thy lyf savyd be,
> Elles let my desyre be in vayne.
> And yf myne answere save thy lyf,
> Graunt me to be Gawen's wyf."(280-286)

Here, Ragnell's speech is an enabling force behind the action within the narrative, as she sets in motion the series of events that will eventually result in a positive conclusion.

When Arthur returns to Inglewood to promise Ragnell Gawain's hand in marriage and receive the answer to the riddle, Dame Ragnell uses her power of speech to display

her wisdom and knowledge of that which women most desire. Here, her discourse displays her knowledge of humanity and her articulation of that knowledge. It thereby implies a bond between Ragnell and the world from which she is believed to be marginalised. She is, however, simultaneously a part of the 'other' world, as she alone knows the answer to the riddle. It becomes clear that Ragnell's liminal nature allows her to know the 'civilised' woman's desires when society itself cannot. In this text, female discourse aids the characters in various ways: it is empowering to the female protagonist; it is simultaneously a weapon and tool for bargaining; it is positive, as it is both the subject of and solution to the challenge placed by Sir Gromer Somer Joure; and finally, it exists as a liminal feature to Ragnell's character. It is from her mouth, the liminal space between her outside and what Ragnell appears to be, and the inside of what she truly is, that truth is learned and lives are spared.

Perhaps the most poignant irony within the romance is the civilised world's innate fear of the other, the perceived monstrous, as it exists within the physical embodiment of benevolence and humanity. Dame Ragnell's physicality may exist as an inversion of what her character should physically appear to be. However, the subsequent inversion of society's expectations towards Ragnell exposes another significant element within the narrative. The danger of the liminal, the otherworldly, is not nearly so threatening as the incorporation of the liminal into society. As has been previously stated, Ragnell's physicality may have changed, but her liminal character merely altered. Female sovereignty, always possessed by Ragnell, but never previously incorporated into the social realm, transgresses its marginalisation and is made a part of social reality

through Ragnell herself. Hence, the body monstrous and its liminal nature is redefined. Female sovereignty in the 'otherworld', the realm of the untamed and supernatural may appear a threat, but it is only when it is brought within the boundaries of society and social order, that true inversion becomes possible.

---

[1] J.K. Bollard. 'Sovereignty and the Loathly Lady in English, Welsh and Irish'. *Leeds Studies in English 17* (University of Leeds, 1986) 47.

[2] For an in depth discussion on sovereignty in medieval Irish literature, see Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. (Kildare: Maynooth Monographs, 1990). For an interesting discussion on possible connections between Arthur and Ireland, see Ann Dooley, 'Arthur of the Irish: A Viable Concept?' *Arthurian Literature 21*. Ed. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004).

[3] Michael Van Baker. 'The Dame and the Knight: Marriage, Sovereignty and Transformation'. *Parabola* 29 (2004, Spring) 17.

[4] J.K. Bollard. 'Sovereignty and the Loathly Lady in English, Welsh and Irish'. 56.

[5] Stephen Shepherd argues that Ragnell never really possesses sovereignty because her experience does not relate to the sovereignty of the realm or the sovereign himself. 'No Poet Has His Travesty Alone: *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays in Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers, and Judith Weiss. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996). However, I would argue that sovereignty may be defined in this text in relation to the individual within society and the wilderness, and his or her ability to maintain autonomy.

[6] Fries defines the female counter-hero as a character who 'holds values which are not necessarily those of the male culture in which she must exist'. She points out that 'her actions are as likely to hurt the hero as to help him'. and that 'she constantly fills roles ordinarily attributable only to men'. Maureen Fries, 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes; Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster (New York: Garland, 1996) 68.

[7] *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. Ed Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1995) Lines 950-968. All further references will be to this edition.

[8] For discussion on the role of Morgan in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, see Michael W. Twomey, 'Morgan Le Fay at Hautdesert' and Lorraine Kochanske Stock, 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the *Auncian* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst. (Dallas, Texas: Scriptorium, 2001). See also Cathalin Buhrmann Folks, 'Gentle Men, Lufly and Loothly Ladies, Aghlich Maysters: Characterisation *in The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Noble and Joyous Histories: English Romances 1375-1650*. Ed. Eilean Ní Cuilleanain and J.D. Phiefer. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993). See also Sheila Fisher, 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. See also Maureen Fries. 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan Le Faye in Medieval Romance'. *Arthuriana* 3 (1994). For discussion on women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, see Geraldine Heng 'Feminine Knots and Other: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *PMLA* 106 (1991, May). See also Maureen Fries 'The Characterisation of Women in the Alliterative Tradition'. *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*. Ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach. (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981).

[9] Maureen Fries. 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter Heroes; Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. 68.

[10] Jan De Vries undertakes a discussion on the pattern of an heroic life in *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963). Otto Rank also examines heroism in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1959). In this, he concentrates on the interpretations of mythology and the hero's role within various mythological cycles. See also Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. (London: Fontana Press, 1949, 1993).

[11] Elizabeth Archibald. 'Women and Romance'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair MacDonald. (Amsterdam: V.U. University Press, 1990).

[12] For further discussion of sovereignty and gender in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, see Erik Kooper, 'Love and Marriage in the Middle English Romances'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. See also Ananda K. Coomaraswamy 'On The Loathly Bride'. *Speculum* 20 (1945, October).

[13] *The Marriage of Sir Gawain. Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Ed. Thomas Hahn. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995) Lines 57-64. All further line references will be to this edition.

[14] Anne Rooney. *Hunting in Middle English Literature*. (Cambridge: The Boydell Press, 1993) 102.

[15] The significance of the hunt can be seen in other texts, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the hunting scenes provide a parallel to Gawain's experiences in the bedroom. In *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, the hunt enables the ghost to deliver her message to Guenevere and Gawain, as they are placed within the liminal realm of the forest and the tarn. Malory's forests in his *Morte D'Arthur*, are also places in which the hero becomes isolated and faces challenges that enable his evolution as a character. See *The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney*. Sir Thomas Malory. *Malory: The Complete Works*. Ed. Eugéne Vinaver. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). All further references will be to this edition.

[16] Corine J. Saunders. *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) 3-5. See also Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Press, 1979).

[17] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. Second Edition, Revised, Norman Davis. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925, 1967) Lines 682-683. All further line references will be to this edition.

[18] See chapter 3 for a full discussion of this text.

[19] *Sir Launfal*. Ed. A.J. Bliss. (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1960). All references will be to this edition, unless otherwise noted.

[20] Michael Van Baker. 'The Dame and the Knight; Marriage, Sovereignty and Transformation'. *Parabola* 29 (2004, Spring) 14.

[21] Sir Gromer says to Arthur 'I wolle nother lond ne gold, truly,/ Butt yf thou graunt me att certeyn day/ Suche as I shalle set, and in thys same araye/. . .Fyrst thou shalt swere upon my swerd broun/ To shewe me att thy comyng whate wemen love best in feld and town/ And thou shalt mete me here withouten end/ Evyn att this day twelfe monethes end;/ And thou shalt swere upon my swerd good/ That of thy knyghtes shalle none com with the, by the Rood/ Nowther fremde ne freynd'. Lines 85-96. Here, Sir Gromer invokes a pledge from Arthur, appealing to his own sense of courtesy and chivalric behaviour,by making him swear an oath upon his sword, a symbol of Arthur's world and its values.

[22] J.K. Bollard discusses how the concepts of chivalry and courtesy aid in the final reconciliation. He says 'the theme of reputation and honour runs throughout the poem. By giving the question test to Arthur and the tests of loyalty and courtesy to Gawain the author is able to emphasise, especially through the use of conversation, the thematic parallels and developments in the tale'. 'Sovereignty and the Loathly Lady in English, Welsh and Irish'. 52.

[23] Ragnell asks Gawain to choose '"Wheder ye wolle have me fayre on nyghtes/ And as foulle on days to alle men sightes,/ Or els to have me fayre on days/ And on nyghtes on the fowlyst wyfe-/ The one ye must nedes have'. Lines 659-663.

[24] It is significant that in *The Marriage*, Gawain is offered by Arthur in exchange for the answer to the question. The loathly lady never asks for him, but rather accepts the offer. When the knights venture into the forest and meet the loathly lady, their treatment of her is uncourteous and cruel, as they state her ugliness and their repulsion at the idea of marriage to her. This reaction to the lady who has just saved the kingdom and Arthurian society demonstrates the true selfish and individualist nature of the knights. They should be inclined towards compassion and sympathy to those less fortunate, and relieved and grateful to the woman who preserved their culture.

[25] Marina Warner. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers.* (London: Vintage, 1995) 240.

[26] For an interesting anthropological discussion of the traditional associations of women with nature and men with culture, see Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Sociology: Explorations in Social Theory.* (London: Sage Publications, 1996) Chapter 5.

[27] John Stevens categorises the 'marvelous' according to various definitions. He argues that 'An event is magical, as I define it (according with anthropological definition), if it shows the marvelous controlled by man'. John Stevens. *Medieval Romance, Themes and Approaches.* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973) 101. Therefore, the loathly lady's appearance, an act of magic in itself, entitles her to be defined as magical, yet human and therefore liminal.

[28] Jeff Rider. 'The Otherworlds of Romance'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance.* Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 118.

[29] The significance of Sir Gromer Somer Joure's name has been examined by critics such as Donald B. Sands and Jean E. Jost. Sands points out that the otherworldly nature of the individual is suggested by the name which, he argues, translates as gromer, from the Middle English grom, meaning man; somer, the Middle English for summer, and Joure, from the Old French meaning day. For further discussion see Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1966). See also Jost, 'Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterisation in *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Albrecht Classen. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). Combined, his associations, therefore, point to an affinity with nature, which is emphasised by his forest home. The relationship between the outside challenger to Arthurian society and the natural world is also apparent in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the Green Knight's colour alone serves to associate him with the natural and earthy wilderness. Likewise, the chosen meeting place, the Green Chapel, also bears the colour and is described as a cave or fissure in the earth. For an interesting discussion on the Green Knight, see Susanna G. Fein 'The Goulish and the Ghastly: A Moral Aesthetic in Middle English Alliterative Verse'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 48 (1987, March).

[30] Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain; Eleven Romances and Tales.* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995) 43.

[31] In his article 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel; The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady' Edward Vasta argues that 'the Loathly Lady of the English romances. . .neither possesses personal sovereignty nor serves as the agency of sovereignty officially recognised. She has no place within the official culture'. Edward Vasta. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Mistrel; The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. *Exemplaria* 7 (1995) 397.

[32] Rebecca A. Davis. 'More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent in *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*'. *Chaucer Review* 35 (2000-2001)

[33] Thomas Hahn argues that Ragnell's 'seemingly omnivorous appetite marks her as an outsider, both sexually and socially, to the aristocratic court. Despite the counsels of her betters, she will have Gawain, and the entire court, led by Arthur and perhaps including Gawain, fears she is a sexual predator'. *Sir Gawain; Eleven Romances and Tales.* 42.

[34] Martha Rampton. 'The Significance of the Banquet Scene in the Bayeux Tapestry'. *Medievalia et Humanistica* 21 (1994).

[35] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World.* Translated by Helene Iswolsky. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984) 281.

[36] David Williams. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature.* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996) 166-167. For further discussion on the role of female genitalia in medieval literature, see E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). See also Kathleen Biddick, 'Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible'. *Speculum* 68 (1993, April).

[37] *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 75.

[38] Lorraine Kochanske Stock. 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the Auncian in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries.*

[39] Lorraine Kochanske Stock. 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the Auncian in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. For an interesting discussion of sheela-na-gigs, see Juliette Dor's

article 'The Sheela-na-gig: An Incongrous Sign of Sexual Purity?' *Medieval Virginities*. Ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003) For a study on medieval marginal iconography, see Michael Camille's book, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. (London: Reaktion Books, 1992).

[40] Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo.* (New York: Routledge Press, 1966).

[41] Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* 109.

[42] Lorraine Kochanske Stock. 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the Auncian in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*. 127.

[43] Edward Vasta. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. 411.

[44] Edward Vasta. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. 410.

[45] Edward Vasta. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. 410

[46] Maureen Fries points out the connection between physical appearance and moral goodness. She says 'Since physical beauty is a coefficient of moral goodness in medieval literature her [Morgan le Faye] ugliness emerges as spiritual as well as corporeal' in 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Faye in Medieval Romance'. *Arthuriana* 4 (1994) 5.

[47] David Williams. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature.* 108.

[48] David Williams. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature.* 109.

[49] Twice Ragnell tells Arthur that she is not wicked or to be feared. She says, "'I am no qued'"(279) and '"Thoughe I be foulle, yett am I gaye'". (300)

[50] Gawain's characterisation in the alliterative tradition ranges from the courtly and gentle to the strong, loyal warrior. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, he appears as Arthur's loyal knight who is the 'flower of chivalry'. In *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, Gawain is a worldly warrior with unstinting loyalty towards his king. In *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, Gawain's worldliness and ambition are criticised. *The Alliterative Morte Arthur*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. *King Arthur's Death*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986). *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne*. Ed. Ralph Hanna. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974). All further references will be to these editions. For discussion on the characterisation of Gawain in medieval romance, see the following: Mary Dove, 'Gawain and the Blasme Des Femmes Tradition'. *Medium Aevum* 41 (1972). Bonnie Wheeler, 'Romance and Parataxis and Malory: The Case of Sir Gawain's Reputation'. *Arthurian Literature 12*. Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993). Gillian Rogers, ' "Illuminat Vith Lawte and with Lufe Lasit": Gawain Gives Arthur a Lesson in Magnanimity'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Thomas Hahn, 'Gawain and the Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*.

[51] Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger.*

[52] *Sir Orfeo. The Middle English Breton Lays*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001) Lines 272-280. All further line references will be to this edition.

[53] *Sir Gowther*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). All further references will be to this edition.

[54] The power of female speech is discussed by the following critics: Joanne Findon, *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). Sandy Bardsley, 'Sin, Speech and Scolding in Late Medieval England'. *Fama: The Politics of Talk in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster and David Lord Smail. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003). N.F. Blake, 'Fabliaux and Other Literary Genres As Witness of Early Spoken English'. *Towards a History of English as a History of Genres*. Ed. Hans-Jurgen Diller and Manfred Gorlach. (Heidelberg: Universitatsverlag. C. Winter, 2001). Karin Boklund Lagapoulou. ' "This Creature:" Discourses on Women and Discourses by Women in the Middle Ages'. *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism*. (1993). Benkov, Edith Joyce. 'Language and Women: From Silence to Speech'. *Sign, Sentence,*

Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature. Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

[55] E. Jane Burns. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 158.

[56] The confinement of women to domestic space is debatable. In Middle English romance, women often occupy space outside domestic confines. It is interesting to note that the consequences of venturing beyond domestic space are not always unwelcome. In *Sir Gowther*, Gowther's mother wishes for a child in order to preserve her marriage. In *Sir Degaré*, Degaré's mother leaves the entourage in an attempt to escape incest and potential rape by her father. Guenevere also leaves the enclosed space of the court to go hunting in *The Awntyrs*. Both Lunet and Elene travel outside the domestic realm, achieving their aims and coping with the consequences of their actions in *Ywain and Gawain* and *Lybeaus Desconus*. While it is the case that most women who enter into undomesticated space face the consequences, it does not appear to be the case that they undergo physical confinement as a result of social prescriptions. The Lady of Sinadoun is held prisoner in her castle due to supernatural elements. Likewise, in *Emaré,* the domestic confines of the family home pose more of a threat to the female protagonist than the open sea. Similarly, in the two 'Constance sagas', *The Erle of Tolous* and *Sir Tryamour*, the false accusations of adultery occur when the women are contained within the domestic space of their husbands' homes. Rather than domestic space appearing as the safe confine for women, it can have negative connotations as a place of imprisonment, sexual deviance and even death. *Sir Degaré*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). *Emaré*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973). *The Erle of Tolous*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). *Sir Tryamour*. Ed. Harriet Hudson. *Four Middle English Romances*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1996). All further references will be to these editions.

[57] *Sir Degaré*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*.

[58] See the following editions: *Lay Le Freine*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). *Sir Tryamour*. Ed. Harriet Hudson. *Four Middle English Romances*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1996). *The Man of Law's Tale*. Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales. The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1987). All further references will be to these editions. For further discussion of the 'Constance sagas', see Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens*. (New York: AMS Press, 1927).

[59] In *Lay Le Freine*, Le Freine leaves her cloth on the bed of the bridal chamber which is immediately recognised by her mother and results in her social and familial reinstatement. In *Sir Tryamour*, Tryamour's mother, Margaret, is accused of adultery. Her innocence is only believed when the faithful Dog of the knight who defended Margaret from an ambush by her accusers returns to the court. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, it is divine intervention that reveals Constance's innocence. In the Middle English miracle plays, women's speech also plays a significant role. In 'Noah's Flood' in the Chester mystery plays, Noah's unnamed wife refuses to board the ark and leave behind her female companions, or 'gossips'. Her lack of comprehension and faith portrays her as a character whose primary concern is for the trivialities of daily, temporal life, while in the '[Wakefield] Second Shepherd's Play', Gill, Mac's wife, aids her husband throughout the play. 'The Second Shepherd's Play'. Ed. Greg Walker. *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). For 'Noah's Flood' see, *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*. Ed. A.C. Cawley. (London: J.M. Dent, 1974).

[60] For further discussion, see E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*, and N.F. Blake, 'Fabliaux and Other Literary Genres as Witness of Early Spoken English'. See also Sandy Bardsley. 'Sin, Speech and Scolding in Late Medieval England'. *Fama: The Politics of Talk in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Thelma Fenster and David Lord Smail. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003). Edith Joyce Benkov. 'Language and Women: From Silence to Speech'. *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*. Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989). Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou. ' "This Creature": Discourses on Women and Discourses by Women in the Middle Ages'. *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism*, (1993).

[61] Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Canterbury Tales. The Riverside Chaucer.* Ed. Larry D. Benson. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1987). All further references will be to this edition.

[62] Andreas Capellanus warns against listening to women's speech. He says 'All women are also free with their tongues, for not one of them can restrain her tongue from reviling people, or from crying out all day long like a barking dog over the loss of a single egg, disturbing the whole neighbourhood for a trifle. A woman gossiping with other women would never willingly give another a chance to speak; she always tries to dominate the conversation with her own opinions, and to go on talking longest. Her tongue and breath could never be exhausted by talking'. From *De Amore. Women Defamed, Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts.* Ed. Alcuin Blamires. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). 123.

Chapter 3: *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*

> The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled.[1]

The question of the female body, and its potential, reaches a new level in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*. No longer confined to realms of the living, whose experience of the supernatural extends only within the sphere of humanity, the loathly lady in *The Awntyrs* exists across borders of corporeal and spiritual being. As a result, the loathly lady's liminal nature becomes defined not only by her body, but by her spiritual condition and the discourse that emanates from that body and spirit. I would argue that the consequences of Guenevere's mother's actions in life are replaced by the significance of her discourse and decay in death. As Kristeva points out, 'I', the individual, is indeed expelled through the signification of the body and the body's message after life. This chapter will examine how Guenevere's mother becomes Guenevere's mother's ghost, the agent possessed by a past definition of self and how the conditions of her existence therefore dwell on the threshold between the living and the dead. I would argue that it is this message which is the most poignant of all; she is still a corpse, belonging neither to the physical world of the living, nor the spiritual realm of souls and that her purgatory exists in her inability to enter either sphere. The horror that pervades the image of the body as corpse, as occupying the threshold between the complete, living individual and the nameless dust that accompanies full decomposition, therefore mirrors the horror of its spiritual experience. It becomes not so much the terror of the loss of the body, but the loss of the individual, the 'I', through

the liminal experience that defines the undead, or ghostly. This chapter will examine how the supernatural or otherworldly ghost transcends the boundaries between the living and the dead, displaying the abject condition of her identity, and the extent to which her liminal existence acts as the prophetic link between past and present, present and future. The extent to which the ghost's past sovereign status, and the question of her marital fidelity in life contribute to the abject nature of her physicality in death, will also be explored.

Otherworlds and the Supernatural

Throughout romance, the placement of individuals in liminal positions serves to emphasise the otherworldly, or supernatural elements within the romance. *The Awntyrs* begins in Inglewood forest, an area existing within Arthur's kingdom, yet on the outskirts of society and removed from the chivalric values inherent at Arthur's court. As in *The Weddyng* and *The Marriage*, Inglewood forest represents the wilderness, the unknown into which Arthur and his knights ignorantly venture.[2] Corine J. Saunders briefly examines the liminal nature of the forest in relation to its historical significance. She argues that the forest exists as a 'combination landscape which is part wild, but also productive, cultivated and sought after, sometimes by choice, sometimes forcibly'.[3] In *The Awntyrs*, the forest provides the setting for the events which unfold.[4] The hunt which is undertaken in this liminal environment is examined by Krista Sue-Lo Twe, who explores the ways in which the hunt in *The Awntyrs* emphasises the aristocratic character of the hunting party and Arthur's initially

unquestioned sovereignty. Twe points out that the hunt 'served to identify the military elite, and functioned as a substitution and a preparation for war. The game animals legally belonged to the king and the unified participation of the entire court … emphasises their solidarity'.[5] The implications of the hunt and its significance relate to Arthur's nature as sovereign and his questionable suitability as king later in the narrative with the arrival of Galeron and his lady, and the judgment Arthur makes in relation to the usurpation and distribution of land and his ability and eligibility to make such decisions.

Embarking on the hunt, the king, queen and knights enter into the forest unaware of future events. Anne Rooney examines the hunt topos which appears as 'an image of worldly vanity when it is contrasted with man's mortality and the mutability of worldly things'.[6] When applied to Arthur in *The Awntyrs* this interpretation of the hunt links the mortality and mutability theme[7] to the consequences of ignoring the message delivered by the ghost; an endless purgatory[8] and liminal experience for those unable to heed her warning.[9] As in the Middle English *The Parlement of the Thre Ages,* the link between the transitory nature of life and the inevitability of death is a fundamental theme. In the *Parlement,* the debate that takes place between Youth and Middle Age is silenced by the intervention of Old Age and the inevitability of the death that follows:

> Ne deth wondes for no wite to wende where hym likes
> And þerto paramours & pride put he full low.
> Now þer is no Riches ne rent may raunsom your lyves.
> ne naught is sikir ri your self ne certayn but deth.
> And he is seyn certayn þat sodenly comes.

> Me þink þe welle of þis world worthes to nought,
>
> Vanitas vanitatum & omnia vanitas.
> That all vayn & vanytes & vanyte is.[10] (632-640)

Helen Phillips's interpretation of the hunt also supports the hunt's significance with regard to the state of being of its souls and the ghost of Guenevere's mother. Phillips argues that 'What we have here seems to be typological rather than allegorical narrative: the tarn, doe and hounds are presented as historically real, but when taken with other events referred to later in the text—the queen's baptism and her torments in hell—they also refer to spiritual and eschatological truths: the soul's flight from demons and the approach to grace'.[11]

Contrary to the spiritual signification of the hunt, is Jean E. Jost's examination of the hunt as it relates to the passage into the marginal space that is 'fairyland'.[12] Instead of exploring the hunt as it appears in relation to its inclusiveness in Arthur's kingdom, Jost argues that Arthur's hunt in *The Awntyrs* provides the marginal location for a series of events which introduce Arthur and his court to the 'Other'. She states that:

> Arthur's hunt, traditional induction into fairyland, begins in a greenly vegetative world, lush and opulent in colour, texture and sound…This forest enclosure sets up artificial boundaries between realities: the castle and the woods, the real and the magic, the natural and the supernatural; these dichotomies prepare for the supernatural realm of blizzard whiteness and tarn blackness, both starkly contrasting the vibrant, natural May morn'.[13]

Jost's interpretation of the dichotomies between the two worlds implies the marginal quality of one (the supernatural wilderness of the forest) and the inclusive civilised

nature of the other (the court and hunting party). The implication of this interpretation inevitably leads to the assessment of the ghost and all that she represents as marginalised other. However, while the ghost does indeed occupy a space removed from the 'civilised' court, her message for civilisation, imparted through her voice and physical deterioration, is articulated outside social realms. She cannot be, as Jost argues 'neither human nor other;'[14] she is simultaneously both. Her liminal and threatening nature exists as a result of her inability to cross either threshold of the living or the dead. The ghost's appearance in the forest, a space liminal in itself, supports her nature as a being who does not exist on the margins, but occupies the border territory between external and internal realms.

The ghost's appearance to Guenevere and Gawain indicates the importance of these characters and what they represent. Instead of seeking out the king and his entourage, the very symbol of material wealth and chivalric idealism, the ghost addresses that character with whom she is linked by blood, sex and position, her daughter the queen.[15] Jost argues that the message that the ghost delivers to Guenevere is lost on her daughter, as she reacts to the advice dismissively and quickly forgets both her mother and her mother's message.[16] Ralph Hanna III argues that Guenevere's refusal to appreciate her mother's warnings is linked to her selfish and prideful character, and that 'Guenevere's decision to ignore the ghost's teaching is linked implicitly to the fall of the Round Table'.[17] Similarly, A.C. Spearing points out Guenevere's superficial nature, stating that 'even before the ghost identified itself, it seemed to come as a kind of serious parody of Guenevere's shallowness in lamenting

the absence of her usual circle of knights'.[18] However, to interpret this simply as superficiality in Guenevere ignores what she represents physically, politically and personally. The extent to which Guenevere represents both herself as an individual woman and her sovereign position is examined by Margaret Robson who states that:

> Guenevere's function here is at once personal and political: the moral and physical corruption combined in the maternal figure symbolises her own moral destiny as well as the decay predicted for Arthur's court. She is also told to mend her ways, as if this could avert the public tragedy, the end of an empire.[19]

Indeed, it is Guenevere's identity as both individual female character and female representation that enables Maureen Fries's view that Guenevere is 'transformed into an archetype of combined courtly and spiritual significance', and that both she and Gawain 'represent a special form of *superbia* as the root of all sins: Gawain primarily *avaritia* and Gaynour *luxuria*'.[20] The nature of Guenevere's identity implies a duality which precludes an interpretation of her character as merely ignorant and vain. Because she goes beyond individual representation, encompassing both personal and representational aspects, Guenevere's inability to comprehend her mother's physical, moral and spiritual messages has far greater implications than that of the well-being of the queen: rather it is the well-being of what the queen represents that is important.[21]

Likewise, Gawain's presence at the meeting indicates a familiarity with his character as the traditional epitome of knightly duty, chivalry and prowess. Gawain's reputation is based, not only on his physical strengths but also on his encounters with the supernatural. [22] Thomas Hahn points out that:

> over and over, Gawain proves the worth of familiar values by facing the marvelous and the unknown, and rendering it manageable for the rest of his society. But his preeminence does not simply consist of unhesitating courage or unparalleled ability. Again it is Gawain's courtesy—perfect composure in moments of crisis—that endow him with heroic stature.[23]

As a result, Gawain's character in *The Awntyrs* is expected to maintain those elements upon which his character is founded. While he does appear courteous,[24] Gawain's encounter with Guenevere's mother's ghost results not in an act of triumph over the ghost, but a failure to consider her message. As Hanna argues:

> Gawain's pride and confidence in the value of martial experience form the basis of his conversation with the ghost. But the Arthurian hero proves unable to see the value of the ghost's counsel, her statement that the life of violence is a life of impermanence. Exulting in the beauty of conquest and despoliation (261-64), Gawain fails to consider his own mortality, that he too may be victimised in battle, that mere ceaseless activity cannot protect one from the ravages of fortune.[25]

In *Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*, Andrea Hopkins examines how the hero of penitential romance follows a pattern of self-exploration which differs significantly from the traditional model of heroic self-discovery. She argues that 'instead of the hero's virtue being tested, found true, and rewarded, his sin is repented of, atoned for, and forgiven'.[26] Gawain's behaviour in *The Awntyrs* anticipates this pattern.[27] Unlike the traditional Gawain of Middle English romance, who follows the non-penitential pattern, the Gawain of *The Awntyrs* does not possess the virtue that would traditionally be tested and awarded.[28] Instead, he is accused of sin at the beginning of the romance by the ghost and given ample opportunity to repent and

atone. However, Gawain's inability to recognise the significance of the ghost's message extends beyond the mere tragedy of the individual and encompasses the archetype which he represents. In the second part of *The Awntyrs,* Gawain exists as the epitome of chivalric values. He contradicts the presumptions of his character in the alliterative and romance traditions by fighting to defend lands not rightfully his and subsequently accepting lands upon which he has no rightful claim. At the end of the romance King Arthur says:

> Here I gif Sir Gawayn, with gerson and golde,
> Al þe Glamergen londe with greues so grene,
> þe worship of Wales at wil and wolde,
> With Criffones Castelles curnelled ful clene;
> Eke Vlstur Halle to hafw and to holde
> Wayford and Waterford, walled I wene;
> Two baronrées in Bretayne with burghes so bolde,
> þat arn batailed about and bigged ful bene.
> I shal dowe þe as a duke and dubbe þe with honde,
> With þe þou saȝtil with þe kniȝt,
> þat is so hardi and wiȝt,
> And relese him his riȝt,
> And graunte him his londe.[29] (664-676)

Gawain's failure is his inability to accept the ghost's advice as an individual who seeks to aid, rather than destroy. His reaction to the ghost seeks to defeat the perceived 'intruder', the believed 'other', that would traditionally inspire such a reaction. However, the ghost does not fulfill the categorical requirements of the threatening outsider. She is no marginal dragon, giant or ogre; rather she is at once both social superior and grotesque.[30] She appears to Gawain under the superficial guise of a jeopardising monster, when truly she provides the hidden salvation for Gawain of conscious personal atonement and self-evaluation. The spiritual message of the ghost

falls upon the ears of the two characters whose personal absolution depends upon their ability to comprehend the warning. Gawain is warned with regard to his behaviour and property, and Guenevere is warned with regard to her sovereign responsibilities and future adulterous transgressions.

The appearance of the ghost occurs at a time of meteorological transition and unpredictability. The darkness that falls over the forest and tarn in the middle of the day[31] is accompanied by stormy weather that interrupts and frightens the hunting party. Schmitt emphasises the connection between purgatory and the darkness of night noting that 'the earthly night, propitious to the most disturbing apparitions, was as black as sin; it was also as black as the darkness of the afterworld that it prolonged on earth, the darkness inhabited by the souls deprived of the illumination of the vision of God'.[32] It is out of this unnatural darkness that the ghost emerges:

> There come a lowe of the loughe—in lede is not to layne--
> In the lyknes of Lucyfere, layethese in Helle,
> And glides to Dame Gaynour þe gates full gayne,
> ȝauland ȝameres, with many loude ȝelle.
> And seid, with siking sare,
> "I ban þe body me bare!
> Alas, now kindeles my care;
> I gloppen, and I grete.!"'(83-91)

The horror of her physical body links her to the physically grotesque nature of the typical loathly lady in *The Weddyng* and *The Marriage*. However, her occupation of the space that is defined by death is made apparent through the imagery of the decomposition of that body. Rosamund Allen points out the loathly lady nature of

Guenevere's mother's ghost. However, she argues that the ghost exists as the counterpart to Galeron's lady and not Guenevere, through her associations with land, and that *'The Awntyrs* inverts and subverts the folktale of the loathly lady [because] it is the loathly lady who loses out, and Galeron does get his lands back.[33] While this is an interesting interpretation of the loathly lady motif in *The Awntyrs*, I would maintain that the ghost fits the traditional loathly lady model through her liminal nature, her physical character and powers of discourse, as well as her sovereign definition. Jost examines another binary pair present in *The Awntyrs*. She compares the ghost with Galeron's lady, arguing that the lady 'exemplifies everything the phantom was not. The brightness of the court scene contrasts with the black and white of the tarn—each domain being dominated by a woman representing its brand of otherworldliness. The maid of part II, however, is not alone, introducing her cohort, the knight to whom she cedes authority; he is as brightly clad as she—his glowing gloves and quilted jackets recall the embers of the ghost's eyes…Her naked vulnerability is matched by his well-armored protection'.[34] The loathly lady, the ghost, becomes more threatening to society than Dame Ragnell or her living counterparts could ever be: Guenevere's mother's ghost is so simultaneously 'other' and familiar, that she transgresses the boundaries of human magic, and is placed between experiences beyond life and human limitations.[35] She is the 'undead' because of her adherence in life to those values upheld by a society as materialistic, violent and self-serving as Arthur's current court. David Williams examines the monstrous and its relation to allegory, stating that:

> the symbolic function of the monstrous is clearly akin to allegory and much of the

> marvelous in the Middle Ages has allegorical characteristics. Like allegory, the monstrous depends heavily on the process of analogy and the transfer and combination of intellectual significations that analogy permits, even if, in this case, the transfer distorts normal expectations.[36]

The importance of the body on a representational level cannot be ignored and is crucial to the social and cultural implications of the monstrous corpse. However, as Robson argues, the significance of the body in its decrepit and abject state is powerful in itself, without the application of metaphor and representation.[37] It is this aspect of the text that perhaps admits the most powerful message and works in direct conjunction with Guenevere's position as the (potential) maternal and political body she both physically and symbolically inherits. The Ghost is threatening not because like Dame Ragnell, she is and has always been both 'other' and familiar, but because her liminality and hideousness were earned as a *result* of her social inclusion. Guenevere's mother in life subscribed to the conventions of society and behaved accordingly. Her present condition is indicative of courtly culture's moral failings and is therefore capable of inspiring fear both within society and the individual. Guenevere's mother's condition is not the result of magic or uncontrollable circumstances; it is the consequence of the amoral personal choices made in life.

The Female Body: Speech, Queenship and Adultery

The central role of women in the first part of the romance emphasises the significance of issues of regeneration and the body. Peggy McCracken argues that:

> As representative of fragmentation, the body of the adulterous queen in medieval romance represents a threat to notions of unity: the union of a married couple, the uninterrupted succession of a dynasty, the wholeness of a body restricted to one lover. The adulterous female body introduces instability into a symbolic order that is founded on unitary institutions, putting into question the legitimacy of the entire order along with the social and political systems it creates and supports.[38]

However, Guenevere's inability to produce an heir to the throne only partially initiates the events which leads to Arthur's downfall; at the heart of this is the issue of adultery itself. McCracken argues that 'in medieval romance the predictable combination of the feminine and the political is thoroughly subverted in a division of sexuality and reproduction: the adulterous queen is a barren queen'.[39] However, I would disagree with McCracken, as the implied adultery of Guenevere's mother in life contradicts McCracken's argument. It would appear that the issue of adultery, rather than precluding conception and birth, provides an element that is intrinsic to the romance genre generally and the Arthurian genre specifically.[40] The possible adultery of Guenevere's mother, while certainly adding to her time in purgatory, is not as significant as the offspring which that adulterous union may have produced.[41] As a result, it is the female body which acts as the agent of power. The ghost's predictions of the fall of the Round Table are directly related to the issue of adultery; however, the responsibility does not fall upon Guenevere alone: it is Morded, the son of the king's sister, who will eventually disrupt and destroy his father's kingdom.[42] In *The Awntyrs*, the ghost predicts the fall of the Round Table and identifies Mordred as a threat, saying:

> In riche Arthures halle,
> the barne playes at þe balle

þat outray shall you alle,
Derefly þat day. (309-312)

This issue of paternity only becomes relevant when it is accepted that Guenevere's inability to conceive is not governed by her moral deficiencies. Once this is admitted, the issue of the maternal body, its womb and thresholds, becomes intrinsically intertwined with the overall significance of the text itself. Instead of the maternal body of the queen existing only in relation to the kingdom and propagation of the king's line, it usurps that function of judgment and choice which is fundamental to the kingship. That the queen may conceive outside wedlock enables a deeper understanding of the liminal nature of the maternal body. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that 'the grotesque body…is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world'. [43] Pregnancy in itself, the existence of the unborn between physical realms and identities, is the liminal precursor to the physical transgression of those boundaries through birth. The pregnant mother becomes, as Bakhtin would argue, an orifice that allows movement between regions. Bakhtin states that 'the grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon. The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body…the outward and inward features are often merged into one'.[44] The pregnant body and especially the pregnant *queen's* body assumes the autonomy with which the liminal is associated. Kristeva examines the nature of the maternal body and its liminal character. She says that,

> the weight of the "non-said" no doubt affects the mother's body first of all: no signifier can cover it completely, for the signifier is always meaning, communication or structure, whereas a mother-woman is rather a strange "fold" which turns nature into culture, and the "speaking subject" into biology. Although it affects each woman's body, this heterogeneity, which cannot be subsumed by the signifier, literally explodes with pregnancy—the dividing line between nature and culture—and with the arrival of the child—which frees a woman from uniqueness and gives her a chance, albeit not a certainty, of access to the other, the ethical. These peculiarities of the maternal body make a woman a creature of folds. [45]

In his study of medieval motherhood, John Carmi Parsons examines the queen's role in a historical context as mother and intercessor. He argues that 'no queen was ever "just" pregnant, not was she merely a mother; she was the matrix of future kings…The queen thus shared in the processes by which the king's physical powers were projected onto the realm to assure its welfare'.[46] The grotesque and liminal nature of the maternal womb is inherent in *The Awntyrs*. The connection between Guenevere and her mother is one that stems from this maternal bond. [47]Adultery, but more importantly the conception that can result from that adulterous affair, takes place within the liminal areas of the female body. The incorporation of the liminal into society, especially in relation to the paternally governed kingship, appears as threatening as the image of the body of the liminal corpse of Guenevere's mother. Regeneration, once taken out of the grasp of the paternal, becomes incorporated into that which is autonomous in its sexual procreational ability; the female maternal.[48]

The issue of female discourse, when examined in terms of both Guenevere's mother's ghost and Guenevere herself, emphasises the liminal nature of both women. The body becomes the tangible link of the living and the dead. The juxtaposition

between the beautiful and grotesque body may accentuate the mortality and mutability theme, but it is speech itself, the symbolism of that which emanates from the body's orifices, that points to a remarkable utilisation of the feminine and its sexual identity. Bakhtin argues that 'the most important of all human features is the mouth. It dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open abyss'.[49] If we are to agree that the mouth is the most important orifice, the significance of the female mouth and its sexual associations cannot be ignored. In chapter two I discussed, in relation to Douglas, the importance of the mouth as a liminal orifice, capable of emitting the liminal construct of speech. In this chapter, I propose to take this a step further and point out the sexual connotations of the mouth and its 'matter' or speech. As discussed in the previous chapter, associations between the orifices of the female mouth and vagina conjure images of the medieval motif of the 'vagina dentata'; the consuming, dangerous and emasculating construct of the female sexual organ.[50] However, the oral nature of this feared aspect of female physicality is equally as significant as the sexual implications of that same orifice.[51] The emanation of discourse from the upper orifice, that of the mouth, implies an independent discourse from the lower, as it seeks to emulate. When women's mouths and vaginas become interchangeable, it is not only the consumption of what goes into them, either food or the penis, that is important, but what may emanate *from* them. Therefore female speech becomes a metaphorical birth: just as it is matter that issues forth from the vagina in an actual birth, and it is matter that is attributed to the maternal, so speech which emanates from an 'oral' vagina holds the threat of materialisation. Like a child, it transgresses boundaries, from the internal

female, into the external society. Fear of female discourse, therefore, becomes a fear of the abject matter without soul, or matter without paternity, as it does not require masculine input for its existence. Discourse, whether sexual, oral, or physical, when emanating from the female body, may be perceived as dangerous and emasculating. In *The Awntyrs*, female speech gives birth to the realisation of society's fate and the turning of fortune's wheel. The ghost's discourse precipitates her daughter's speech to Arthur at the tournament, where it becomes the catalyst for change. Likewise, the ghost's discourse calls attention to both her overt sexuality in life, and apparent lack of sexuality in death. Douglas further examines the margins of the body in relation to its polluting qualities. She states that:

> all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, feces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins.[52]

The ghost appears to Guenevere and Gawain, her body so putrefied that it is difficult to tell whether she is male or female. The ghost is not attributed a gender and is referred to in the text as 'hit'. When she emerges from the marsh, she is described as follows:

> Bare was þe body and blak to þe bone,
> Al biclagged in clay vncomly cladde.
> Hit waried, hit waymented, as a woman,[53]

But nauthyr on hide ne on huwe no heling hit hadde.
Hit stemmered, hit stonayde, hit stode as a stone;
Hit marred, hit memered, hit mused for madde. (105-110)

This seemingly asexual loathly lady contrasts with the typical loathly woman such as Ragnell.[54] The ghost's nakedness is also mentioned [55] and through that nudity, her corporeal 'holiness', the imagery surrounding the body's decomposition, her message is made evident: sexual identity is replaced by the body's speech in other ways.[56] It is that discourse which threatens regeneration as much as Ragnell's hideous appearance. However, in this case, the fear of regeneration is a fear of the regenerative powers of both physical and spiritual degeneration. The voice that emanates from the corpse, though wise, nevertheless derives from a source both familiar and foreign and therefore liminal in definition. [57] That Guenevere's action at the tournament is dictated by this ghostly discourse emphasises the possibility for social change. Her social abasement before the king implies, not the relinquishment of monarchical sovereignty, but rather, paradoxically, the enforcement of that sovereignty in the aid of those in need. While Guenevere appears to relinquish her crown, her true sovereign power over her husband is demonstrated. Twe argues that this abasement before the king symbolises the liminal nature of the monarchy at that moment in time. She states that 'as the Queen uncrowns herself and abased herself before her husband—her other half—the monarchy is beside itself and at odds with itself in a very literal way'.[58] Parsons also discusses the significance of a queen's intercession historically. He examines how intercession and motherhood 'were the two functions of her office upon which her coronation *ordo* dwelled most intently', and that 'the regal behaviour of a king and

queen together formed a continuous unity, popular observation of which was critical to shaping the official face of each partner'.[59] When taking the historical realities into consideration, Guenevere's intercession becomes, not the submissive abasement before the king, as Spearing argues,[60] but an authoritative, initiating, and above all, proper response to a situation in which her presence and discourse are required. Rather than implying an undermining of justice and the law, as Twe maintains,[61] Guenevere's intercession upholds proper procedure and law. The consequences of this indicate Guenevere's ability to procure proper judgment (even if her husband cannot) and employ the authority she holds in the courtly realm to initiate action. Her inability to fully comprehend her mother's message is the underlying tragedy within the romance. As is evident by her actions in the jousting scene, Guenevere is capable of using her authority to advance fairness and proper judgment. However, overshadowed by misunderstanding of the implications of the ghost's discourse, courtly society is fated to spiritual decomposition. Guenevere moves into the liminal sphere of existence between full and partial comprehension of the message she must clearly understand in order that her soul be spared the anguish of purgatory. This is known through the prophetic knowledge given by the ghost and fundamental to romance's audience.

Sovereignty

The issue of female sovereignty is an intrinsic element within *The Awntyrs*. In this romance, sovereignty possesses two different definitions, depending upon where it is enacted. The first is worldly, stemming from the living physical world and social realm of Arthur's court. This is the sovereignty possessed previously by Guenevere's mother and subsequently by Guenevere herself. It is centred in the material realm of the court and is, according to the ghost, the potential instigator for the downfall of Arthurian society. Guenevere's mother appears the mirror image of her daughter, just as clearly as if Guenevere herself looked upon her reflection in the tarn's marshy waters. This concept of reflection is invoked when the ghost says to Guenevere:

> "For al þi fressh foroure,
> Muse on þi mirrour;
> For king and emperour,
> Thus diȝt shul ye be." (166-169)

However, the reason for the ghost's visitation is to advance warning to her daughter. While Guenevere may possess the sovereignty of the physical and social realm, it is not sovereignty itself that dictates a similar fate, but rather the ways in which that sovereignty is employed. The ghost tells Guenevere:

> " þus deth wil ȝou diȝt, thare you not doute;
> þereon hertly take hede while þou art here.
> Whan þou art richest arraied and ridest in þi route,
> Haue pité on þe poer while þou art of power.
> Burnes and burdes þat ben besy þe aboute,
> When þi body is bamed and brouȝt in a ber,
> þen lite wyn þe light þat now wil þe loute,
> And þen helpes þe noþing but holy praier.
> þe praier of þe poer may purchas þe pes,
> Of þase þat ȝelles at thi ȝete,
> When þou art set in þi sete,

Aith al merthes at mete,
And dayntés on des." (170-182)

The mother and daughter parallels provide a juxtaposition between two sides of the same identity. As Robson argues, 'Mother and daughter are both intimately implicated in the text's account of the end of a kingdom; and it is an appreciation of this fact that leads us to the text's most profound resonances. The two female characters are, to many intents and purposes, identical'.[62] By interpreting Guenevere and the ghost as binary pairs the ghost's warning to Guenevere is already in vain. The final indication of Guenevere's inability to recognise her fate is her fate itself. Guenevere will pray for her mother, but the court remains the same, the poor remain poor, and sexual temptation and adultery are inevitably linked with the decline and fall of the Round Table.

While the personal sovereignty that exists in the social realm may appear neutral and dependent upon the ways in which it is employed, the sovereign experience possessed by the ghost of Guenevere's mother is also dependant upon its use. Here, the liminal attributes of the loathly lady are implied through the juxtaposition between what appears on the surface to be evil, and what is, in reality both honorable and benevolent. The ghost's power of knowledge and influence over the elements implies a supernatural energy beyond the comprehension of the living protagonists. Her ability not only to transgress the boundaries of the living and the dead, but to appear and impart this knowledge, makes clear her liminal identity, her unearthly sovereignty, as she should have done in life. The ghost of Guenevere's mother has learned that same

lesson which she attempts to impart to her daughter; that the selfless and benevolent use of personal sovereignty enables the personal redemption of the soul. The ghost achieves this through her request to her daughter to say thirty series of masses. However, the question remains unasked 'who will pray for Guenevere, the barren and adulterous queen?'

The second part of the narrative, that which Hanna terms 'part B', [63] serves to prove the materialistic and self-seeking character of King Arthur's court. Emphasising the ghost's charges that the

> "King is to couetous, I warne þe sir kniȝt.
> [and that no man] stere him with strength while þe whele stondes.
> Whan he is in his magesté, moost in his miȝt,
> He shal light ful lowe on þe sesondes'.
> And ȝour chiualrous king chef shall a chaunce:
> False Fortune in fight,
> That wonderfull whelewright,
> Makes lordes lowe to liȝt." (265-272)

Part B links the prophecy and the accusation of moral weakness and corruptibility in part A to the reality of the conditions prevalent at court. Beginning at the court, within the boundaries of society, spatial occupation soon shifts to the tournament field, a place both courtly in its purpose, yet outside the court itself. The chivalric and courtly treatment of Galeron the evening before the tournament serves to emphasise the materialistic and superficial nature of Arthur's court, in the same way in which Guenevere's richly bejeweled dress in Part One serves to emphasise the juxtaposition of the morally naked and decaying mother and her richly dressed daughter.[64] That

Galeron is treated well on the evening before the tournament does not change the fact that he may be brutally and unjustly killed the following day. The chivalric and courtly execution of ideals as it appears in this episode is undermined by the fact that it is the outsider, the challenger, who is in the right and that Arthur, in his usurpation of Galeron's lands, is in the wrong. Here, the ghost's message to her daughter and Gawain is recalled, as the tournament fails to produce a victor and Arthur repeats his transgressions, oblivious to the lesson he should have learned. For:

> this restoration of order fails to address the factors that lead to its crisis, and the apparent recovery is temporary and illusory. When Arthur gives Gawain "al the Glamergan londe with greves so grene;/ The worship of Wales, at wil and at wolde" (665-666) he created the conditions under which Gawain can honourably yield the Scottish territories to Galeron, but recreated the situation that gave rise to Galeron's grievance over Arthur's imperial annexation of his lands in the first place. The poem implies that this might only be another turn in the cycle of violence perpetuated in these territorial feuds. Somewhere in Wales, we can imagine another displaced lord arming himself for another trial by combat.[65]

The spiritual limbo of Guenevere's mother's ghost acts as the challenge set for king Arthur's realm. Instead of the common quest of romance, which takes place outside the court, this expedition is one that must be undertaken at the heart of society and in a collective spirit. The failure of both king and court is realised in the second part of the romance in the tournament and the final false reconciliation.[66] As Twe argues:

> at the height of its powers we see the elements of the Arthurian court's eventual fall. The intrinsic failure to mitigate violence and effect justice in this display of the court's ostensible power return us to the Ghost's prophecy with its invocation of fortune, "that wonderfull whelewryghte,/ [who] Shall make lordes lowe to liȝt (271-272), as the driving force behind history. Here too, the poem invokes the imagery of the Wheel lifting up and casting down those caught in her grasp.[67]

The ghost may be able to pass on from her liminal purgatory, but both her daughter and her daughter's realm are still condemned.[68] As a result, the ghost does manage to permeate the boundaries of society and introduce the possibility of liminal experience to the court. The consequences of this are startling: through society's inability to comprehend the ghost's message, life, not death, is transformed into the liminal. Life itself becomes the ignorant waiting period between the possibility for redemption and the torments of purgatory.[69] Herein lies the irony which is inherent throughout the text; it is that which appears supernatural and magical which is, in effect, the most real, concrete of experiences, and that which emerges as the unequivocal fate of the living protagonists.

Central to *The Awntyrs* is the concept of the wheel of fortune. Critics such as Twe, Phillips and Hanna have all commented on this element within the narrative and stressed its importance.[70] The concept of Fortune's Wheel directly relates to the philosophical influence of Boethius who stresses the changeability of fortune itself in his *Consolatio Philosophiea*[71]. Tristram states that 'the cycle of Fortune has little reassurance to offer the victims of time, for the rise and fall of her wheel is as arbitrary as it is inevitable, and testifies to a world, distinct from the ordered transience of nature, which is continually prey to the anarchy of mutability'.[72] However, the idea of fortune's wheel is inextricably linked with character transformation (or lack thereof) within the text itself. The rise and fall of fortune as well as the ways in which speech incites the turning of its wheel, implies the possibility for a dynamic reaction to change and not merely a resignation to fate. If the wheel itself is dynamic in its definition, so

too are the characters in their ability to rise, fall and perhaps rise again with the wheel. While the wheel has been linked to a static and fixed fatalism, when examined in conjunction with the prospect for personal and spiritual transformation, it may be allowed to come full circle. The discourse of the ghost provides the possible awareness of a fate that can, upon reflection and amendment, be changed; for why offer warning if change is impossible? It would appear that the message which prevails throughout the romance is essentially Christian. The implications of the sinfulness prevalent at Arthur's court may appear to doom its inhabitants to an endless purgatory. However, central to the medieval Christian system of beliefs is the concept of penance and forgiveness. That Guenevere, Gawain and Arthur are unable to recognise their sinfulness lies at the very heart of the romance's message. The ghost's final message to her daughter and the court is as follows: no one can escape the fate of corporeal death, but everyone can effect changes that will enable eternal life in heaven, regardless of their fortunes or tribulations on earth. When regarded in this manner, the lack of transformation of the characters becomes inexcusable. Unable to hide behind the ideas of fate and predestination, Arthur, his knights and specifically Gawain and Guenevere, must take responsibility for their lack of full comprehension of the ghost's message. The consequence of this removes the tragedy that accompanies a fatalistic approach to the romance and enables even harsher criticism of the actions of the living. The female voice is at once abject construct of the abject body, and the potential redeemer of Arthurian society. Its authority is achieved as a result of its liminal status as both foreign and familiar, owning diverse perspectives of known territories. Once again, the loathly lady has provided the means for courtly salvation and, for the first time in

loathly lady tradition, her voice has been ignored.

---

[1] Julia Kristeva. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 3-4.

[2] In *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, the forest functions as a place in which supernatural occurrences transpire. The concept of forest as wilderness also exists within the 'fair unknown' romances, in which the male protagonist begins his quest for self-discovery within the wilderness, as in *Lybeaus Desconus, Ywain and Gawain, Sir Orfeo* and Malory's *Sir Gareth of Orkney*, is conceived in the forest, as in *Sir Degaré,* or is born in a forest, as in *Sir Tryamour. Sir Orfeo*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays.* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). Sir Thomas Malory. *Malory: The Complete Works*. Ed. Eugéne Vinaver. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). *Sir Degaré*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). *Sir Tryamour*. Ed. Harriet Hudson. *Four Middle English Romances.* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1996). All further references will be to these editions.

[3] Saunders also emphasises the significance of the forest from a biblical perspective, stating that 'to the historical reality which underlies the romance forest, must be added the second and related tradition of the Biblical wilderness or desert. The definition of the forest as uncultivated landscape, rather than simply as woodland, allowed the writers of the Middle Ages to equate easily the forest of their own times and the desert of the Bible. This desert landscape carried with it specific associations of solitude and divine inspiration which were to be appropriated as part of the forest's symbolism in the romances. Such associations fitted well with the idea of the forest as a separate landscape governed by its own laws and defined by its wildness'. *The Forest of Medieval Romance.* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) 4, 10

[4] The significance of place in *The Awntyrs* is further examined by Rosamund Allen in her article 'Place-names in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Corruption, Conjecture, Coincidence'. *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field.* Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004). Also examined by Andrew R. Walkling in his article 'The Problem of Rondolesette Halle in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *Studies in Philology* 100 (2003, Spring). John Eadie, 'Two Notes On The *Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *English Language Notes* 21 (1983, December). See also Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530.* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984).

[5] Krista Sue-Lo Twe. '*The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne*: Reliquary for Romance'. *Arthurian Literature 20.* Ed. Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003).

[6] Anne Rooney. *Hunting in Middle English Literature.* (Cambridge: The Boydell Press, 1993) 103. Rooney also examines the relationship between the hunt and the theme of 'the three living and the three dead', in which three kings are confronted with their dead counterparts while hunting. This occurs in literature and iconography across Europe throughout the Middle Ages and in the text *De tribus regibus mortuis*, the corpses appear to the kings while they are hunting a boar. (104-105). The hunt may also imply a link to the Hellequin hunt, in which the king of the dead leads his unearthly rabble in search of the living. Jean Claude Schmitt examines theories regarding the Hellequin hunt in the Middle Ages and its connection to king Arthur in the late thirteenth century. He states that 'Hellequin, Herla and Arthur are the names of the same mythical character, the king of the dead, who sometimes, at night in the forests or on the main road, rode at the head of his furious troop and who sometimes reigned in his subterranean palace on the border of Wales, in Etna, or on Mont-Chat, attracting the living by a practice of gift-giving in which life and death were at stake'. Schmitt, Jean-Claude. *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society.* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) 119. Schmitt goes on to examine the theories surrounding the nature of the hunt's souls. He argues that, as the middle ages progressed, the hunt came to be interpreted as having a penitential aspect. In the Thirteenth century, William of Auvergne 'hesitates between two interpretations: were they souls in purgatory, or were they evil spirits who at night took on the appearance of knights "that in French one calls *hellequin* and in Spanish the *ancient army*"'. 119. See also Claude Luttrell, 'The Arthurian Hunt With A White

Bratchet'. *Arthurian Literature 9*. Ed.Richard Barber. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989).

[7] This motif is implicit within *The Awntyrs* and directly relates to the ghost's warnings. Helen Phillips argues that this representation of death and the impermanence of life as exemplified by the ghost of Guenevere's mother does not imply a message directly related to women, rather that she 'is presented from the beginning very much as a representative of the ruling and territory-controlling classes...though her feminine gender is significant we should not let this aspect of her identity eclipse response to the fact that she functions also as a *dead royal*: equivalent to one of the crowned skeletons who meet their living similitudes in *memento mori* works like *Three Dead Kings*'. '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Structure and Reassessment'. *Arthurian Literature 12*. Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) 75.

[8] *The New Dictionary of Theology* defines purgatory as 'the belief that those who are basically just at the time of death but still burdened with temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven, must undergo purgation after death. These departed ones can be aided by the prayers and good works of those living on earth. The state of purgatory is understood to be an intermediate condition between individual death and entrance into heaven...The idea that purgation after death is carried out in a specific place between heaven and hell and for a time proportionate to the number and quality of sins in this life was soon systemised by the university theologians of the thirteenth century'. Ed. Joseph Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot Lane. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Press, 1990) 823-824.

[9] The supernatural connotations of the hunt can also be viewed in *Sir Orfeo*, in which the fairy hunt appears as a type of Hellequin hunt, where human souls are prey. Orfeo's subsequent entrance into the inverted fairy realm to retrieve Heurodis and horror experienced at the physical abjection of human souls calls to mind the grotesque and frightening appearance of Guenevere's mother's ghost at the Tarn. See John Block Friedman 'Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon'. *Speculum* 41 (1966).

[10] M.Y. Offord connects this intervention to 'The Three Living and The Three Dead', stating 'This legend is a warning to all mankind of Death's inevitability, but is addressed above all to the worldly and the prosperous; and the author of the *Parlement* may well have been influenced by it when he made Age deliver his Sermon to Middle Age and Youth'. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*. Ware Version. EETS. OS 246. (1959) Lines 632-640. All further references will be to this edition.

[11] Helen Phillips. 'The Ghost's Baptism in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *Medium Aevum* 58 (1989) 55.

[12] Likewise, Ralph Hanna III emphasises the supernatural element of the Tarn, stating that 'Tarn Wadling should almost certainly be understood as a place with spectral or magical connotations, possibly as a place where transfer from the Other World (whether Hell or Faery) is possible'. '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: An Interpretation'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 31 (1970) 281.

[13] Jean E. Jost. 'Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterisation in *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Albrecht Classen. (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2002) 134. See also Corine J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993).

[14] Jean E. Jost. 'Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterisation in *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*'. 135.

[15] This relationship between decaying mother and richly attired daughter is common within the motif of the three living and the three dead, where the link between the corpses is either one of blood (as in *Three dead Kings*) or that of similitude. In *The Awntyrs*, the relationship between mother and daughter has been viewed, not only as a link of blood, but also as a parallel of representations.

[16] This view of Guenevere has been taken by other critics, such as A.C. Spearing, Krista Sue-Lo Twe, and Ralph Hanna III, all of whom argue that Guenevere's inability to heed her mother's message lies at the heart of courtly society's failure.

[17] Hanna, Ralph III. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure*, An Interpretation'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 31 (1970) 289-290.

[18] Spearing, A.C. '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*. Ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach. (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981)193.

[19] Margaret Robson. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*. Ed. A. Putter and Jane Gilbert. (England: Longman Publishing, 2000) 231.

[20] Maureen Fries. 'The Characterisation of Women in the Alliterative Tradition'. *The Alliterative*

Tradition in the Fourteenth Century. Ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach. (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981) 32.

[21] Directly related to this is the issue of maternity, or Guenevere's lack thereof, and how the female body, as both individual and representational, impacts upon the actions of queen, ghost and male characters.

[22] In *The Avowyng of Arthure*, Gawain's connection, not only with the supernatural, but also with the Tarn Wathelyne in Inglewood forest is evident. Gawain's supernatural experiences in *The Avowyng* take place at the tarn, where he is placed to keep vigil. However, in this text, it is Gawain's warrior nature that is praised, as he defeats his otherworldly opponent in combat, thereby freeing Sir Kay and preserving order. This sharply contrasts with *The Awntyrs*, where Gawain's response to the otherworldly figure of Guenevere's mother as a threat, emphasises his lack of perception and his inability to heed her message. *The Avowyng of Arthur*. Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995). Further references will be to this edition.

[23] Thomas Hahn. 'Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 223.

[24] It is this courtesy which serves to define Gawain in other Middle English Romances, such as *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight, The Weddying of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell, The Marriage of Sir Gawain* and *The Knightly Tale of Golgaras and Gawain*. Gawain's courteous nature, intertwined with his combatative skill, are crucial elements of his character within the alliterative tradition. *The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain*. Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995). Further references will be to this edition.

[25] Ralph Hanna, III. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure*, An Interpretation'. 292.

[26] Andrea Hopkins. *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 20.

[27] The pattern of the penitential knight is observed in the romance of *Sir Isumbrus*, which, like *The Awntyrs*, may be viewed as a text which challenges the typical chivalric values of romance. Isumbrus' 'fall from grace' occurs as a result of his pride. Following Hopkins' pattern, Isumbrus, bereft of his worldly possessions and family, eventually is restored to grace through suffering and penitence. Similarly, the romance of *Sir Gowther* also follows the pattern, as Gowther seeks atonement and forgiveness through his physical and spiritual debasement, eventually earning forgiveness and, as a result, full social inclusiveness. See *Sir Isumbrus. Six Middle English Romances*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. (London: Dent, 1973) *Sir Gowther. Six Middle English Romances*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. (London: Dent, 1973).

[28] Gawain's character and behaviour varies from text to text. In the alliterative tradition, he is usually characterised as a superior warrior whose behaviour conforms to military expectations. In *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, Gawain is, above all, a warrior whose physical and martial prowess defines him. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, not only does Gawain exist as the paragon of chivalry, his humanity is also made a prominent feature of his character. This Gawain of the alliterative and romance traditions contrasts sharply with his characterisation in the *Chanson de Geste* tradition, which emphasises an overly sexual and uncouth individual. In the Middle English *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain*, Gawain's extramarital, sexual relationship with a nameless lady, leads to the chivalric combat between him and the lady's brothers and father, which he inevitably wins, thereby proving his manhood. See *The Alliterative Morte Arthure. King Arthur's Death*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1986). *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. W.R.J. Barron. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain. Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Ed. Thomas Hahn. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995).

[29] *The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*. Ed. Ralph Hanna III. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974) Lines 664-676. All further line references will be to this edition.

[30] This reaction of Gawain to 'civilise' that which appears to him to be other is also present in *The Turke and Sir Gawain*, in which Gawain's final triumph is to incorporate the 'outsider' into Arthurian chivalric society'. *The Turke and Sir Gawain*. Ed. Thomas Hahn. Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995). Further references to this text will be to this edition.

[31] In Middle English literature, noon often has supernatural implications. In *Sir Orfeo*, Heurodis falls

asleep at noon and awakens to a madness which is followed by her abduction. See John Block Friedman, 'Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon'. *Speculum* 41 (1966, January).

[32] Jean-Claude Schmitt. 178.

[33] 'Place-Names in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Corruption, Conjecture, Coincidence'. *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.C.J. Field*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004) 183.

[34] 'Margins in Middle English Romances'. 138. This contradicts Robson, Phillips and Hanna, who argue that Guenevere and her mother exist as binary pairs.

[35] The powers possessed by the ghost in *The Awntyrs* may be defined, according to John Stevens' definitions of the marvelous, as belonging to the mysterious. It is neither 'controlled by man', as magic, nor is it directly 'controlled by God', as is the miraculous. It belongs to the category of mysterious because it exists outside of the realms of spiritual or human possibility. John Stevens. *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches*. (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973) 100-101. The ghost's purgatory precludes God's hand, as she is, by definition, out of the sight of God. Likewise, it cannot be magically induced, as she no longer belongs to the realm of humanity, but that of the liminal undead.

[36] David Williams. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996) 75.

[37] Margaret Robson. 231.

[38] Peggy McCracken. 'The Body Politic and the Queen's Adulterous Body in French Romance'. *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*. Ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 56.

[39] Peggy McCracken. 44.

[40] It must be noted that in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, Guenevere conceives children by Morded, implying a paternal failing of Arthur, rather than the maternal infertility of Guenevere. When taking into consideration the dominant beliefs in the Middle Ages relating to conception and masculinity, Arthur's inability to produce a (legitimate) heir implies a weakness of gender resulting in a weakness of ability. Vern L. Bullough examines how 'maleness' in the Middle Ages was a construct based upon cultural, scientific and religious factors. He states that 'Failure to perform [sexually and reproductively] was a threat not only to a man's maleness but to society. Potency came to be not only the way in which a male defined himself, but how he was defined by society, and impotence was grounds for marital annulment'. 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages'. *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Claire A. Lees. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 41. Adultery in other Middle English romances also may result in birth as in *Sir Gowther*, where the father of the male protagonist is not his mother's husband, but an otherworldly being. Likewise, the possibility of women who engage in adulterous affairs producing offspring may be applied to Morgause, Queen of Orkney in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* whose murder by her son Gaheris, is as a result of her affair with Sir Lamorak.

[41] This may be observed in romances which contain the 'noon-day demon' motif, such as *Sir Gowther,* and *Sir Degaré* in which the supposedly barren women produce sons and heirs through adulterous liaisons with otherworldly men. The 'noon-day demon' motif also occurs in *Sir Orfeo*, however, the production of child does not occur in this romance. See John Block Friedman 'Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon'.

[42] The relationship between Mordred and Arthur varies depending on the text. In *The Alliterative Morte D'Arthur,* Mordred is Arthur's nephew, his sister's son. Nothing is stated with regard to his paternity. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittannie*, a source for the later medieval Arthurian chronicle and romances, Mordred is also described as being Arthur's nephew by his sister and in Layamon's *Brut,* the relationship stays the same. The Mordred of the Welsh sources is also referred to as Arthur's nephew. Malory follows the French Vulgate tradition, in which Mordred is the product of an incestous encounter between Arthur and his sister Morgause. I place the Mordred referred to in this text within the alliterative and chronicle tradition, due to its existence as part of the alliterative Arthurian tradition. His associations with Arthur are, in these traditions, based solely on the significance of his maternal associations. *The Alliterative Morte Arthur*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. *King Arthur's Death*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986). Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Ed. Neil Wright. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988). Futher references to these texts will be to these editions. See Elizabeth Archibald, 'Arthur and Mordred: Variations on an Incest Theme'. *Arthurian*

Literature 8. Ed. Richard Barber. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989).
[43] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais And His World.* Translated by Helene Iswolsky. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984) 317.
[44] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais And His World.* 318.
[45] 'Stabat Mater'. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985) 115.
[46] John Carmi Parsons. 'The Pregnant Queen as Counselor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood'. *Medieval Mothering*. Ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996) 44.
[47] Maternal bonds between mothers and daughters can also be seen in the two Middle English Breton Lays, *Emaré* and *Lay le Freine*. Like *The Awntyrs*, these two Lays focus on female characters. In the first, Emaré's lack of a mother is the relevant issue, as her father, with the absence of a wife, turns to his daughter for sexual gratification. It is this incestuous advance that sets in motion the events within the Lay. In *Lay le Freine*, the relationship between mother and daughter is also crucial to the narrative, as it is the mother's jealousy of her neighbor who gives birth to twins that results in her accusations of infidelity and leads to the forced abandonment of her own daughter when she herself gives birth to twin girls. *Emaré*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973).
[48] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine the fear associated with the maternal womb in patriarchal discourse and society. They explore the associations between women and monstrosity, citing the example of Lilith of Hebrew mythology who, acting against the patriarchal dominance of Adam, preferred the death of her demon children to patriarchal marriage. Gilbert and Gubar argue that 'What her history suggests is that in patriarchal culture, female speech and female "presumption"—that is, angry revolt against male domination—are inextricably linked and inevitably daemonic. Excluded from the human community, even the semi-divine communal chronicles of the Bible, the figure of Lilith represents the price women have been told they must pay for attempting to define themselves'. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) 35.
[49] Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World.* 317.
[50] David Williams examines the monstrous nature of the vagina dentata, and its associations with cannibalism and monstrosity and castration. See Williams' *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*, chapter 3.
[51] E. Jane Burns examines the significance of female orifices in medieval French fabliaux, with particular emphasis on the vagina and mouth. She considers how silence in the fabliaux' female protagonists exists as a type of decapitation and that 'in female protagonists, association with the rational mind is denied as the female mouth is reduced—by association with the eroticised female body—to a wholly sexual orifice. The women of fabliau lose their heads metaphorically to the extent that their mouths are shown to function as vaginas'. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 53.
[52] Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1966) 151.
[53] The language here implies that the ghost's sex was indeterminable, as its behaviour is described as being 'like' or 'as' a woman and not that of a woman.
[54] Ragnell's sexual voracity is made clear through the emphasis on the size of her breasts, her large appetite and table manners and, above all, her desire for marriage. In *The Awntyrs*, the ghost's sexuality is implied, based on a past self-definition. Her voice, discourse and decay usurp the power of her previous sexuality. Where once she used her body within courtly society to communicate sexual power, now she must use the decay of that body to communicate warning.
[55] Schmitt points out the significance of clothing after death. He states that 'Clothing was never used simply to protect the body. In medieval culture it was also a sign of belonging to a social "estate"; it situated the individual and the group within the hierarchy of the ordines. It was also perceived as one of the modes of expression of moral or religious value of a person…When the soul is depicted as a little child who comes out with the last breath from the mouth of the deceased, it is often nude. It is also nude in the torments of hell or purgatory, as are the bodies that emerge from their tombs at the time of the resurrection of the dead and at the last judgment…The dialectic of nudity and of clothing organises the

imaginary's representation of the fate of souls in the hereafter'. 201-202. In Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*, clothing is associated with the sin of pride. The desire for rich and ornate clothing is a vanity which indicates sin and is wasteful. He also criticises the fashion for too little clothing, emphasising the immodest exposition of various sexual body parts, on both men and women. This too, he argues, exposes pride and can only be remedied with humility and self-knowledge. *The Parson's Tale. The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[56] The ghost's speech is examined from a physiological perspective by Margaret Robson, who discusses the physical 'speech' of decomposing bodies in relation to *The Awntyrs* in her article 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'.

[57] In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast; The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Caroline Walker Bynum examines the relationship between holy women and bodily nourishment through food. She stresses the significance of the proportionally greater number of female saints whose physical nourishment was achieved through the host alone and the relationship between the consumption of 'marginal' bodily material and a maternal 'feeding' of those in need. In an examination of Saint Catherine of Siena, whose consumption of the pus of a dying woman is indicative of her sainthood, Bynum argues that 'accounts of Catherine's life accentuate not only her food abstention and feeding of others; they also underline her substitution of the filth of disease and the blood of Christ's agony for ordinary food'. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 171. Here, the link between the maternal, the abject and the liminal is defined in accordance with Bynum's analysis as it relates to hagiographical and historical sources.

[58] Krista Sue-Lo Twe. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure At The Terne Wathelyne*: Reliquary for Romance'. 116.

[59] John Carmi Parsons. 'The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood'. 42, 53.

[60] Spearing argues that Guenevere's response at the tournament is a result of the heeding of her mother's message to embrace 'Mekenesse and mercy' (250). This implies her appeal to Arthur is undertaken from a point of submissive resignation. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*. 199.

[61] Krista Sue-Lo Twe. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure At The Terne Wathelyne*: Reliquary for Romance'. 116.

[62] Margaret Robson. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. 231.

[63] Hanna divides *The Awntyrs* into separate sections, part A including the episode with the ghost of Guenevere's mother and ending with the hunting party's retirement to Rondelsette hall. Part B includes Galeron's challenge, the joust and the distribution of lands. The final part, the concluding stanza, includes the masses said for the soul of Guenevere's mother.

[64] In her article, 'The Ghost's Baptism in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*' Helen Phillips examines the ghost's mention of baptism and her present situation in purgatory. She looks at the relationship between mother and daughter, stating that 'The poem expresses, then, a dual attitude to these torments. The contrasts between both queens' pleasures in life and the former queen's present case (142) are certainly a horrific warning; so are the grim parallels between the two women: the circle of sapphires of the one, and the circles of serpents on the sides of the other (22, 120)...But there is another parallel, another mirror, and it is a hopeful one: Guenevere's suffrages on earth can complement her mother's penance in the next world'. 51-52.

[65] Krista Sue-Lo Twe. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure At The Terne Wathelyne*: Reliquary for Romance'.

[66] Arthur's poor judgment regarding the reconciliation for transgressions is mirrored in both *Sir Launfal* and *Wynnere and Wastoure*. In *Sir Launfal*, the king's inability to believe the truth of Launfal's supposed treason, leads to the loss of his knight from the court. In *Wynnere and Wastoure*, the king's response is a temporary and simplistic solution which, much like Arthur's decision in *The Awntyrs*, takes little into consideration regarding potential future disunity within the realm. *Wynnere and Wastoure*. EETS, O.S. 297. Ed. Stephanie Trigg. (London: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[67] Krista Sue-Lo Twe. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure At The Terne Wathelyne*: Reliquary for Romance'.

[68] Twe also argues that the final tragedy of the romance lies in the 'inability of the characters to comprehend their fates despite the prophetic vision granted by the ghost'.

[69] In her book, *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature*, Phillipa Tristram emphasises the significance of faith and death as seen in an emphasis on mortality in life. She states that in medieval grave poetry 'life, literally, is but the first stage in the process of dying; the authority of the Scriptures

and the liturgy lend their support to this view; worst of all, that sentient sub-life in the grave will continue for "evermore", a word which chimes oddly with the qualification—until the body's resurrection on judgment day'. (London: Elek Books Ltd., 1976) 161.

[70] This motif plays a significant role in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, in which this theme of the turning of fortune's wheel is related with regard to the moral depravity of Arthurian society and the theme of mutability.

[71] In Book Two of the *Consolatio*, Boethius describes the true nature of fortune, personified as a woman. He says of Fortune 'Change is her normal behaviour, her true nature. In her very act of changing she has preserved her own particular kind of constancy towards you...If you are satisfied with her ways, you must accept them and not complain. But if you shudder to think of her unreliability, you must turn away and have nothing more to do with her dangerous games. She has caused you untold sorrow when she ought to have been a source of peace...Do you really value the presence of Fortune when you cannot trust her to stay and when her departure will plunge you in sorrow?' Translated by V.E. Watts. (London: Penguin Books, 1969) 55.

[72] Phillipa Tristram. *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature*. 128.

Chapter 4: *Lybeaus Desconus*

In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas emphasises the significance to society of its margins and peripheries. She maintains that:

> the idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas. For symbols of society, any human experience of structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand.[1]

At the heart of the romance *Lybeaus Desconus* is the issue of social integration. The traditional critical understanding of social exclusion has primarily focused upon the male protagonist, his marginalisation and eventual acceptance into chivalric society. However, this chapter will examine the female characters, not only as individuals in their own right, but as active participants within the romance. The liminal characterisation of these women provide the male protagonist with his identity and purpose, yet they exists within the constraints of male dominated culture. The hero's quest, therefore, is the escape from a feminised and maternal selfhood, rather than solely a search for paternity and masculine identity. The constant divisions between civilisation and wilderness, male and female, are significant features throughout this romance. They provide the metaphorical and tangible boundaries for the state of the characters' gender identities. The liminal character of both the hero and women is, in this romance, transitory but crucial. All of the women, in their positions, appear to be something other than what they truly are, existing on the border between the

appearance of passive 'victims' and motivating authority. Elene appears to be merely a messenger, requiring aid for her lady, La Dame D'Amour, an evil sorceress, Lybeaus's mother a fallen woman and the Lady of Sinadoun the silent prey of two evil men. However, all of these women occupy the space between the definitions of traditional medieval female archetypes and the antithesis to those archetypes. The ways in which the women in *Lybeaus Desconus* both transgress traditions, while simultaneously retaining their feminine identity will be examined in this chapter. How these women provide the male protagonist with the means for integration into patriarchal society and enable him to attain a masculine identity will also be explored.

Motherhood and Liminality

The primary and crucial woman within the romance is Lybeaus's mother. While she appears to be the embodiment of the traditional maternal figure paradoxically, she is the reason for Lybeaus's social exclusion and namelessness. The question 'what is a mother?' is examined by Clarrisa Atkinson, who points out that mothers, regardless of the ways in which they are characterised, are always 'the female parent', and that women 'are frequently perceived as mothers or potential mothers even if they have no children'.[2] The emphasis on the female body as reproductive, or maternal, is present in much of medieval romance.[3] The prevailing medical theories of the Middle Ages in relation to conception, birth and the female body have a direct bearing on the ways in which we may approach such narratives. The Hippocratic belief that women were intrinsically inferior to men dominated European medical theory, as well as the

Aristotelian explanation of the conception and birth of the child. According to Aristotle, the mother provided the unformed matter and the father provided life and power.[4] Those elements which physically define and are unique to women- menstruation, childbirth and breastfeeding, become marginalised by medieval medical theorists. The concept of 'pollution' enters into their associations and thus also becomes associated with the inherently feminine. While menstruation has, in many cultures, been categorically viewed as corrupting, or polluting, the connection between the menstruating woman and the breastfeeding mother becomes linked together in the understanding of the abject experience of women in the Middle Ages. The belief that breast milk was an altered form of blood was both a symptom of and a reason for medieval medical attitudes to the female body. If the child was dependent upon the very substance that was substandard from a medical perspective (the Aristotelian view being that menstrual blood, analogous to semen, was a weaker version, lacking the heat necessary for regeneration), and if that substance had to provide both fetus and child with nourishment, the woman was confronted with the social fear that power bestowed upon them. MacLehose emphasises this paradox of the fear of women as destroyers through their uncontrollable bodily fluids, and as necessity through their function as vessels and nurturers.[5] This leads to a mistrust in women's bodies; a mistrust which is evident in Middle English romance.

The appearance of mothers within a narrative is usually indicative of a reproductive or sexual issue or problem. In the romance *Sir Gowther*, Gowther's mother, threatened with the prospect of losing her husband because she has not yet

produced an heir, actively seeks conception through her prayers. That those prayers are answered by a 'felturd fende',(71) or demon, not only provides the narrative with its male protagonist, but raises the uncomfortable issues of illegitimacy and succession.[6] In this romance, maternal action is that which threatens traditional patriarchal culture through its active participation in the seeking out of the 'life' that will give identity to the undeveloped matter of the womb. That the mother is aware of the true paternity of her son and still vouches for a false paternity, presents a fear that, to the medieval mind, could be seen as a very possible threat and Gowther's demonic and uncontrollable character exists as a result of the life given to him by his father. Jane Gilbert argues that Gowther's monstrosity reflects a failure of his mother's culture, not nature. She argues that 'according to the theory of motherhood as nourishment, both Gowther's mother and his wet-nurses ought to transmit to him their own nobility of character. Yet it appears that they cannot. The positive cultural qualities carried by both blood and milk fail to "take" in Gowther'.[7] While Gilbert's interpretation of the significance of female bodily fluid and their impact on the child coincides with medieval medical theory, I would argue that the mother's nature is all too fully realised through her son and his character. While Gowther's behaviour is monstrous and recalls his father's own demonic character, Gowther's existence within the social realm occurs as a direct result of the marital infidelity and dishonesty of his mother. It is her desire for a child, dictated by the fear of the loss of her husband, that causes her to react against the dictates of patriarchal culture and results in the incorporation of the monstrous Gowther within the confines of civilised society.

Gowther's mother's social and marital transgressions place her son within cultural boundaries where his 'otherness' cannot and does not belong. It is only when the mother is considered as an active character within the narrative that Gowther's misplacement, as well as his mother's participation, can be fully understood, and the perceived threat of the feminine, not only as a physical 'pollutant', but also as a socially corrupting force, is realised. In the Middle English Breton Lay, *Sir Degaré*, the male protagonist's maternal associations are a central element within the narrative. Born illegitimately to the daughter of a king, it is Degaré's maternal blood that establishes him as a significant individual because it links him to his maternal grandfather's rule and kingdom. However, the circumstances of his birth establish his mother and her actions as an important character in her own right. Sexuality and maternity are directly confronted in this narrative, in which the 'incest theme' occurs twice. At the beginning of the lay, the king's sexual infatuation with his daughter is alluded to through the challenge he sets for her suitors. He himself takes on the role of her champion (a position commonly attributed to a potential partner and not her father) and challenges the suitors to combat. The princess' eventual conception occurs, not by her father, but as a result of rape by a fairy knight in the woods. The combination of incest motif and demonic rape juxtaposes two extremes of sexual obsession with the female body; the first, a distorted concept of fatherly love, the second, a deviant violation of the codes of love, to which the fairy passionately attributes his desire. The combination of these extremes leads to the abandonment of the child and the mother's forced silence. The possibility for incestuous relations occurs for a second time at the end of the lay, when Degaré defeats his maternal grandfather, winning the hand of the princess (his mother)

and comes dangerously close to consummating their relationship.[8]

Perhaps the most interesting example of the threat of the female ability to conceive and give birth can be seen in the romance *The King of Tars*,[9] in which the Christian wife of a Saracen Sultan gives birth to a child that is unformed matter only.[10] This 'lump child' exists as the maternal contribution, according to Aristotelian conception theory, and it is clear that the paternal input of 'life' is not present. It is only when the child is baptised that it gains shape and humanity, through the bestowal of life from God the father, and not the Sultan.[11] The mother has done her duty to the best of her ability, conceiving, providing the matter and giving birth to an heir. Her maternal abilities are rewarded by God. Unlike Gowther's mother, who also procreates with something that exists as 'other', the Sultan's wife may be rewarded for her Christian devotion and fidelity, not so much to her husband, but to the true father of her child, God.[12]

Maternity, Paternity and the Identity of the Hero

In the previous chapter, I discussed the theoretical frameworks as defined by Kristeva, Bakhtin and Douglas surrounding concepts of maternity. The liminal nature of pregnancy and childbirth emphasises the extent to which the mother exists as both abject liminal individual and the physical site of a liminal act and condition: she simultaneously *is* and is a *part of* that condition. I have already explored the links between childbirth and the birth of language as liminal, threatening and necessary. I

will now examine the extent to which maternity may influence the product; the child.

The issue of motherhood and the establishment of the male protagonist's identity are interconnected many Middle English romances. In *Sir Tryamour*, the hero's placement outside society occurs when his mother, falsely accused of adultery, is banished.[13] The search for paternity and social inclusion occupies the majority of this romance, and the sexual associations of the mother are, as in *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Degaré*, evident, if unfounded. What is interesting about the mother's position in *Sir Tryamour*, however, is her decision to withhold the information regarding her son's legitimate paternity. Unlike Sir Gowther's mother, who withholds this information as a result of shame and wrong doing, Tryamour's mother tells her son only when she feels he has proven himself worthy of his paternity. This withholding of a name, or 'fair unknown' motif is a common element in romance, occurring also in Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney*, partially occurring *in Ywain and Gawain*, and highly significant in *Lybeaus Desconus.*

In *Lybeaus Desconus*, the mother exists on her own, outside the confines of society. While Lybeaus's mother's sexuality is not implicitly stated within the romance, it is strongly implied. We never learn if Lybeaus's conception and birth occurred as a result of a love affair or rape. The characterisation of Sir Gawain in medieval literature has been varied and contradictory, depending on time and geographical location. If we are to assume that Gawain follows the *Chanson de Geste* tradition, the rape becomes more probable.[14] In the Middle English *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain*, a narrative which

owes much of its format and characterisation to the Old French Gawain romances and appears as a derivation of two episodes in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte Du Graal*,[15] Gawain's womanising reputation is portrayed, as is his ability to engage in sexual affairs with unmarried women.[16] However, if we are to believe that Gawain exists in *Lybeaus Desconus* as a paragon of chivalric prowess and courtesy, as he does in numerous Middle English romances,[17] then the possibility that Lybeaus's conception occurred within a relationship based on mutual attraction becomes likely.[18] Neither case is, however, unproblematic. The Gawain of the alliterative tradition is perhaps the hardest to classify. We need only to look at *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to see that the epitome of knightly virtue can fail, or to *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*, to know that the rise and fall of fortune and the fall of the Round Table and its knights, is unavoidable.[19] The Gawain of the alliterative tradition is as multi-faceted as the culture in which he takes part, a culture which is systematically criticised and exalted by its writers. Gawain's conduct in *Lybeaus Desconus* is no less ambiguous, as he takes part in the conception of illegitimate offspring and himself abandons the mother of his son. Unlike the other narratives examined, Lybeaus's mother is single and exists without the influence of a man. The question remains, 'what are the implications of the presence of a single mother within a genre where motherhood is a crucial element?' I would argue that it is this singularity of the feminine at the outset of the romance that establishes the dichotomies that appear throughout the narrative between masculine and feminine, 'culture' and wilderness and it is this overwhelming presence of the female that generates the narrative itself and the action of the male protagonist.

For the issue of conception, the question of rape versus consensual intercourse is secondary. What is significant is the fact that Lybeaus was conceived at all. Medieval medical theory examined the connection between female pleasure during intercourse and the conception of a child. The Galenic view of the 'female seed' dictated that, in order to avoid hysteria and to be open to conception, a woman must have an orgasm during intercourse, as this will expel her seed.[20] William of Conches argued that women who had been raped and conceived must have experienced some pleasure in order for the conception to occur and later theorists saw a connection between female pleasure and the emission of the 'female seed'.[21] The belief that female sexual gratification was a necessary component for the conception of the child has major implications in this study. If women's sexual identity and action is a significant factor in relation to their maternal instincts, female sexuality becomes a necessity, rather than a consequence, and as such, a greater threat to patrilinear culture. This threatening aspect is evident in Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney,* Malory's own version of *Lybeaus Desconus*. In Malory's tale, Gareth (the fair unknown) is the brother of Gawain and the son of Morgause of Orkney.[22] The overt sexuality of Morgause plays a significant role throughout Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. Morgause's incestuous relationship with Arthur and adulterous affair with Sir Lamorak not only result in her death at the hand of her son Sir Gaheris, in *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyonesse*, but implicitly brings into question her marital fidelity before the birth of her sons and, as a result, their true paternity.[23]

Existing on the border between wilderness and civilisation, Lybeaus's mother passes on her liminal definition of self to her son. As a result, Lybeaus himself is forced to straddle the border between man and feminine male, as a result of his upbringing. He is physically masculine, but because of his maternal associations and lack of known paternity and social integration, he exists as female; he cannot be included into a patriarchal, feudal society, while he lacks the paternal input that would serve to define him as a man. Lybeaus's lack of identity, his lack of a name, and his inexperience and existence in the wilderness (a realm associated with the feminine[24]), all serve to classify him as a 'feminised' male. That he also exists on the threshold between child and adult connects to his indefinable gender demarcation and occupation of the border between inclusiveness and occlusive peripheral inhabitation. Through an upbringing by a medieval 'single mother', Lybeaus's paternity, that aspect of his identity which serves to define him, is absent. Unlike the Sultan's son in *The King of Tars*, the paternal contribution to Lybeaus himself is present. However, his nature, his identification as his mother's son, is that element which ultimately defines him. This results not only in a lack of appellation or absence of the individual, but also his feminisation, resulting in the justification of his social exclusion. Bullough points out that a man's 'maleness' could be demonstrated by the sex of his child and that a son proved the masculinity and virility of the father.[25] If we are to apply this to *Lybeaus Desconus*, not only is Lybeaus's gender identity questioned, his father's masculinity is also challenged. That his mother belongs to courtly society does not outweigh the fact that her son is illegitimate; nor does Lybeaus's mother's placement on the outskirts of society change the fact that she is of high descent herself. From the beginning of the

romance, the pattern of Lybeaus's quest and eventual social integration is made apparent. Like Ywain, Lybeaus's quest follows the pattern of the heroic biography, as outlined by Jan De Vries. Lybeaus is conceived out of wedlock and raised in a liminal area on the outskirts of society. De Vries points out the various exceptional qualities found in the hero during childhood and adolescence. One of these qualities is the slow mentality sometimes possessed by the hero, as in the case of Perceval[26] in *Sir Perceval of Galles*.[27] Sarah Kay argues that to integrate into the male dominated sphere of culture, Perceval must 'unlearn' his mother's instructions. She states that 'the death or abandonment of the mother indicates her expendability as the hero moves away from her into a "symbolic" world where men pre-dominate'.[28] My view is that the mother can never truly be abandoned: in *Lybeaus Desconus*, she provides her son with a feminised identity that defines him as 'other' in cultural terms. While his quest centres around social integration, his 'otherness' has more to do with his feminisation than with his lack of paternity. Unlike Ywain, whose marginalisation is earned through a breach of faith, Lybeaus is marginalised because of his associations with his mother, a woman who exists on the borders between respectable lady and unmarried mother, and on the physical boundaries between wilderness and Arthur's court.

Lybeaus begins his quest as an individual whose feminisation serves both to define his character and highlight his lack of paternity. He exists on the boundaries between wilderness and civilisation, and as a result, embraces that definition of a liminal figure: he is both human and well-bred, yet lacks the basic factors of identity that are inherent in social status. Hence, Lybeaus enters the world at birth, straddling

the border between social inclusion and marginalisation. The fact that he lacks a true name before arriving at Arthur's court emphasises his existence on the threshold of social identity, but more than that, it accentuates his associations with his mother and, indeed, femininity itself and its marginalised values and strengths. Vern Bullough points out the necessity for the male's separation from the mother, in order for him to establish his masculine identity, examining concepts of gender behaviour, love and sexual intercourse. Similarly, the prevalent attitudes to gender emphasise the necessity to be masculine. Bullough argues that femininity in a male was to be construed as weakness.[29] I would like to take this one step further and argue that femininity in a male makes them 'other' or abject, as they take on the associations of the feminine and all that that may encompass, both psychologically and physically. Unlike Gowther, whose abject existence relates to his paternity, it is the feminine identification of Lybeaus's character, received as a result of his maternal associations, which brands him as abject other. As has already been stated, that which makes a woman physically female, her polluting qualities both as mother and sexually mature individual, are 'foreign' in male dominated society. Therefore, Lybeaus's affinity with the feminine not only serves to emphasise his physical beauty, but associates him with all that is female, 'other', and ultimately, abject. When Lybeaus arrives at Arthur's court, he begins his journey towards social inclusion and masculine identity with the bestowal of a name, Lybeaus Desconus (the fair unknown), by Arthur himself. The term by which Lybeaus's mother addresses him lacks masculinity and inspires imagery that is not only childish, but feminine. In her examination of medieval youth, Kim Phillips discusses the practices of male youth and the social expectations inherent in their upbringing.

She argues 'to study medieval youth …is partly to study the process by which young people were socialised into the gender roles and identities appropriate to their social group'.[30] Lybeaus's lack of integration into gender specific activity is apparent:

> It therefore becomes apparent that Lybeaus's extended time living with his mother and being raised by her influence alone is highly unconventional and fails to prepare him, not only for a life at the highest level of society, but as a male within that society.[31]

In *Sir Perceval of Galles*, the male protagonist, raised in the forest by his mother, suffers the indignity of social ignorance as a direct result of his upbringing. Perceval's mother is described as a woman who despises courtly society and chivalry and who raises her son in accordance with her own values. Perceval, like Lybeaus, is raised in the wilderness, outside society. However, Perceval's assimilation into that wilderness is expanded upon in greater depth and he, like Lybeaus, is described as 'savage'. His sexual immaturity is also made clear, as he rides a pregnant mare, believing it to be a stallion (670-719). While Perceval appears to be even more 'other' than Lybeaus, he does not lack masculine definition, simply maturity and knowledge. Perceval's paternity is established from the beginning and through his mother's fear of chivalric society. Lybeaus, however, lacks both paternity and paternal influence through his mother: his lack of name allows a maternal substitute. The name by which Lybeaus is known to his mother confers upon him an identity that relates to his maternal associations. 'Beau-Fis', or 'beautiful son' names his relationship and describes his physicality. By defining Lybeaus by his physical beauty, both his mother and Arthur imply his feminisation. He becomes defined by that aspect which has commonly

defined women in medieval literature, his body.

While describing a man's physical beauty is not unusual in Middle English romance, it is always secondary to their abilities as a knight. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* Gawain's handsome face and body are not as significant as his abilities as a chivalric warrior and courteous knight.[32] Beauty in a male protagonist may be a part of their identity, but it is their chivalric capability and adherence to the values of courtly society that ultimately determine their worth. Women, however, are defined by their appearance and bodies: because their futures often depend upon securing a marriage and producing an heir, they become identified primarily by their physical attributes and only then by their achievements or character. This is not to say that women exist only to provide sexual and procreative support to the male protagonist, but rather that this is the standard against which they are judged in a masculine and feudal society. By placing Lybeaus in a position where he may only be defined by his beauty, the full impact of the feminisation of his character is realised and, as a result, he becomes an abject individual whose liminal identity is dictated by the femininity inherited through his mother.[33] His body, while male, can only be seen as beautiful because it has never crossed into the realm of male-dominated society. When Lybeaus eventually does arrive at Arthur's court, the full impact of his feminisation becomes apparent and confirmed. The lack of a proper name within medieval romance is a common occurrence in relation to female characters. Lybeaus's own mother is never named, as is common with mothers of other heroes such as Sir Gowther, Sir Degaré and with Guenevere's mother in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*. It also may occur in relation

to the wives of heroes, such as Sir Isumbrus's wife and the wife of the dead knight in *Sir Amadace*.[34] Perhaps the most interesting example of the recognition of a name occurs in Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec and Enide*, in which the female protagonist is nameless until her marriage with Erec. The implications of this are significant in relation to *Lybeaus Desconus*. If female identification occurs only in relation to the attached or related male within society, then Lybeaus's lack of a name immediately questions his masculinity. Therefore, the quest for paternity is the quest for masculinity. Lybeaus must earn his paternal associations so that he may override all feminine connections. Unlike the name 'Beau-Fis', 'Lybeaus Desconus' implies a foreign and unidentifiable individual whose origins are mysterious. The definition ascribed to Lybeaus as 'foreign' or 'unknown' by the king exists as the first instance in which Lybeaus is confronted with his marginalisation from Arthur's court and society in general.[35] Armed with the knowledge of himself as 'other', Lybeaus must form himself into that which is known and held valuable in courtly society. The only way in which he may accomplish this is to embrace the values of chivalric society and prove himself as worthy, both of his paternity and his incorporation into the courtly realm.

Lybeaus's mother is perhaps the most significant individual in his journey, as it is she from whom he acquires initial selfhood. His journey is undertaken, not because he is Gawain's (unknown) kin, but because he is his mother's son. Therefore, Lybeaus's journey becomes not only a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood (a liminal expedition in itself,)[36] but an attempt to rid himself of a feminine identity and acquire male identity and masculinity.[37] Numerous examples exist of male protagonists who

must either instate or reinstate themselves into society. Romances such as *Sir Gowther, Sir Degaré* and *Sir Tryamour* all relate the hero's quest for social assimilation and acceptance. Romances such as *Sir Orfeo, Sir Launfal* and *Ywain and Gawain* narrate the hero's adventures as they seek their place socially after a period of exclusion. *Lybeaus Desconus* shares certain similarities with all of these narratives. Like Sir Tryamour and Sir Degaré, Lybeaus must assimilate into society after existing on its outskirts and, like Sir Gowther, he must undergo transformation from the abject 'other' in order for that assimilation to occur.[38] However, unlike Ywain, whose selfish nature results in his downfall and who has to challenge his 'self' in order to be reinstated into society, Lybeaus must develop a masculine 'self' before he can undergo social inclusion. Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two knights is the way in which they must achieve social (re)instatement. While Ywain must behave as a selfless individual and earn his place in society through selfless and anonymous deeds, Lybeaus must perform similar deeds for self-promotion. Like Ywain, Lybeaus's quest is one of development and maturation, both must earn their names as a result of female recognition; Ywain through the recognition and forgiveness of Alundyne and Lybeaus through the Lady of Sinadoun's kiss and identification of him as Gawain's kin. The only way Lybeaus may arrive at that identification of self is through the credit he has earned as a result of his chivalrous deeds by eventually fulfilling his quest for the Lady of Sinadoun, the woman whose transformation, knowledge and discourse bestow paternity and hence, masculine identity, upon the male protagonist.

Elene

When Lybeaus arrives at Arthur's court demanding to be made a knight, the arrival of Elene confirms a significant female influence. While Elene appears to be the docile messenger of her mistress, the Lady of Sinadoun, she exists as challenger. As the initiating voice of the quest Lybeaus must undertake, Elene presents the challenge; however, as the simultaneous voice of disapproval, she indicates to Lybeaus the overriding challenge he will face throughout his quest, that honour and reputation may only be gained through action and victory. Lybeaus's subsequent act of building his knightly reputation through self-promotional achievements serves to gain Elene's approval and propel Lybeaus forward towards his final challenge and achievement of personal identity. As the narrative progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that Elene exists as more than simply a messenger. Elene's constant speech and advice to Lybeaus aid him in his quest, her significance as a companion is evident through her prominence in the narrative. While it is clear that the journey is undertaken by Lybeaus, Elene and the Dwarf, it is Elene, rather than the Dwarf, who offers counsel and guidance. [39] Her knowledge of the dangers Lybeaus must face serves to warn him of what to expect in advance. Melanie McGarrahan Gibson argues that Lyonet in Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth* (Elene's Malorian counterpart) speaks in a Bakhtinian, carnivalesque voice. She says 'her [Lyonet's] words have acted as a magical incantation, humiliating Gareth, but at the same time reviving and renewing him. The result of this behaviour is carnival perversion, urging Gareth on to greater glory with each joust. Lyonet delivers her remarks with complete seriousness. Her disapproval of

Gareth is social, not moral, and although we laugh at Gareth, we must also laugh at Lyonet'.[40] Gibson's carnivalesque interpretation is, in my opinion, interesting, as it recognises the disruptive language of Lyonet and the fact that this language does impact significantly upon the course of events within the tale. However, by associating Lyonet's discourse with Bakhtin's carnivalesque and inverted world, she becomes placed within that inversion. The discourse employed by Lyonet (and Elene by proxy) becomes the construct of a world turned topsy-turvey rather than the voice of an individual within, or on the outskirts of, society.[41]

While Elene's presence within the romance is crucial to *Lybeaus Desconus*, her existence as a character whose actions provoke response in relation to her own individual identity has been largely ignored. Morgan Dickson argues that female identity in medieval romance occurs only in relation to the hero's identity[42] however, I am inclined to disagree. I would argue that the identity and personal autonomy of the female characters is independent of the relationship with the male protagonists. In order to examine Elene, we must first look to the position she occupies as a woman within the narrative. The quality which stands out the most in relation to Elene is her voice. Elene's discourse is perhaps the most memorable aspect of her character. It is not her beauty (although we are told she is beautiful), or any supernatural ability, nor is it her social position that identifies her as a woman within the romance. Rather, it is her voice that is the trait which defines her character. As a result, Elene becomes a liminal individual because she defies the conventions of the typical positive female archetype.[43] Her speech, something which emanates from an orifice in itself liminal,

aids rather than hinders both Lybeaus and her lady. As has been previously discussed, the significance of the mouth in medieval literature is often associated with women and particularly with female sexuality. In medieval French and English fabliau, the female mouth and genitalia are interchangeable. E. Jane Burns argues that, in medieval fabliau, women's bodies and orifices, such as the mouth and vagina, produce a type of feminine discourse. She states that:

> whereas these voices do not represent what women might say or how they might express their desire, they do show that women could have a say, could have a head and mouth and use them. At stake in the fabliau narratives...is then not just female desire and how it might be articulated. Nor is the central issue male castration anxiety. Rather, the fabliau husband's fear of being swallowed up by his wife's desiring and devouring vaginal lips expresses a struggle over the status of the gendered subject. In other words, who has access to subjectivity and the authority that accompanies it? [44]

In chapters two and three I examined the implications of this interchangeability in relation to the vagina dentata as well as female speech, within the context of the previous texts. In *Lybeaus Desconus* however, Elene's discourse and her sexual identity also become interchangeable. The female body and its liminal orifices enable both the articulation of the spoken word and gender classification. That Lybeaus is not threatened by Elene and her language, and, in fact, understands her and follows her counsel emphasises his own feminisation. Edith Joyce Benkov argues that women's speech in medieval literature is portrayed as a threat to male culture and that women's language is systematically suppressed through authorship.[45] However, in *Lybeaus Desconus*, female speech is pivotal to the romance as a whole. Elene's discourse aids, exemplifies her character and promotes action. Likewise, the Lady of Sinadoun,

through her voice, provides identity to the male protagonist through her knowledge of his paternity.

Elene's behaviour at the banquet table in Arthur's court is significant in itself and stands in direct contrast to Dame Ragnell's behaviour at the wedding banquet.[46] Like Dame Ragnell and Guenevere's mother's ghost, Elene's mouth is one aspect which defines her as a liminal woman in the romance. Her rejection of hospitality at Arthur's court is her conscious decision not to let that boundary of her body be transgressed. Kristeva argues that 'food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories. A boundary between nature and culture, between human and the non-human'.[47] In *The Raw and The Cooked*, Claude Lévi-Strauss examines associations between food and culture. He argues that the foundation within culture is based on the theory that that which is raw is associated with nature, while the cooked is associated with culture.[48] An extension of this involves the attribution of gender to concepts of the culture/nature dichotomy.[49] If women are associated with nature and men with culture, Elene's behaviour towards the 'cooked' food at Camelot emphasises her relationship with the 'otherworld', outside Arthur's civilisation. Carole M. Counihan discusses how food and sex are often connected through their common abilities to transgress gender boundaries. She states that:

> Precisely because eating and intercourse involve intimacy, they can be dangerous when carried out with the wrong person or under the wrong conditions. Hence food and sex are surrounded with rules and taboos that both regulate their use and reinforce beliefs basic to the social order, most notably beliefs associated with gender. Food and sex both have associated etiquette about their appropriate times,

> places, and persons; often people with whom one can eat are those with whom one can have sex and vice versa. Maleness and femaleness in all cultures are defined through specific foods and the rules governing their consumption.[50]

As in the rest of the romance, Elene uses her mouth to rebel against a culture which she feels has wronged both her and her mistress. Significantly, however, it is that act of rebellion which ensures the freedom of the Lady of Sinadoun and the completion, not only of Lybeaus' quest, but of Elene's quest as well. I believe it is only once we can acknowledge Elene as an individual who is sexually liminal that the full impact of the issue of gender identity in relation to the text as whole may be realised. The threat that usually accompanies female speech is absent in *Lybeaus Desconus*. Instead, I would argue that Elene's speech is positive because it aids in the defeminisation of the hero and the subsequent aid of her lady. Elene's persistent verbal abuse exposes Lybeaus's lack of identity and constantly reminds him of the necessity to fulfill his obligations and acquire that identity. Elene challenges Lybeaus, yet she also speaks the truth. The insulting nature of her discourse unmasks the reality of the hero's present condition and his future, should he fail in his quest. The mouth exists as a rebellious force [51]through which emasculating language is employed in order to make Lybeaus work harder and thereby obtain masculinity, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Lady of Sinadoun. This female loyalty is an aspect which is present in both Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney* and *Ywain and Gawain*, both Lunet and Lyonette stress their loyalty to their respective mistress and sister. The male protagonists are viewed by these women as the potential instigators of their lady's happiness. It is important to note that

the female companion always demonstrates that her first loyalty is to the woman she serves.

Identity, Quest and the 'Other'

As Lybeaus undertakes his quest, his definition as 'other' is made clearer. His initial response to the dead knight before arriving at Arthur's court highlights both his immature naivety and almost primal, animal reply to a situation which should invoke a more human, civilised sense of sympathy and respect for the dead. Instead of reacting to the dead knight with kindness and empathy, Lybeaus strips him of his armour and attempts to take upon himself the dead knight's identity as a knight. This inability to recognise proper behaviour in relation to the dead, and more importantly, the soul of the dead, places Lybeaus on the outskirts of civilised society and courtly behaviour and within the realm of wilderness. The demonstration of respect for the dead was of huge importance in the Middle Ages. The romance *Sir Amadace* utilises the folklore motif of the 'grateful dead'[52] emphasising the importance of respect for the dead and the afterlife.[53] The male protagonist, upon entering the 'stinking chapel' where a widow mourns her dead husband who did not leave enough money for his burial, pays for the Christian burial of the knight with the last of the money he possesses. This act of kindness is rewarded by the dead knight who returns as an angel-like being (unknown to Amadace) and aids in the latter's social and financial reinstatement. The significance of kindness and respect for humanity, both in life and death, is the message that is extolled in *Sir Amadace* and it is, above all, a Christian message.

Lybeaus, however, does not understand what he has done by stripping the knight of both his dignity in death and his identity in life.[54] The state of mind in which Lybeaus exists at this moment is comparable to that of Ywain in his madness:[55] a return to the primal, unknowing, unconscious and amoral definition of animal identity, rather than the conscious, moral definition of sane humanity.[56] Upon arriving at Arthur's court, Lybeaus enters into the next phase of personal development. While he is still defined by his 'otherness', Lybeaus progresses towards maturity and selfhood through his use of voice.[57] His request to Arthur to make him a knight ascribes a sophomoric quality to Lybeaus that did not exist in his character before. This liminal condition which places Lybeaus between knowledge and ignorance of the world in which he strives to take part, emphasises his abilities to assimilate along with his simultaneous struggle to acquire the knowledge necessary for that assimilation.

Elene's comprehension of Lybeaus's existence on the threshold between society and wilderness, childhood and adulthood, femininity and masculinity, is evident when they leave Arthur's court:

> The mayde be-gan to chide
> And sayde 'Alas that tyde
> That J was heder j-sentt!
> Thy worde shall sprynge wide:
> For-lorne is thy pryde
> And thu lose shentt,
> When thou wilt send a childe
> That is witles and wylde
> To dele eny doughty dent,
> And haste knyghtes of renon.[58](178-187)

This realisation of Lybeaus's immaturity corresponds with a medieval view of youth and legitimises Elene's complaint:

> the mistrust of youth has…in the Middle Ages, sources more profound than subject frailty, for it is rooted in the theological notion of man's fallen nature, and thus, receives the sanction of religion. A representative figure of Life, Youth comes to reflect the religious suspicion of the merely natural, the purely temporal: confidence in the first is, for example, misplaced, because innocence and experience are not synonymous.[59]

It is as a result of this 'otherness' that Lybeaus must prove his worth as a man and knight and form an identity based upon his actions. It is only once he leaves the court that he begins to understand the ways in which he must prove himself and not only undergo trials, but be seen and known to undergo those knightly ordeals which will ultimately redefine his character. The question of male heroism is one which is inherent within the romance. The progressive element to Lybeaus's quest is evident through the strength and nature of the opposing forces that challenge him directly. The first encounter is with the knight William Selebraunche, who, as Elene points out is:

> "a werreour oute of wytt;
> Throwe herte oþer throwe haunche,
> His spere he will throwe launche
> Whoso agayne hym sytt." (290-293)

This first encounter not only serves to emphasise Lybeaus's innate abilities as a knight, but initiates him into the world of conflict and chivalric duty as a man.[60] It is here that Lybeaus encounters opposition from another male for the first time in his life and experiences his first challenge of strength and chivalric protocol. When Lybeaus

defeats the knight, he responds to his pleas for mercy with mercy. However, Lybeaus realises the importance of public honour and knightly integrity, even at this early phase of his development. By sending William Selebraunche to Arthur as a knight defeated at his hands, Lybeaus not only demonstrates his physical, combative abilities, but his adherence to and understanding of the chivalric ethos and the expectations placed upon him as a knight of the Round Table as well. This results not only in the primary stages of Lybeaus's development and recognition as a knight, but also in the immediate respect of his companion, Elene, who 'Mercy con hym crye/ For she had spoken hym vylonye:/ He for-yaue hir that trespas'(459-461). Elene, like Lunet in *Ywain and Gawain*, and Lyonet in Malory's *Gareth of Orkney*, provides the male protagonist with crucial information throughout his quest, existing as both advisor and companion. In all three narratives this amicability is something which is earned by the male protagonist through his actions. The negativity faced by the hero in *Lybeaus Desconus* is even more pronounced in Malory's *Gareth of Orkney*, in which Lyonet remains unconvinced of Gareth's abilities well into the quest.

The subsequent ordeals and challenges that Lybeaus faces in the romance each provide the knight with increased and specific challenges that must be undertaken and achieved for him to realise his final objective; the complete annihilation of his feminine self. The second conflict with the three kinsmen of William Selebraunche introduces Lybeaus to the inevitable consequences of his actions. The revenge the three knights seek for their uncle places Lybeaus in a position whereby he must defeat these knights both to preserve his life, and more significantly still, his honour. His defeat of the

knights signifies a developmental change in Lybeaus's character, whereby he arrives at a comprehension of the possible consequences for his actions. This understanding aids Lybeaus in the next phase of his quest which presents him with an even 'larger' physical challenge. Through having learned the impact his actions may have in his previous encounter, Lybeaus now enters this next challenge armed with an understanding of the consequences of his failure. His defeat of the giants and deliverance of the maiden Violette signifies a change in Lybeaus's character. I believe that it is at this point that Lybeaus recognises the gravity of the situation in which he finds himself. Rape, the ultimate transgression against the female body, a violation of the individual and the feminine itself, is horrific in normal circumstances, let alone when it is undertaken by an 'over-developed' male body. [61] Lybeaus's actions in this episode have a direct impact on the life of another, and it is not a coincidence that that person happens to be female. Violette's capture and the threat of rape recalls the threat of monstrous conception through the paternal[62] and questions whether this is, in fact, the way Lybeaus himself was conceived. That the woman is named emphasises her importance: she is not just a woman who exists to test Lybeaus's military abilities, she is given an identity which both emphasises her as an individual who is threatened and Lybeaus as an individual who is nameless.[63]

Where Lybeaus initially sought only honour and personal glory for himself, he now realises the positive impact his actions can have upon others. While he still must seek personal honour and public recognition for these deeds, he has now entered into a phase of understanding of the impact of those actions. Lybeaus's battle with the giants

extends beyond the physical and superficial threat of size. It encompasses the threatening nature of the over completed and self-effacing individual. In the Middle Ages, 'the giant is a bodily form moving beyond the limitations of that form towards something else yet undefined'.[64] It therefore represents the threat of transgressing boundaries, embracing a permanent liminal definition of self that cannot exist within the confines of society, and which responds in its behaviour accordingly. Lybeaus's contact with the giants imparts to the hero the understanding of what it is to exist, not merely on the border between civilisation and wilderness, but to become the object of pure marginalisation with no hope of integration. To a 'blank slate' such as Lybeaus, the horror of this abject marginalisation enforces a personal recoiling from all that it represents. As a result, Lybeaus seeks his next challenge within the social realm. In Kardevyle, public approval and the unquestionable victory over the ruler of the city serve to promote Lybeaus to a status which is more socially inclusive than his previous standing. The presentation of the ger-falcon to Arthur at Lybeaus's request results in an initiatory acceptance of Lybeaus as a knight worthy of the king's recognition.[65] However, it is still only a step in the development of his character and the discovery of his true identity and name. Once Lybeaus leaves Kardevyle he is faced with an ordeal which displays his physical ability, while simultaneously exposing his undeveloped lack of judgment. When Lybeaus steals the dog for Elene he is forced to face the consequences of his unjust actions. While Lybeaus does emerge victorious, this episode serves as a reminder that his quest for personal development and identity is far from over.

La Dame D'Amour

Perhaps the most interesting of all the women within the romance is La Dame D'Amour. While appearing to be negative, she provides Lybeaus with the opportunity for the next phase of his development. If it is acceptable that the quest Lybeaus undertakes involves the development of the knight, not only from child to adult, but also from effeminate, liminal individual to full masculinity, the sexual awakening of the hero becomes a crucial phase in his development as a man, affirming his gender and the associations that accompany that gender. After the encounter with La Dame D'Amour, it becomes impossible to classify the hero as liminal in terms of both his maturity and his gender. This sexual awakening of the hero is a motif that occurs in *Sir Launfal*, in which his experience with the fairy, Lady Tryamour, benefits him sexually, socially and financially.[66] The aid of this otherworldly woman is not necessarily negative. [67] It could be argued that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the relationship between Lady Bertilak and Gawain signifies Gawain's sexual awakening. As a knight traditionally associated both with unequaled chivalric virtue and 'cortaysye', Gawain's experiences in the bedroom with Lady Bertilak indicate the necessity for sexual experience. Like Launfal's relationship with the fairy Tryamour, and Lybeaus's relationship with La Dame D'Amour, Gawain's experience serves to aid him in a quest for masculine maturity. It is maturity which Gawain ultimately finds at the end of the romance, when he realises his human imperfection. The supernatural woman who aids the male protagonist is, in these cases, associated with the 'otherworld' or realm of fairy in some way. Joseph Campbell refers to this sexual

initiation of the hero as a period of liminal significance: he cites an example of the Russian mythological 'Wild Women' who exist within unknown, marginal geographic regions and who engage in intercourse with human lovers.[68] This motif of the supernatural sexual woman is not limited to Middle English romance: one is immediately reminded of Odysseus's affair with Calypso in Homer's *Odyssey* and sexual consummation of the rightful king with the female otherworldly 'sovereignty' of Ireland in medieval Irish literature.[69] It appears to me that the negativity, or lack thereof, surrounding these affairs has more to do with the way in which they are written, rather than with any inherent problem with the occurrence of these affairs. Elizabeth Archibald argues that the positive nature of Launfal's relationship with Tryamour and the negative effect of the queen's accusations is intended as a criticism of Arthurian society.[70] While Lybeaus's experience with La Dame D'Amour may not appear to be positive, its importance is made evident through Elene's response to the situation. Elene's interference takes place after a year, and not immediately after his victory over the black giant.[71] Herein lies the true significance of this episode: La Dame D'Amour is, like the other women in the romance, not what she appears to be; her otherworldly abilities aid rather than hinder the male protagonist's development. Elene, aware of the importance of Lybeaus's sexual maturation and development as a male, allows him to stay. It therefore cannot be argued that her influence over the male protagonist has waned, as Lybeaus follows Elene's council immediately after it is given. She says to him:

> "Knyght, thou arte false in thi laye
> Agetnes Kynge Arthure!

For the love of o woman
That mekyll of sorcery canne
Thow doste the grete dissehonour:
My lady of Synadowne
May longe lye in preson,
And that is grete doloure!" (1501-1508)

Male Magic and Phallic Women

Lybeaus's final encounters places him in an unfamiliar position, as he faces challenges which are supernatural in nature.[72] The sorcerers Yrain and Mabon challenge Lybeaus's courage and intellect. The fact that these two beings, who possess and use magic for evil are male is an unusual and significant element within the romance.[73] As we have already established, Lybeaus exists as a feminised male, the aid he receives throughout his quest is feminine in its origins. Because Lybeaus is feminised, the threat of magic cannot come from women, as the female forms too much of his identity; instead it must come from that which is still foreign to him: the masculine otherworldly. However, Lybeaus's final challenge is not the confrontation of the masculine supernatural through Yrain and Mabon rather, it is the Lady of Sinadoun herself who provides Lybeaus with the final challenge that will enable him to become fully male. The threat the Lady poses to Lybeaus is her masculine identity-her phallic and abject signification which is manifested in the form of her body: it is this which Lybeaus fears. As all of the women in the romance, the Lady occupies liminal space. As the victim of sorcery and imprisonment, she appears to be the most passive character within the narrative, who requires a specific knight's aid to deliver her from

her physical and bodily imprisonment. However, she provides the means for Lybeaus's maturation and deliverance from the liminal state in which he exists until her liberation; it is also through the Lady of Sinadoun that the traditional associations with the loathly lady become apparent. Like Dame Ragnell, her transformation occurs at a time in which physical contact is both possible and, in this case, realised. When Lybeaus faces the Lady of Sinadoun in her bewitched form, it is the first time in the narrative in which he is described as being afraid:

> As he sat thus in halle,
> Oute at a stone walle
> A wyndowe fayre vnfelde;
> Grete wondyr with-all
> In his herte ganne falle
> And he sate and be-helde.
> A worme ther ganne oute-pas
> With a womanes face:
> "Yonge Y am and nothinge olde'.
> Hir body and hir wyngis
> Shone in all [þ]ynchis,
> As amell gaye and gilte.
> Hir tayle was mekyll vnnethe,
> Hir peynis gryme and grete,
> As ye may listen and lere.
> Sir Lybeous swelt for swete
> There he sate in his sete,
> As alle had ben in fyre;
> So sore he was agaste
> Hyme thought his herte to-braste
> As she neyhid hym nere. (2061-2081)

Here, Lybeaus is confronted with the inverted physical manifestation of the liminal definition which has always been attributed to him, and from which he has, throughout the romance, attempted separation. Lybeaus is confronted, not with the 'fair unknown', or his own liminal definition of self, but the 'unfair unknown', the loathly lady, who

represents to Lybeaus the threat of digression as 'other'. The idea of the abject maternal accompanies this loathly lady, as she is the means through which Lybeaus cuts his own umbilical chord or connection, to his mother. The Lady herself becomes mother through the birth of the knowledge necessary for Lybeaus's social acceptance. This knowledge, as verbalised by the Lady, represents the power and autonomy of the female liminal individual and provides a significant step in the development in this study of the female abject. Here, the aspects of the Lady's liminal abject identity are both evident and acknowledged. Kristeva argues that:

> the body's inside...shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self"...the abjection of those flows from within suddenly become the sole "object" of sexual desire—a true "ab-ject" where man, frightened, crosses over the horrors of maternal bowels and, in an immersion that enables him to avoid coming face to face with an other, spares himself the risk of castration. But at the same time that immersion gives him the full power of possessing, if not being, the bad object that inhabits the maternal body.[74]

The reason for Lybeaus's fear, therefore, is reasonable: by facing the antithesis of what he has attempted to become, Lybeaus encounters the possibilities of his inverted self. The grotesque being that he sees is feminine, animal and monstrous and exists against the laws of nature: as a result, she transgresses the boundaries of human experience and exists in the margins of the truly obscene and unknowable. This obvious juxtaposition between the beautiful and feminine Lybeaus, who is defined by his physical good looks, and the loathly, phallic worm-woman, emphasises the significance of the body and the body as threshold, within the romance itself. The phallic representation of the Lady's enchanted body invokes the imagery of a Mélusine.

Kevin Brownlee examines the physicality of Mélusine in Jean D'Arras' fourteenth-century French *Roman de Mélusine*. He argues that the hybrid body of this woman exists as three separate bodies; woman, flying snake, and a combination of the two. The sexual connotations of the hybrid female body are not subtle. The Lady of Sinadoun's otherworldly nature is inherent, but, like Mélusine, it is not that which poses the greatest threat. Brownlee argues that 'the figure of Mélusine may be seen as a striking treatment of the problematic relations between the female body and power'.[75] It is this 'masculinisation' of the woman who should embody not only femininity, but the feminine within patriarchal society, that is so terrifying. Instead, it is this woman whose physicality transcends boundaries of nature and whose purpose is the demasculinisation of the male through the otherworldly power she has over him. Because she appears to encompass both feminine and symbolic masculinity, magical and worldly signification, the threat that the Lady poses in *Lybeaus Desconus* is perhaps the most dangerous that Lybeaus has had to face throughout his quest. The pervasive feminine and maternal, its defining features of speech and orifice, sex and reproduction, is sharply juxtaposed with the apparent lack of discourse and transgressable boundaries. The Lady's impenetrability is in itself grotesque,[76] as she appears to be that which seeks penetration of the male. The transgressable nature of female bodies is due to their penetrability while the fluid and malleable nature of women's bodies is displayed through menstruation, sexuality, reproduction and the ability to breast-feed. Therefore, on a physical level, the defining feature of the female body is its ability to incorporate, produce, and expel both the familiar and the foreign.

The Lady of Sinadoun's lack of vaginal orifice is compensated for by the use of the mouth as sexual orifice. The transforming kiss allows the transgression of physical, liminal boundaries to occur, and gender to be attributed to both the Lady and Lybeaus.[77] Here, the knowledge that the loathly lady traditionally possesses is evident, as it is she who initiates the kiss and enables the final transformation, both of herself, from grotesque and liminal serpent woman to human woman, and of Lybeaus from unidentifiable and marginal 'other', to an individual with an identity. It is through this knowledge of Lybeaus as kin to Gawain that identity is bestowed upon the male protagonist. Here, female discourse is employed by the Lady, and results in a positive outcome for both her and the male protagonist. The Lady's position as a liminal figure directly relates to every aspect of her identity and this signifies her importance within this study. It is her embodiment of the qualities of the loathly lady through her physical being that places her upon the border between human and 'other', while her discourse accentuates the wisdom and positive nature of her speech. The transformation occurs, not because Lybeaus knows how to respond to her 'otherness', but because she responds to his true identity as Gawain's son. By taking the initiative, the Lady becomes that which acts rather than that to which a reaction occurs. Not only does this emphasise the Lady's authoritative position within the narrative, but it highlights the reality of her personal and monarchical sovereignty.

---

[1] Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1966) 141.
[2] Clarissa W. Atkinson. *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages.* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991) 27.

[3] For discussion of theoretical maternity, see Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater'. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Reubin Suleiman. (Massachusetts and England: Harvard University Press, 1985). See also Ewa Plonowska Ziareck. 'At the Limits: Heterogenity, Alterity and the Maternal Body in Kristeva's Thought'. *Language and Liberation: Feminism, Philosophy and Language*. Ed. Christina Hendricks and Kelly Oliver. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999). For discussion on maternal theory in the Middle Ages, see John Carmi Parsons, 'The Pregnant Queen as Counselor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood'. *Medieval Mothering*. Ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. (New York: Garland, 1996). William F. MacLehose, 'Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child'. *Medieval Mothering*. Sarah Kay, 'Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance'. *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Elspeth Kennedy*. Ed. Karen Pratt. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994). Jane Gilbert, 'Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*'. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*. Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Rosalynn Voaden. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000). Kathleen Biddick, 'Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible'. *Speculum*. Volume 68, (April, 1993). Atkinson, Clarissa W. *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*. Huston, Nancy. 'The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes'. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985). Tania Colwell, 'Mélusine: Ideal Mother or Inimitable Monster'. *Love, Marriage and Family in the Later Middle Ages*. Ed. Isobel Davis, Miriam Müller, Sarah Rees Jones. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003). Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

[4] For a more detailed discussion on the physiological aspects of medieval motherhood, see William F. MacLehose. 'Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child' and Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*. For detailed discussion about physiological theories pertaining to the reproductive body in the Middle Ages, see Joan Cadden. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For a very interesting article that applies medieval medical theory to aspects of female religious and mystical experience, see Elizabeth Robertson's 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*'. *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*. Ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

[5] William F. MacLehose. 16.

[6] *Sir Gowther*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973) Lines 64-74. All further references will be to this edition.

[7] Jane Gilbert. 'Unnnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*'. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*. Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol Meale and Lesley Johnson. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000) 341.

[8] *Sir Degaré*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001) Lines 575-672. All further line references will be to this edition.

[9] *The King of Tars*. Ed. Judith Perryman. Heidelberg: Winter, 1980. All further references will be to this edition.

[10] From an historical perspective, the existence of a 'lump-child' may have other implications. An instance of a 'monstrous' child being born is documented in the fourteenth-century *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa*, in which an entry is made regarding the birth of a child in England who was 'divided from the navel upwards and both masculine and feminine, and joined in the lower part. When one part ate, drank, slept or spoke the other could do something else if it wished. One died before the other and the survivor held it in its arms for three days. They used to sing together very sweetly. They died, aged about eighteen'. See *The Black Death*. Ed and Translated Rosemary Horrox. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994) 68-70. While this is obviously a case of conjoined twins, it is interesting to note the length of their lives, despite the fear they must have caused within a society that

didn't comprehend their disability. The very fact that they lived past infancy must be due to a parent or guardian who respected and encouraged their existence.

[11] The significance of Christian baptism is examined in relation to another text in this study, *The Awntyrs off Arthure,* by Helen Phillips in her article 'The Ghost's Baptism in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *Medium Aevum.* Volume 58, (1989).

[12] For a full discussion on the monstrous child and the issue of paternity in both *Sir Gowther* and *The King of Tars*, see Jane Gilbert, 'Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in the *King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*', in which Gilbert compares the treatment of motherhood, paternity and monstrosity within these two narratives. See also Elizabeth Archibald, 'Women and Romance', in which she argues that the 'monstrous birth' motif stresses the underlying importance of producing an heir. *Companion to Middle English Romance.* Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. (Amsterdam: V.U. University Press, 1990).

[13] *Sir Tryamour.* Ed. Harriet Hudson. *Four Middle English Romances.* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1996). All further references will be to this edition.

[14] Kim Phillips examines the perceptions and legalities of rape in the Middle Ages. She emphasises the centrality of the body and opposed to the 'unconsenting will' of the victim and various narratives in which rape occurs. See 'Written on the Body: Reading Rape from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Centuries'. *Medieval Women and Law.* Ed. Noel James Menuge. (The Boydell Press, 2000).

[15] J. Burke Severs. *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500.* (New Haven, Connecticut: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967) 67. See also Thomas Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales.* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995) 393.

[16] It is interesting to note that the child which Gawain and the woman conceive is named Ginglain, or Gyngelayne, as he appears in *Lybeaus Desconus.* The child produced in the relationship between Dame Ragnell and Gawain in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* is also named Gyngolen. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain's horse is called Gryngolet. The naming of Gawain's horse emphasises its significance within the narrative. See Andrew Breeze, '*Gryngolet*, The Name of Sir Gawain's Horse'. *English Studies* 81 (2000). In *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, Gawain's horse is also given a name; Grissell. When he is killed in the tournament, Gawain mourns his loss as he would a fellow knight, vowing revenge for his death. The close partnership between Gawain and his horse appears as an anomaly within Middle English Arthurian narrative. The fact that his name is a possible variation on the name attributed to his son is also perplexing. Gawain's association with individuals whose names begin with 'G' also occurs in *Gologras and Gawain*, and in *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain.* In the latter, two of the four knights Gawain encounters have names beginning with a 'G'; Gylbert and Gymamoure. The appearance of 'G' in the names of opponents also occurs in *The Weddyng*, with the name Sir Gromer Somer Joure, and in *The Awntyrs,* with Sir Galeron. Because this occurs in alliterative narratives, it is unclear whether this repetition of 'G' is due to an underlying significance of the names, or merely alliterative demands. *Golagros and Gawain. Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales.* Ed. Thomas Hahn. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1995). *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain.* Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales.*(Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995).

[17] In his essay 'Sir Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain', Thomas Hahn examines how the character of Sir Gawain appears in various Middle English narratives. He argues that Gawain is uniformly portrayed as the knightly ideal who combines both courtesy and chivalry. He states that 'the predictable roles played by Gawain and his fellow knights and the name recognition of these characters , serve as powerful, stabilizing links that join rapid-fire episodes of marvels, violence and mysterious confrontation, or extended and detailed description...this erruption of unforeseen wonders and threats is not, however, without pattern: these provide Gawain with the indispensable opportunity for heroic triumph'.. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance.* Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 224. However, Hahn fails to discuss various ambiguities surrounding Gawain's character, such as his portrayal in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see chapter 5) or the tradition which emphasises his warrior and sexual status, as opposed to his courtly reputation, which can be seen in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure, The Jeste of Sir Gawain* and *Ywain and Gawain.* Hahn emphasises instead his position as a shining example of virtue and prowess.

[18] In *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, both texts which exhibit a relationship between Gawain and women, he behaves as a courteous knight and loyal servant to the king.
[19] For a full discussion of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, see chapter 3.
[20] Vern Bullough examines medieval medical theory with specific emphasis upon masculinity in 'On being Male in the Middle Ages'. *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Claire A. Lees. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
[21] Joan Cadden. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*. 142.
[22] Sir Thomas Malory. *Malory: The Complete Works*. Ed. Eugéne Vinaver. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). All further references to this text will be to this edition.
[23] The characterisation of Morgause throughout medieval Arthurian literature varies between period and tradition. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae* and Laȝamon's *Brut,* Morgause, called 'Anna', is Arthur's sister. In the chronicle tradition, there is no mention of incest and Anna is described as being wife to Lot of Orkney and mother to Gawain. In the *Prose Merlin*, a Middle English text based upon the French Vulgate narratives, Morgause is Mordred's mother by Arthur, but neither she nor Arthur are blamed for the incest (it is attributed instead to magic). In Malory, however, Morgause becomes an exceedingly sexual, adulterous and corrupt woman. *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Ed. Neil Wright. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988). *Prose Merlin*. Ed. John Conlee. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1998). *Laȝamon's Brut*. EETS. O.S. 250. Ed. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).
[24] See Carol P. MacCormack, 'Nature, Culture and Gender: A Critique' *Nature, Culture and Gender*. Ed. Carol P. MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
[25] Vern L Bullough. For a full examination of masculinity in the Middle Ages, see *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. 40.
[26] De Vries examines heroic childhood, stating that 'the child is often very slow in his development: he is dumb or pretends to be mentally deficient'. De Vries highlights Perceval as a hero who fits this pattern. *Heroic Songs and Heroic Legends*. Translated by B.J. Timmer. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) 210-13. In light of my argument that Lybeaus's social exclusion is a result, of his mother's influence and the feminisation of the hero, De Vries statement supports the perception of the hero as an outsider of the masculine realm of the court. The attribution of mental defficiency to the hero, may serve to highlight, not only his own state of mind, but the inexperience of the hero in a male, warrior society.
[27] *Sir Perceval of Galles*. Ed. Mary Flowers Braswell. *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995). All references to this text will be to this edition.
[28] Sarah Kay. 'Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance'. *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Elspeth Kennedy*. Ed. Karen Pratt. (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1994) 26.
[29] Vern L.Bullough.
[30] Kim Phillips. *Medieval Maidens; Young Women and Gender in England. 1270-1540*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 10. In this book, a full examination of the social, sexual and personal identities which surrounded young female experience in the Middle Ages, is undertaken.
[31] In his book, *From Childhood To Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530*, Nicholas Orme examines the constructs of aristocratic male social, military and scholastic education. (London and New York: Methuen Press, 1984). See also Robert Ackerman 'The Knighting Ceremonies in the Middle English Romances', which provides an historical backdrop for rituals of knighting and how they appear in romance. *Speculum* 19 (1944).
[32] For a discussion on the constructions of masculinity in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, see Clare R. Kinney's article 'The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the *Signs of Manhood in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Medieval Masculinities*, in which she examines Gawain's masculine identity and physicality as a communal construct which is represented by the pentangle. Here, the male body is utilised as representative of the chivalry and troth believed to pervade Arthurian society and emphasised through Gawain himself.

[33] Catherine LaFarge also investigates the feminisation of a hero in her article 'The Hand of the Huntress: Repetition in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*', in which she examines the gender tensions and Lancelot's feminisation in Book 18 (Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenevere). *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. (London: Routledge, 1992).

[34] *Sir Amadace*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973) All further references will be to this edition.

[35] Roger Sherman Loomis examines the name of the 'fair unknown' in *Malory's Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney*, in his article 'Malory's Beaumains'. *PMLA* 54 (1939). Loomis argues that 'Kay's insulting speech and the gross disregard of gender in combining masculine adjective with feminine noun suggests not so much that Kay's grammar was a match for his manners, but that we are here faced with a late bungling attempt to explain a traditional name' 658. I would argue that this combination of masculine and feminine in language emphasises Gareth's (or the fair unknown's) existence on the threshold of gender identity. Robert Wilson also examines Malory's *Sir Gareth* and the fair unknown in his article 'The "Fair-Unknown" in Malory'. *PMLA* 57 (1943, March).

[36] Arnold Van Gennep examines 'initiation rites', or the rites which mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. He argues that 'one is therefore led to think that most of these rights—whose sexual nature is not to be denied and which are said to make the individual a man or woman, or fit to be one—fall into the same category as certain rights of cutting the umbilical cord, of childhood and of adolescence. These are rights of separation from the asexual world, and they are followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality and, in all societies and all social groups, into a group confined of one sex or the other'. *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960) 67.

[37] Ad Putter examines effeminacy and heroism in twelfth and thirteenth-century Arthurian romance in his article 'Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy'. *Arthurian Romance and Gender*. Ed. Freudrich Wolfzettel. (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 1995)

[38] Michael Uebel, however, argues that Gowther remains an abject individual throughout the romance and that this is ensured by his paternal identity. See 'The Foreigner Within: The Subject of Abjection in *Sir Gowther*'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Albrecht Classen. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

[39] The presence of dwarves in medieval romance is common and also occurs in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide*, In *Sir Degaré* and Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth*. In Malory, the dwarf acts as the character with the most knowledge about Gareth, as he knows his true identity and origins. See Penny Simons 'The Squire, The Dwarf and the Damsel in Distress: Minor Characters in *Le Bel Iconnu*?' for an examination of the characters in the French version of *Lybeaus Desconus*. *Forum For Modern Language Studies* 32 (1996, June).

[40] Melanie McGarrahan Gibson. 'Lyonet, Lunete, and Laudine: Carnivalesque Arthurian Women'. *On Arthurian Romance: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst. (Dallas, Texas: Scriptorium, 2001).

[41] Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou examines the historical context for female speech, both in society and literature in her article '"This Creature": Discourse on Women and Discourse by Women in the Middle Ages'. *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 1 (1993).

[42] Dickson, Morgan. 'Female Doubling and Male Identity in Medieval Romance'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Phillipa Hardman. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002). Sheila Fisher also argues that women in medieval romance appear either to aid in the construction or destruction of the male protagonist, not as characters in their own right. See 'Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*.

[43] It must be noted that it is the archetype that is defied and not the women who are believed to subscribe to that archetype. This thesis argues that women become liminal characters when the perspective of their positions is altered. Therefore, there need not be a 'default' position for women who do not fit the same mould as Elene. For further reading on female archetypes, see Maureen Fries 'The Characterization of Women in the Alliterative Tradition'. *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*. Ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach. (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981). See also Maureen Fries, 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. (New York: Garland, 1996).

[44] E. Jane Burns. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 59. See also Sandra Bardsley, 'Sin, Speech and Scolding in Late Medieval England', in which 'the sins of the tongue' are discussed. *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe.* Ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[45] Edith Joyce Benkov. 'Language and Women: From Silence to Speech'. *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature.* Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

[46] See Caroline Walker Bynum in her book *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987) And also by Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion.* (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

[47] Julia Kristeva. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* 75.

[48] Claude Lévi-Strauss. *The Raw and the Cooked.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

[49] For further discussion, see Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society.* (London: Sage. 1996). See also Carol P. MacCormack, 'Nature, Culture and Gender: A Critique'. *Nature, Culture and Gender.* Ed. Carol P. MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[50] Carol M. Counihan. *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning and Power.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 63. Mary Douglas examines the relationship between pollution and food. Studying the Havik culture of India, Douglas states that 'while eating, a person is in the middle state of purity and if by accident he should touch the server's hand or spoon, the server becomes impure and should at least change clothes before serving more food'. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo.* (London: Routledge Press, 1966) 42. However, Douglas points out that 'the only person who is not defiled by touch and by eating from the leaf of another is the wife who thus, expresses her personal relationship to her husband'. 42. See also Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked.* Harmondsworth Penguin (1964)

[51] This also occurs in *Sir Gowther*, in which Gowther's murder of his wet-nurses through breastfeeding and oral mutilation of his mother's breast becomes the rebellion of the individual. See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's 'Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Inhuman c. 1400'. *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages.* And Michel Uebel's 'The Foreigner Within: The Subject of Abjection in *Sir Gowther*'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages.*

[52] For further discussion on the 'grateful dead' motif in the romance *Sir Amadace*, see Elizabeth Williams, 'Sir Amadace and the Undisenchanted Bride: The Relation of the Middle English Romance to the Folktale Tradition of "The Grateful Dead"' *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance.* Ed. Rosalind Field. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999).

[53] See Phillipa Tristram, *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature.* (London.: Paul Elek, 1976) Chapter V. See also Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979). See also Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society.* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[54] In his article 'The Knight, Heraldry and Armor: The Role of Recognition and the Origins of Heraldry', Adrian Ailes discusses the significance of a knight's armor and his own personal identity. He states that 'During the Middle Ages heraldic devices were so successful in identifying knights, otherwise unrecognisable in their armour, that they actually created problems of their own. A knight had only to swop his armorial surcoat and shield for those of another to be safely taken for that person; or he could assume entirely bogus arms and thus appear incognito'. *Medieval Knighthood IV: Papers From the Fifth Strawberry Hill Conference 1990.* Ed. Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992) 3.

[55] This theme of madness existing outside of the physical boundaries of society is also seen in the Middle English Breton Lay, *Sir Orfeo*, in which Orfeo's madness occurs after the abduction of his wife when he leaves his kingdom and wanders aimlessly in the wilderness on the outskirts of society.

[56] See Joanne A. Charbonneau, 'From Devil to Saint: Transformations in *Sir Gowther*', *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance.* Ed. Phillipa Hardman. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002). For a discussion of problematic identity, human nature and the animal state of the male protagonist. For a discussion on psychology in Middle English romance, see Bart Veldhoen, 'Psychology and the Middle English

Romances: Preliminaries to Readings of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Launfal*'. *Companion to Middle English Romance.*

[57] The significance of the voice in relation to the wilderness also occurs in *Sir Orfeo*. When Orfeo leaves his kingdom to venture into the wilderness, his music, that which is representative of civilisation, both calms the animals of the forest and ensures the release of Heurodis. Here an encroachment on the borders of the wild and supernatural territories of the forest and fairy kingdom by elements of civilisation occurs through Orfeo's voice and music, which ultimately allows for the reinstatement of both king and queen. By transgressing the boundaries of wilderness and civilisation, just as the fairy king had done to abduct Heurodis, Orfeo recreates the boundaries and delivers both himself and his wife from a liminal state of being.

[58] *Lybeaus Desconus, (Lambeth Palace Version).* Ed M. Mills EETS. OS.261, (1969) Lines 178-187. All further line references will be to this edition.

[59] Phillipa Tristram. *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature.* (London: Elek Books Ltd, 1976) 21.

[60] See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces.* (London: Fontana Press, 1993). See also Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, which looks at heroism in a mythological context, examining the hero in various literatures, from ancient Greek, to Biblical and Mesopotamian, and how they may be interpreted. (New York: Vintage Books, 1936).

[61] The threat of the monstrous in sexual terms is also found in the *Alliterative Morte D'Arthur*, in which the giant of Mont St. Michel systematically rapes and, as a result, kills the women. His final victim, the Duchess of Brittany, also meets this grim fate before Arthur and his knights are able to come to her rescue. That the Duchess dies as a result of rape, in which she is 'slit to the navel' not only demonstrates the consequences of the monstrosity of the male individual, but emphasises the inability of Arthurian society to intercede in time. *The Alliterative Morte Arthure. King Arthur's Death.* Ed. Larry D. Benson. (Exeter: University Press, 1986) Lines 840-1161.

[62] Exploring Middle English Breton Lays, Amanda Hopkins argues that female vulnerability is inherently connected to the heroic identity of the male protagonist and that this vulnerability exists as a primarily biological threat. The issue of rape, therefore, is connected to the potential of motherhood, what Hopkins argues is a primary identifier for women. See 'Female Vulnerability as Catalyst in The Middle English Breton Lays'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance.*

[63] It could also be argued that the name 'Violette' is a play on words. The name Violette is the Old French name for the flower violet, deriving from the Latin viola. The Latin verb violare, 'to violate or dishonour' bears striking similarity to the offences with with Violette is threatened. If indeed it is a play on words, Violette becomes defined according to the actions taken against her, and not according to her individual character. She therefore lacks identity as much as her rescuer, Lybeaus.

[64] David Williams. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature.* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996) 113.

[65] The fifteenth-century Boke of St Albans, provides the guidelines for the proper hierarchy of birds in relation to social hierarchy. According to this text, the ger-falcon is the bird of kings and princes, while lake falcons were associated with dukes; peregrines with earls; bustards with barons; saker falcons with knights; merlins with Ladies; sparrowhawks with priests and kestrels with knaves. See *The Boke of St Albans: Selections*. Ed. Rachel Hands. (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[66] For further discussion on the fairy woman in *Sir Launfal*, see Elizabeth Williams, ' "A Damsell By Herselfe Alone": Images of magic and Femininity from *Lanval* to *Sir Lambewell*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills.* Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996). See also Laurence Harf-Lancner, 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers' *Arthurian Women: A Casebook.*

[67] For further discussion on Malorian supernatural women, see Geraldine Heng, 'Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory'. *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context.* Ed. Keith Busby. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1990). See also Maureen Fries, 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. and 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Faye in Medieval Romance'. *Arthuriana* 3 (1994).

[68] Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. p.79. See also Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings*. Rank devotes an entire chapter (chapter 8, 'Sexual Enlightenment and Impulse') to the sexual education of the hero in society.

[69] See Kim McCone. *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. (Kildare: Maynooth Monographs, 1990).

[70] Elizabeth Archibald. 'Women and Romance'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. 58. Stephen Knight maintains that *Lybeaus Desconus* is about power and brutality, for which chivalry and courtesy provide a convincing cover. See 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romance'. *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*. Ed. David Aers. (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986) 105-109.

[71] The black giant, Maugris, exists as other, both physically, through his size and colour, and culturally. His colour would imply he is a 'Saracen'. This use of the foreigner in Middle English romance is not uncommon and implies an explicit fear of that which is 'other' in cultural and religious terms. See also the Middle English *King Horn, Middle English Verse Romances*. Ed. Donald B. Sands. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1966). For an interesting examination on racial implications within Middle English Romance, see Jesus Montano, '*Sir Gowther*: Imagining Race in Late Medieval England'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*.

[72] For further discussion on magic in romance, see Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance: From Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000). See also Helen Cooper, 'Magic That Does Not Work'. *Medaeivalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976). For an interesting examination of the relationship between magic and music in *Lybeaus Desconus*, see Linda Marie Zaerr, 'Music and Magic in *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Lybeaus Desconus*'. *Medieval Forum*. www.sfsu.edu/~medieval/Volume4/Zaerr.html

[73] The most well known sorcerer in the Arthurian tradition is Merlin, who appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth as the son of a human woman and a demon. According to Monmouth, his influence as a prophet and sorcerer is extensive, as he enables the conception of Arthur. In Malory, Merlin continues to have supernatural powers and tremendous influence. The *Prose Merlin*, however, concentrates on Merlin and his position and influence leading up to and during Arthur's reign. See *Prose Merlin*. Ed. John Conlee. *Prose Merlin*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1998). *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Ed. Neil Wright. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988).

[74] Julia Kristeva. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. 53.

[75] Kevin Brownlee. 'Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis'. *Yale French Studies* 86 (1995) 19.

[76] Bakhtin argues that 'if we consider the grotesque image in its extreme aspect, it never presents an individual body; the image consists of orifices and convexities that present another, newly conceived body. It is a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception'. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984) 318. However, the Lady's lack of orifice is in itself grotesque, as it contravenes her very signification as woman.

[77] The motif of the transforming kiss bears similarities to Dame Ragnell and the acquisition of sovereignty, as it is only once the male protagonist demonstrates submission to the female that union and transformation can occur.

Chapter 5: *Ywain and Gawain*

In her article 'The Breaking of Troth in *Ywain and Gawain*', Gayle Hamilton points out the extent to which this Middle English text emphasises the importance of troth, rather than that of love, which is of primary importance in Chrétien's twelfth-century *Le Chevalier au Lion*.[1] She states that:

> truthfulness in word may be given so prominent a place in this poem because it is such an integral part of a feudal society. Community order depends upon men who fulfill their oaths of fealty to their lord and lords who support and protect their retainers as they promised... *Ywain and Gawain* delineates a society which matches the author's concern with fidelity to verbal bonds. Arthur's court honours a man who is true to his word while despising one who is not.[2]

While the theme of troth is a significant aspect within the romance, critical focus examines troth as an inherently male value, both upheld and enforced by the masculine realms of chivalry and King Arthur's court. The ways in which female characters relate to troth and traditionally held 'male values', is something which has remained overlooked, resulting in a failure to recognise the women within *Ywain and Gawain* as subjects rather than objects. In this chapter, I will examine how Lunet and Alundyne, characters who have traditionally been viewed as individuals existing solely to benefit and enable masculine development and social reinstatement, become 'protagonists' in their own right and how the feminisation of the romance relies on the application of those values held as typically 'male' to the female characters within the romance. Central to the re-evaluation of the women in *Ywain and Gawain* is the concept of liminality as it applies to both male and female protagonists. It must be emphasised

that, throughout the romance, it is liminality, the existence on a threshold between two realms simultaneously, as differentiated from duality, the transference from one realm to another and back again, that is examined in this study. It is this liminal experience that serves to signify the differences between the sexes. I will argue that the women in *Ywain and Gawain* successfully adhere to the values upheld by chivalric society as inherently 'male' and heroic. As a result, the women in the romance become liminal individuals who are marginalised by their sex, yet who fully incorporate those values of the society from which they are marginalised. The ultimate revelation is the extent to which the female characters surpass Ywain and the male realm of Arthur's court in their adherence to those values which are held in such high esteem. This chapter will examine the concepts of heroism and the application of 'male' values to female characters within the romance, and why it is impossible for these women to achieve full heroic status. How this impacts upon the liminal and abject status of the women in the romance will be the primary focus of this chapter, as enabling a position by which female abjection progresses further into social consciousness and thereby enforces the liminal identity of the female protagonists.

The Female Liminal Experience and 'Male' Heroism

The application of concepts of heroism to women in Middle English romance is problematic. I want to explore how is possible for troth to be employed by a female character and the instances in which this occurs. I would argue that heroism in a culture reflects social fears and hopes; it is therefore dictated by social constructs and

priorities. A hero may be identified as heroic because he preserves or advances the social order and, because the hero has historically existed in a patriarchal society, he must embody those traits which society most values. If masculinity is seen to be that which preserves or promotes society, the hero must be male however, this raises issues of gender and the transgressing of gender boundaries: women may act as heroes, but their sex prevents them from becoming heroes in the fullest sense because they can never become physically male they therefore take on a liminal quality that places them on the threshold of masculine heroism and feminine virtue and physicality. This is not to say, however, that women do not participate in and influence events; they may be the subjects of a narrative, they may irrevocably change or influence the narrative, but their physical sexual identity prevents them from becoming that which society epitomises; they can never be physically male. Applied to the romance *Ywain and Gawain*, the primary heroic attribute, that of troth, may be approached differently. Troth, it has been argued by several critics, is the central focus of the romance, however, rarely has it been applied to the female protagonists in *Ywain and Gawain*.[3] Troth may be defined as the ability to maintain one's honour and personal integrity in relation to another. It appears as a vital element within *Ywain and Gawain* and is an inherent concept within Middle English romance. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it is Gawain's troth that is broken as a result of taking the green girdle. In *Sir Launfal*, it is Launfal's ability to maintain his troth to Tryamour that is tested, and in the romance *Amis and Amiloun*, the pledge of troth between the two male protagonists is that element which subsequently drives the narrative forward.[4] It would appear that invariably, the issue and possession of troth belongs solely to the masculine realm of

chivalry and that while it can appear in relation to women through a pledge or promise, it belongs predominantly to the realm of men. However, troth can and does exist in relation to women under the 'more feminine' aegis of constancy and patience in such romances as *Emaré, Lay Le Freine* and *Sir Tryamour*.[5] In this section, I will demonstrate how troth in its most 'male' form may be successfully applied to the women in *Ywain and Gawain*, resulting in the liminalisation of these female characters.

Both the romances *Emare* and *Sir Tryamour* belong to a genre of texts known as the 'Constance sagas', in which the female protagonist's fidelity is put to the test, through unjust accusations, usually of adultery. In the romance *Lay le Freine*, Le Freine's patience and her ability to maintain her troth with her lover leads to her patient suffering. Instead of the integrity of her bond with her lover being rewarded, it is her patience and endurance that is commended. Le Freine endures the degradation in which she is placed by Guroun and she is subsequently rewarded for her submissive endurance through marriage to her beloved. In *Sir Tryamour*, Tryamour's mother, Margaret, wife of king Ardus, is accused by the king's steward of adultery: she is subsequently banished, escapes ambush and flees to Hungary where she gives birth to Tryamour.[6] Margaret's patience, indeed her troth, is maintained and she is reunited with her (apologetic) husband. In this romance, the reward for patience and constancy is the eventual family reunion and her son's legitimacy and installation as heir to the throne. In *Emaré*, the focus remains primarily upon the female protagonist, whose success is determined by the patience and goodness with which she endures her various trials and suffering. Neither Emaré nor Margaret establishes the conditions under

which they must succeed in maintaining their constancy, nor do they choose the means by which they engage in their various struggles. Instead, the pattern is predetermined by their sex. Troth, personal integrity and the promise of that integrity, is maintained, but because it is done so by women it becomes merely the long and patient suffering of a 'good woman'.[7]

Although a specific type of troth may be employed by women in several texts however, the application of masculine, chivalric troth to women in Middle English romance is rare. Troth, in the male realm inspires knightly endeavours, courtly behaviour and loyalty that, if accomplished, results in the social advancement of the hero. 'Traditionally' female characters have only been able to achieve social position through marriage, thus the application of any virtue not amenable to wifely status is not only unusual, but is incompatible with the characteristics of the 'ideal wife'. However, in *Ywain and Gawain*, both Alundyne and Lunet adhere to the principles dictated by the concept of troth throughout the romance. Lunet's aid of Ywain at the beginning stems from an obligation to him for his kindness years before: she informs Ywain of her obligation, saying:

> "I aw the honore and servyse.
> I was in message at the king
> Bifore this time, whils I was ying;
> I was noght than savese,
> Als a damysel aght to be.
> Fro the tyme that I was lyght
> In cowrt was none so hend knyght,
> That unto me than walde take hede
> Bot thou allane, God do the mede.

Grete honore thou did to me,
And that shal I now quite the."[8](720-730)

Her subsequent promise to help him win Alundyne's hand in marriage is undertaken with a selfless concern for the happiness of both Ywain and her lady. Lunet's loyalty and unwillingness to break troth with her mistress results in near execution. By the end of the romance, Lunet's selfless and positive nature is indisputable, as are the sacrifices she has made honourably and truthfully.

Alundyne's troth and ability to keep her promises inspires an initial confusion as to the positive nature of her character. The first instance in which she upholds her promise is her repossession of the ring from Ywain. This reclamation of the magic ring relates to Ywain's immature character.[9] Michelle Sweeney discusses the relationship between troth and magic. She writes:

> Troth (as defined in terms of love, loyalty, obligation and duty), bears a relationship to the sociological role of magic...The place of magic in medieval society is related to the need of a person to achieve power, or, in other words, influence over fate, fortune, his/her own actions and the actions of others. In these romances magic is intimately linked to this decisive moment when a hero or heroine discovers his or her free will, or lack thereof, in the tales. Its presence heralds the confrontation of the character with his or her status, either as one who maintains one's trowth, or a traytour. In *Ywain and Gawain*, the return of Alundyne's magical ring occasions the humiliation of the character and the acknowledgement of his betrayal of trowth to his wife.[10]

This act also confers upon Alundyne the status of one who maintains troth, and therefore deserves the ring's power.[11]

While this act appears to be to the detriment of the male protagonist, it later becomes evident that it serves to propel his journey of personal development forward; the romance ends with a reconciliation between Alundyne and Ywain, brought about through Lunet's artful discourse and it is in this instance that Alundyne's true adherence to the principles of troth are made clear. Lunet's verbal trickery places Alundyne within a situation that tests her integrity and honour; however, instead of breaking her promise, she is reconciled completely with her husband.[12] The implications of both Alundyne and Lunet's honour and troth are testament to their existence, not only as figures who straddle the boundaries between gender roles, but as characters who are fully developed and who do not seek personal evolution.

Ywain regains his sanity as a result of female aid; because his insanity was caused by his transgression against a woman, it is women who must deliver Ywain from the wilderness. The restoration of Ywain's sanity by the otherworldly women provides him with the means for salvation: the renewal of his human consciousness and consequent understanding of the path he must follow to enable him to return to his marriage.[13] As a result, Ywain's liminal experience is again redefined, as is his heroic characterisation.[14] The autonomy of these women is established through their presence in the romance after Ywain's recovery. While from a narrative perspective these women appear to exist for the sole purpose of relieving Ywain from his psychological situation, upon further examination it is evident that they provide a direct juxtaposition with Lunet and Alundyne's actions. The dishonest behaviour of the lady's servant and her use of the healing oil serve to fully restore Ywain to health. However, it is

undertaken against the promise made to the lady; instead, the maiden:

> despended al the unement
> Over hir ladies cumandment.
> For his lady wald sho noght let;
> Hir thoght that it was ful wele set. (1781-1784)

This stands in distinct contrast with Alundyne's rightful reclamation of the magic ring. The dishonest action of the servant through her assistance of Ywain aids in an understanding of Alundyne's just action against him. These women, existing on the threshold between the wild and the civilised, embrace a liminal identity which serves both the male and female protagonists while their associations with magic stand in conjunction with Alundyne and Lunet's otherworldly power, as well as their liminal experience. Criticism has tended not to focus on the scene concerning the servant's lie to her mistress, but solely on Ywain's restored mental health. However, this episode, while seemingly irrelevant to the narrative, becomes a significant indicator of the validity of the female protagonists' actions and discourse.

Alundyne

The motifs of sovereignty, transformation, female discourse and the otherworldly exist within the female characters in *Ywain and Gawain*. I will now examine the characterisation of the women in *Ywain and Gawain*, beginning with Alundyne.

Both Alundyne and Lunet integrate these motifs through their characterisation and

action, existing as separate female characters whose individual utilisation of these traits directly influences the male protagonist's conduct. The liminal nature of these women exists throughout the romance yet must be defined separately as both exist between worlds, albeit in varying ways and to various degrees. Alundyne's liminal nature is central to the events that take place within the romance. While Alundyne appears to embody the qualities of the typical female hero of medieval romance, her existence as a liminal figure allows her the freedom that accompanies non-specific and multiple significations and simultaneously places her between the expectations of her gender and the implications that her sovereignty would denote. It is as a result of her liminal nature that Alundyne possesses those qualities with which this study is concerned. Her existence on this threshold allows her the experience of those qualities otherwise reserved for the female 'counter-hero', as defined by Maureen Fries,[15] such as power over the male protagonist, transformation and otherworldly connotations; however, Alundyne's positive nature defies the implications of the female counter-hero. Because she exists as both Ywain's challenger and his reward, Alundyne straddles the definition of the acceptable and pre-determined denotation of a specific type of female character. Unlike Dame Ragnell, who appears to move from one definition to another, Alundyne occupies both the social realm and sovereignty within that realm, while simultaneously becoming an outsider because of that sovereignty. It is Alundyne's autonomy and definition that places her within a liminal domain. Alundyne also occupies the threshold between the definable, that of human woman, and the cryptic, the embodiment of many character definitions and significations, and as a result, Alundyne's character undergoes another liminal experience. From this viewpoint, it

becomes possible to understand Alundyne's conduct throughout the romance.

Perhaps the most significant aspect to Alundyne's liminal character is her possession of sovereignty. In this romance, sovereignty may be defined in two different ways; personal sovereignty, the autonomous rule of oneself; and independent sovereignty; the ruling of a geographical kingdom or realm. Alundyne possesses both throughout the romance and in every circumstance it directly relates to her liminal experience. Alundyne's possession of the land is implied through her need for a knight to defend it on her behalf. When she is widowed, she enters a liminal realm in which she becomes responsible for both the rule and defense of her domain: Alundyne temporarily exists on the boundaries of gender experience. While the expectation may be that she find a new husband to defend her lands, her sovereign responsibility to her people is that of both defense and leadership. Her subsequent marriage to Ywain is undertaken on the conditions that he becomes responsible, not for the ruling of the realm, but for its defense.[16] Here, Alundyne maintains her sovereignty over Ywain, as it is her decision to marry him, set the conditions for that marriage, exclude him and ultimately to forgive his transgressions. As a result, Ywain becomes a 'feminised' male.[17] Here, the traditional implications of marriage within medieval romance as an act which allows the male protagonist sovereignty over both wife and land are altered. Alundyne's position of personal and monarchical sovereignty is also maintained after her marriage to Ywain: he speaks of his love and submission to Alundyne, saying:

"Anis with a luke,
Al my hert with the thou toke.

Sen I first of the had syght,
Have I the lufed wirh al my might.
To mo than the, mi lady hende,
Sal never more my luf wende.
For thy luf ever I am redy
Lely forto lif or dy."(1161-1168)

Alundyne prescribes the conditions of Ywain's departure and return and inflicts punishment when those conditions are transgressed.[18]

Alundyne's sovereignty is made even more apparent through the language used by Lunet, when Ywain has broken his promise to his wife. She says of Ywain:

" He is ateyned for trayture,
A fals and lither losenjoure;
He has bytryed my lady,
But sho es war with his gilry.
Sho hopid noght, the soth to say,
That he wald so have stollen oway.
He made to hir ful mekyl boste
And said, of al he lufed hir moste.
Al was treson and trechery,
And that he sal ful dere haby.
It is ful mekyl ogains the right
To cal so fals a man a knyght.
My lady wend he had hir hert
Ay forto kepe and hald in quert,
Bot now with grefe he has hir gret
And broken the term that sho him set." (1601-1616)

Here, the implications of Alundyne's sovereignty, not only over herself and her realm, but over Ywain as well, are indisputable. The use of words such as 'trayture', 'treson' and 'trechery' imply a bond of monarchical command as well as personal dominance. It is only after these phrases implying sovereign betrayal are spoken, that language of

personal betrayal is employed by Lunet. She says:

> "Sertainly, so fals a fode
> Was never cumen of kynges blode,
> That so sone forgat his wyfe,
> That lofed him better than hyr life."(1621-1624)

As a result, the full extent of Alundyne's sovereignty is exposed through the culmination of Ywain's actions and his inability to recognise the significance of his wife's authority. The liminal nature of Alundyne's sovereign experience is directly related to her multiple definitions as both wife and ruler. By defying the expectations placed upon her as a wife, such as obedience, submission and unquestioned support of her husband, Alundyne appears to become the paradigm of wifely vices. However, her existence as the voice of authority within the relationship results in Ywain's positive development as both a man and a knight who becomes capable of embracing troth and honour. It is this experience on the threshold of gender expectations, between both virtuous and dominant wife, that further defines Alundyne as a liminal character.

Alundyne's transformative experiences also serve to define her liminal nature. Unlike Dame Ragnell, whose transformation is above all physical, Alundyne undergoes mental transformation. When Ywain first sees Alundyne, she is mad with grief.[19] Here, her bereavement inspires not only mental anguish, but a physical, animal response to that anguish, which is later evident in Ywain with his loss of Alundyne. Instead of behaving as the sovereign in command of her realm, Alundyne exhibits animal behaviour, her mouth uttering moans and wails instead of the rational and logic

expected from a ruler. Alundyne is described as being:

> white so mylk,
> In al that land was none swilk;
> Sho wrang her fingers, outbrast the blode.
> For Mekyl wa sho was nere wode.
> Hir fayre hare scho al todrogh,
> And ful oft fel sho down in swogh.
> Sho wepe with a ful dreri voice. (819-825)

When Lunet attempts to reason with Alundyne regarding the future of her kingdom and her sovereign responsibilities, she tells Lunet to leave, chastising her for her bold opinions. However, Lunet's counsel influences Alundyne's subsequent course of action as she:

> thoght than al the nyght,
> How that sho had na knyght
> Forto seke hir land throghout
> To kepe Arthurgh and hys rowt.
> Than bigan hir forto shame
> And hirself fast forto blame. (1021-1026)

As a result, Alundyne is placed between the social expectations of the behaviour of bereaved wife and the responsibilities of a strong ruler. This transformation, instead of removing Alundyne from the liminal realm in which she exists, serves to reclassify her liminal experience as one that is governed not only by traditional gender expectations, but also by the expectations of society.

The loathly lady motif emerges in this event, where Alundyne's sanity and reason, traits which re-emerge under Lunet's council, are lost through personal despair. She

embraces that aspect of the loathly lady's definition which poses the greatest threat to society: she becomes 'other'. Ó'Cathasaigh defines the heroic experience, stating that:

> by means of the heroic biography, the human person, (real or imaginary) is transmuted into something quite other, that is, into a sacred personage...The hero is a mortal personage whose life is characterised by certain definable features which mark him off as sacred.[20]

Here, the female characters of the romance become what may be defined as sacred in their otherness. However, because of their gender, criticism has failed to apply this positive connotation of otherness to these characters. When viewed in this manner, female liminality within the text becomes an issue of existence between boundaries of female reality and sacred experience. Alundyne and Lunet, through their cross-boundary existence, attain affirmation of their heroic status.

Alundyne's behaviour during her mourning period transgresses human boundaries of reason and sanity and therefore belongs outside the confines of society. Arnold Van Gennep places the act of mourning in a liminal realm. He states that it is 'a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society'.[21] She belongs, temporarily, on the outskirts of society, to the realm of mental wilderness, which Ywain will later inhabit.[22] However, unlike Ywain, Alundyne never enters fully into the wilderness of insanity and despair. While wilderness is an area that may be occupied by women in medieval romance, wilderness as symbolic of mental instability is less common in female characters and appears to be a predominantly 'male' motif. When a woman

does enter into the physical wilderness, a forest or place on the outskirts of society, the threat is not a lapse into the chaos of insanity rather, it is the threat of the sexual violation of the woman. This is especially evident in texts where violation actually occurs and produces a child, as in *Sir Degaré*, *Sir Gowther* and, possibly, *Lybeaus Desconus*.[23] However, in the romances *Sir Orfeo* and *Ywain and Gawain*, the temporary insanity displayed by both Heurodis and Alundyne places them in a mental wilderness, where they become simultaneously abject and more sexually appealing [24] as it is at this point in *Ywain and Gawain* that Ywain realises his attraction to Alundyne. These acts of inflicting harm upon the body not only parallel both Orfeo and Ywain's future disregard for their own bodies in the wilderness, but place these women in a liminal position with regard to their gender. The expectations placed upon Alundyne as sovereign serve to keep her within the physical realm of society. Herein lies the confirmation of Alundyne's status as sovereign. Ywain transgresses boundaries; he becomes a fluid and dynamic individual. Alundyne, however, may not belong to one definition alone. From the outset, she is defined in multiple ways, exhibiting a sovereignty which owes much to her characterisation as a liminal figure.

Both Lunet and Alundyne cross into the inappropriate through their associations with magic, or the otherworldly. However, instead of this serving as malevolent influence on the male protagonist, it preserves his life, enables his quest of personal development and symbolically represents the power of life and death which the female protagonists possess. Sweeney argues that the magic ring given to Ywain by Lunet is crucial to his endeavours because Ywain,

> has not developed enough as a character to use his own wit to achieve his goals. Instead, he relies heavily, as in the original, on the magic ring given to him by Lunet. Her ring transforms Ywain physically into another person, demonstrating the radical nature of the changes to his personality that Ywain needs to make.[25]

Herein lies another aspect to both Lunet and Alundyne's unequivocal sovereignty and liminal experience; both exist on the threshold between courtly society and the otherworld. Magic exists within the romance however, it is only employed by its female characters.

When Lunet first meets Ywain, she offers him her ring which will hide him 'Als the bark hilles the tre'.[26] While Lunet undoubtedly saves Ywain's life, she is also able to harness the power of Ywain's love, to enable reconciliation and union between Ywain and her mistress. Alundyne's power over the otherworldly is displayed when she gives Ywain her ring, and explains its power and significance. Here, her mastery over the otherworld is clear. However, her ability to maintain power over Ywain is even stronger than her associations with the otherworldly. This juxtaposition between Alundyne's portrayal as a positive character who is simultaneously associated with the otherworld and the governing of her own society and her husband, offers a seeming contradiction between what is and is not acceptable for a woman. When Alundyne sends Lunet to retrieve the ring from Ywain after his promise has been breached, her associations with sovereignty and the otherworldly take on a more sinister hue. However, Alundyne's true positive nature is preserved and her course of action justified when it becomes evident that Ywain is at fault and must both atone for his sins, his breach of trust, and undergo a period of personal development.[27]

Lunet

Lunet's relationship with Alundyne is one of servant, friend and protector. She exists simultaneously and constantly as all three, offering advice that both serves Alundyne's interests and, when heeded, protects her from invasion by outside forces. As a friend she acts as mediator between husband and wife, showing an allegiance to Alundyne when Ywain forgets his promise to return. However, transformation does occur, not to Lunet personally, but within this female relationship, when it becomes jeopardised by the male influence at Alundyne's court. It is here that Lunet faces the loss of a different definition of sovereignty, that which exists in relation to her lady. It is this influence and relationship which is regarded by those men as dangerous to their own political ambitions. While this is not the first instance of a female posing a threat to the masculine world of chivalry and male dominated values in medieval Arthurian literature, it is perhaps one of the most unusual; Lunet's characterisation and actions, undertaken in a female-dominated realm and for a female cause, are positive in nature and enforce the legitimate claim of female sovereignty. It is when Lunet is denied sovereignty over both herself and within the kingdom that she moves from being a liminal character who possesses the strengths of a liminal identity, to one who is both liminal and marginalised within her society.[28] It is the male realm of ambition, that of self-improving conduct, that is indirectly criticised. Lunet's captors, who accuse her of being a traitor to her lady, are indeed themselves treacherous in their attempts to rid Alundyne's kingdom of the voice of proper counsel which has served to benefit its

people.

Lunet appears within the romance as a character of central importance, yet exists on her own without the attachments of a romantic partner. Like Lyonet in Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney*,[29] and Elene in *Lybeaus Desconus*, Lunet takes on the role of the advisor. It is her discourse that facilitates Ywain's marriage and the reconciliation between Ywain and Alundyne. She is autonomous and possesses personal sovereignty throughout the romance. Her liminal nature is defined by her adherence to her own personal objectives, which are manifested through her aid of Ywain, and her loyalty to Alundyne. Her actions, while always initially appearing to be in aid of Ywain's purpose, are simultaneously positive for her mistress as well. Thus Lunet exists on the threshold between seemingly contrasting loyalties and, like Alundyne, it becomes impossible to define her as either heroine, female counter hero, or female hero, as she appears to be beyond such classification. Her own personal sovereignty allows an ability to cross those borders between acceptable and unacceptable female conduct. It is through this liminal experience that Lunet is able to maintain her autonomy. By crossing borders of social expectations as both a woman and a primary initiator of action, Lunet transgresses those expectations through her inspiration of positive results and happy endings.

Liminality and the Female Body

I will now focus on how the female body in *Ywain and Gawain* shares many similarities with the traditional loathly lady with regard to a liminal representation. I will follow this with an exploration of the concept of male heroism, concluding with an examination of heroic identity in *Ywain and Gawain* and how the women within the text impact upon the ideals and values of heroism. The physically grotesque nature of typical loathly ladies such as Dame Ragnell, is a primary focus within such texts as *The Weddyng* and *The Marriage*; however the liminal nature of female speech is also highly significant. As has been previously examined, areas of the body, such as the mouth and female genitalia, represent the threshold between the inside and the outside: 'through the mouth the self deals with the other'.[30] When examining *Ywain and Gawain*, it is evident that the threshold experience of its two female protagonists depends heavily on the ways in which they employ discourse.[31] The monstrous body associated with the loathly lady may be absent, but her ability to speak with reason and intelligent council, contradicting traditional gender beliefs, is still present in both Lunet and Alundyne. It is this absence of the loathly body that emphasises the female characters' importance. Without the excuse for marginalisation based on physical appearance, Lunet and Alundyne retain the positive nature of liminal definition without abject peripheral habitation. Their physicality allows them social inclusion, while their positive, dynamic discourse places them on the border of gender boundaries and personal sovereignty. The issue of sex and regeneration also emerges through the marriage of Alundyne and Ywain. Like the traditional loathly lady, the possibility for regeneration

is implied, and with it the potential for social disruption. Alundyne's liminal state of being has the same social implications as that of Dame Ragnell; she transgresses the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour through her sovereignty, her supernatural associations and her power of discourse and transformation. However, she exists, not only within the social realm, but as its ruler.

The female protagonists in *Ywain and Gawain* are able, through their liminal nature, to possess those qualities so highly valued by the male chivalric ethos. Their adherence to concepts of personal honour and troth defines them as individuals who exist on the border between male and female gender roles. While both Lunet and Alundyne incorporate the experiences of characters who undergo multiple and simultaneous definitions of self, it is this constant adherence to their own morals and sense of troth that enables their positive connotations throughout the romance. Their incorporation of those elements of a liminal nature, such as female sovereignty, magic, transformation and discourse, does not serve to marginalise these women, but enables their integration into society.

Heroism and Male Identity: An Exploration

In order fully to understand how women in *Ywain and Gawain* follow the traditional 'masculine' values that define heroism within middle English romance, we must see how heroism is defined and how it is applied in other middle English texts. According to Alfred Nutt's definition of a heroic biography, which has come to be

known as the 'Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula',[32] a hero may be defined by those extraordinary experiences which take place in a liminal realm or manner. These experiences are defined as rites of passage where the hero exists in a liminal space. Nutt identifies these rites as beginning with the hero's birth and extending to his death. However, Tomas Ó'Cathasaigh points out that 'the heroic biography is not always to be found in a single inclusive text; it is usually necessary to draw on a number of texts in order to establish the configuration of the hero'.[33] A comprehensive study of heroism in a universal context is undertaken by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Campbell examines how the hero exists cross-culturally in relation to myth and folklore. Examining the various stages of heroic development, Campbell paints a portrait of heroism that is recognisable in many of the medieval romances. The concept of the 'liminal' hero is acknowledged by Campbell in the stage he terms 'the crossing of the first threshold' upon which, he argues, the individual meets the dangerous unknown that exists outside social and familiar boundaries.[34] It is only after the entrance into this world that the potential hero will undergo those challenges that will ultimately define him as a hero. Campbell argues that 'once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure'.[35] In the case of Middle English romance, heroism is often defined according to the individual's ability to live up to those expectations placed upon him by the governing authority, which is often chivalric and, in the case of the Arthurian romances, based at Arthur's court. The protagonist's ability to live up to the ideals of a chivalric hero can be put to the test in different ways: it may be through financial ruin,

the question of the legitimacy of the individual, or social transgression that the potential hero is forced into a journey of heroic development. Through the culmination of their trials and subsequent victories, the hero undergoes a process of self-discovery; education and evolution of the individual result in the achievement of chivalric perfection. In the romances *Sir Perceval of Galles,*[36] *Lybeaus Desconus, Sir Degaré* and *Sir Gowther,*[37] the male protagonist begins his quest of self-discovery and social initiation on the outskirts of chivalric society. These male protagonists must earn their inclusivity through a series of trials and tests which allow them to understand their place within society and their familial identities.[38] The tests take place in the liminal outskirts of society and in the unknown wilderness. The 'other' is often encountered, especially by Lybeaus Desconus, Perceval and Degaré through meetings with giants, ogres and beings with powers that are supernatural. In *Sir Gowther*, the abject is, in fact, the hero himself, who must overcome his nature through abject means and thereby earn his humanity.

In the romances *Sir Amadace, Sir Isumbrus, Sir Cleges* and *Sir Launfal,*[39] the reason for the social exclusion of the male protagonists and the purpose of their subsequent quests are financial. All four knights enter into a state of poverty as a result of their over zealous generosity, or largesse. In *Sir Cleges*, social marginalisation is achieved simply through this poverty. However, social reinstatement and resumed wealth are achieved by Cleges as a result of his Christian values and both he and his wife's piety. The issue of piety is also significant in *Sir Isumbrus*, in which the male protagonist loses his wife and family as a result of his inability to adhere to Christian

values, favouring material wealth above Christian piety. Both Cleges and Isumbrus are married and their families are mentioned and in both romances, the wives of the protagonists play a major role in the redemption of their husbands; in *Cleges,* through the good advice given, and in *Isumbrus,* through the maintenance of sexual virtue. [40] In the romance *Sir Amadace*, the male protagonist begins his journey in the wilderness, or forest, where he encounters the foreign and abject in the 'stinking chapel'.[41] The rotting corpse signifies what Amadace himself will become, and calls to mind the mortality and mutability theme common in Middle English romance.[42] That Amadace has been placed in a situation of social marginalisation as a result of poverty, the very thing which prevents the proper burial of the corpse, calls to mind the significance of Amadace's financial failings. However, it is through Christian charity that Amadace is able to become reinstated into society. In this romance, it is not so much the acts of chivalry that save Amadace in the end, but rather the Christian goodness and morality that he possesses, that allow him to be a part of society.

In various texts, the exemplary status of Arthur's court is challenged. Many Middle English romances utilise Arthurian subject matter as a way either to criticise indirectly the chivalric values represented by Arthurian society, or to question its priorities. While this may result in alteration of the criteria for heroism, it does not change the heroic identity of the protagonist himself. This is perhaps most obvious in the romance *Sir Launfal*, in which the male protagonist, through his uncontrollable largesse, becomes outcast from society and is eventually reinstated into Arthurian society through the aid of his fairy lover. The subsequent breaking of troth with the

lady and rejection of Guenevere's sexual advances emphasise Launfal's simultaneous heroism through his rejection, and the inability for him to live up to the expectations placed upon him by his mistress.[43] As in *Ywain and Gawain*, the male protagonist fails in his promise to his lady and suffers the consequences: she revokes her love and the sovereignty of both her body and land (or in Launfal's case, magical power). However, Launfal undergoes a period of unjust treatment and accusations of treason and must, in the end, be saved by his fairy lover who takes him to her 'otherworldly' home. Because Launfal has become a hero who has transcended the criteria for social inclusion in Arthur's realm, he can no longer remain and the faults of Arthurian society are exposed. In the romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain's reputation within the text as the epitome of chivalric virtue and troth is tested and shown to be incorrect.[44] The failure of the knights to realise Gawain's transgression merely enforces an opinion that their blindness to Gawain's failure is an inability to recognise the imperfection in themselves and their value system. The accusations made against Arthur by his people at the beginning of the romance, and the Green Knight's accusations of cowardice against the knights of the Round Table, question the Round Table's integrity.[45]

***Male Heroism and Identity in* Ywain and Gawain**

Elements of the heroic biography may be applied to Ywain in this romance. His future greatness is implied through his ability to defeat the knight of the fountain, where his kinsman had failed. Ywain's nature is both passionate and violent and he

kills monsters; after his expulsion from his home and place beside Alundyne, Ywain must seek service in lands foreign to him, and his return home to his wife and her realm results from the completion of his developmental journey.[46] Ywain's experiences throughout the romance place him in a liminal situation that is defined by his development as a man or 'hero'. From the beginning of the romance, when Ywain decides to undertake the adventure that his kinsman failed, he enters into a space of personal development. Bollard argues that:

> Colgrevance's account of his adventure is an exemplum demonstrating both courteous behaviour and the insufficiency of seeking adventure for its own sake. The lesson he himself learns, both from his adventures and from his retelling of them, is one of humility. The opening section of *Ywain and Gawain*, therefore, establishes a primary theme and it prefigures the thematic development of Ywain's adventures, outlining in miniature the narrative and thematic concerns of the whole.[47]

The theme of heroic immaturity and development is common in medieval romance occurring in many of the Middle English texts. This is evident in *Sir Degaré, Lybeaus Desconus, Sir Tryamour* and *Sir Perceval of Galles*. The adventures that the individual knight may undertake commonly result in the social and moral development of the knight. The immaturity present in these characters places them in liminal positions, whereby incorporation as fully developed individuals into chivalric society is the primary objective. In the romance *Sir Degaré*, the male protagonist must achieve his social position through a quest. Not only beginning as a socially immature individual, whose illegitimacy and subsequent abandonment marks him as marginal, Degaré must also overcome his ignorance with regard to his parentage, to avoid incestuous, Oedipal

disaster.[48] Likewise, in the romances *Lybeaus Desconus, Sir Tryamour* and *Sir Perceval of Galles*, social marginalisation and an unconventional upbringing set the male protagonists apart as individuals who must overcome both ignorance and underdevelopment to become integrated into chivalric society. However, in *Ywain and Gawain*, the male protagonist begins in a position of social, familial and personal inclusion. Ywain, a young knight, is a member of chivalric society and Arthur's court, seeking to prove himself through adventure. Unlike Degaré, Tryamour, Perceval or Lybeaus, Ywain's social marginalisation occurs as a direct result of his own actions and, more importantly still, occurs as a result of his transgression against a woman. Ywain's apparent achievement of maturity and his development as a knight, are undermined by the very principles to which Arthur's court believe they adhere. This results dramatically in the revelation of both the court's chivalric ineptitude and Ywain's immaturity. In his pre-marital situation, Ywain appears to be the perfect knight; his adventures result in personal and financial advancement and the acquisition of his final prize, his wife Alundyne. It is in this phase of Ywain's development that he experiences the primary stages of heroic evolution. His recognition as a hero takes place outside the confines of his society in a wilderness unknown to him. This element of the unknown is explored by John Stevens who maintains that the heroism in romance:

> is often and characteristically of a searching pattern: the hero is involved in a mystery; he is on a quest but does not know what he has to look for; he is engaged in struggle but does not know who his adversary is...in romance the hero goes in search for the final, meaningful encounter that will crown his quest and, one often feels, enable him to know himself. This is why, in romance, the hero can be at a loss, can make mistakes and not understand what is happening to him.[49]

Ywain undergoes a period of adolescence, in which he exists as an immature individual who must prove himself worthy of social integration and knighthood. This experience reaches its height in his marriage to Alundyne, a woman who surpasses Ywain in the experience of marriage and love and is his superior in terms of wealth and status: it is only after Ywain's marriage to Alundyne that he embarks upon the next step of his personal development. When Ywain decides to return with Arthur and his knights, his reason centres on individual glory and honour.[50] While his decision is made based on his own egotistical objectives, Gawain provides the primary influence behind the decision.[51] Gawain says to Ywain:

> "Sir, if thounly at hame,
> Wonderly men wil the blame.
> That knight es no thing to set by
> that leves al his chevalry
> And ligges bekeand in his bed,
> When he haves a lady wed.
> For when that he has grete endose,
> Than war tyme to win his lose;
> For when a knyght es chevalrouse,
> His lady es the more jelows.
> Also sho lufes him wele the bet.
> Tharfore, sir, thou sal noght let
> To haunt arms in ilk cuntre;
> Than wil men wele more prayse the.
> Thou hase inogh to thi despens;
> Now may thow wele hante turnamentes. (1455-1470)

The extent to which the masculine realm of Arthur's court is underdeveloped is evident. The prospect of personal achievement clearly takes precedence in Ywain's mind, over the responsibilities of a husband and protector. This emphasises Ywain's

inability to identify his priorities: as a result, it is not only Ywain's shortcomings that are exposed, but the entire masculine realm of Arthur's court. What is interesting in this romance is the court's inability to achieve the same level of maturity that it so strongly prescribes. Ywain's broken promise to his wife accentuates the importance of a verbal contract. Here it becomes clear that the promise does not decrease in value as a result of the sex of the person to whom it is made this, in turn, emphasises not only the true status of women and specifically Alundyne, but also the inability of Arthur's court to comprehend this significance.

After Ywain's public humiliation, he enters into another liminal phase of his development. He enters a state of being which is defined by his existence between human form and animal consciousness. Ywain's insanity also serves to define him as a marginalised individual, who must exist outside society.[52] Here, Ywain enters into the true challenge of his heroic development. Having realised the error of his previous actions, he now enters into the wilderness of understanding. Ywain has finally grown up and, although unable to begin his atonement for his transgressions, he now at least understands them. He says:

> "Allas, I am myne owin bane;
> Allas" he sayd, "that I was born,
> Have I my leman thus forlorn,
> And al es for myne owen foly.
> Allas, thys dole wil mak me dy." (1644-1648)

His atonement may take place only after he experiences a personal suffering that stands in direct juxtaposition with his previous egotism. It is the identity of the male

protagonist that is lost through the onset of insanity. In the 'fair unknown' romances, such as *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Sir Perceval of Galles* and Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney*, the issue of identity is a condition based primarily on the hero's parentage, and specifically, his father. In these romances, the hero does not enter a period of insanity which marginalises him rather, he is born into an identity that is already socially marginal, due to paternal absence. He knows that he must earn his identity by proving himself worthy of that identity. Because the 'fair unknown' heroes begin their educational journey on the edge of society, they do not require insanity in the traditional sense to place them there: however, in romances where the male protagonist *enters* into social marginalisation, the insanity of the hero is the medium through which he experiences social exclusion; therefore, the matter of personal identity becomes inextricably linked to the hero's own sense of loss. In *Sir Orfeo*, the loss of Heurodis is the cause of Orfeo's sojourn in the wilderness. By placing the kingdom in the hands of his steward and entering the forest, Orfeo physically and symbolically places himself outside civilisation. His madness manifests itself through actions that contradict society's expectations of its ruler. The acquisition of personal identity can also occur as the result of an epiphany, or sudden realisation of the hero's own transgressions or inadequacies. In *Sir Gowther*, Gowther's comprehension of his sins leads to his repentance. The penance required not only places Gowther outside society, but also entails the acquisition of a temporary animal identity. In *Ywain and Gawain*, the hero faces loss *and* the knowledge of his personal sin, both of which provide the catalyst for Ywain's sudden lack of reason and the loss of human identity. Like Sir Gowther, Ywain becomes more animal than human, consuming raw meat and existing within the

wilderness with little clothing. Penelope Doob examines madness in Middle English literature and explores the ways in which insanity is deployed within the texts. She argues that Ywain belongs to the category of the 'unholy wild man' during his period of insanity. He is wild because he lives outside civilisation, and he is unholy because his temporary insanity and exile in the wilderness is brought about through transgression, and not choice. Doob states that the 'Unholy Wild Man' 'commits atrocious sins, but for some reason—often because he is graced with excellence in some respect—his sins are at once symbolized, punished, and purged by a period of temporary madness or wildness during which he degenerates into a bestial state of unconscious penance until forgiveness finally brings sanity and restoration'.[53]

In the romance *Sir Orfeo*, the issue of insanity is one that affects both Orfeo and his queen, Heurodis. Madness first occurs in Heurodis. After having been visited by the king of fairy who informs her of her impending abduction, Heurodis displays signs of madness and, significantly, grief at her parting with her husband and her world.[54] Once abducted, Heurodis's identity is lost, as she enters into the liminal realm of the fairy world. She is neither alive, nor dead, but exists as do the other humans; suspended in a timeless and grotesque space, on the threshold of human identity and otherworldly definition. Orfeo's reaction to Heurodis's abduction is simultaneously calculated and spontaneous. The loss of his wife represents both a personal loss, but also a renunciation of sovereignty that is comparable to Ywain's experience with Alundyne.[55] Both Heurodis and Alundyne represent that aspect of sovereignty which is intrinsically connected to kingship.[56] Alundyne's bestowal of sovereignty upon Ywain is revoked

when he fails to keep his promise. Unlike Alundyne, we are never made aware of the circumstances preceding the marriage of Orfeo and Heurodis. However, the issue of generation and succession appears as an important element within *Sir Orfeo*. The romance ends with the reunion of queen with king and king with kingdom. While all appears reconciled, the lack of an heir is clearly indicated through the succession of the loyal steward after Orfeo's death. The question of the procreative abilities of either Orfeo or Heurodis is immediately raised as a result. We are left to wonder if the abduction and sojourn in the wilderness stole those years of childbearing potential, as surely as they stole sanity and reason from both king and queen. When we see how closely dependent Orfeo and indeed Ywain, are upon their wives, their sudden madness and subsequent lack of identity becomes increasingly understandable. Bart Veldhoen argues that by losing his wife, Orfeo has lost himself and that his sojourn in the wilderness represents his own psychological state of deprivation and susceptibility.[57] I would argue that Orfeo's loss of his wife does not merely precipitate a state of mourning, but one of madness, and that Orfeo's loss of identity has more sinister implications than merely a period of restless vulnerability rather, it enforces his own reliance upon female importance to kingship. In the beginning of *Sir Orfeo*, Heurodis's fit of terror draws a peculiar reaction from her husband. He says:

> "forlorn icham!
> Whider wiltow go, and to wham?
> Whider thou gost, ichil with the,
> And whider y go, thou schalt with me."(127-130)

Here, Heurodis's significance to the king is emphasised; he will not reign without her.

In *Ywain and Gawain*, Alundyne's magic ring represents both Ywain's promise to his wife and the sovereignty she has bestowed upon him through marriage. It is therefore significant that the repossession of the ring not only reminds Ywain of his broken troth, but also strips him of his human identity. When Ywain enters the forest, he returns to a primal state of being, in which he is devoid of human reason. Corine J. Saunders examines the historical reality of the forest and its inhabitants. She says: 'the legal process of outlawry, which removed the individual from any protection of the law, thus stripping him of his birthright, necessitated flight into the wilds of the forest'.[58] Ywain's habitation of this liminal realm not only places him physically in a position on the threshold of humanity and abject individuality but suggests illegality. As a result, Ywain's broken promise to his wife truly makes him unfit for social inclusion; it 'outlaws' him from his identity, his sanity and his society. He becomes a liminal individual who exists on the threshold between human and animal, but without the identification of either. It is only through his act of kindness to the lion that Ywain begins his development as a human being.[59] The lion himself becomes a crucial element to Ywain's evolution, as he enables Ywain to acquire a new identity. As 'the knight of the lion', Ywain takes the identity of the animal over his own human identity in an attempt to atone for his sins against his wife. As in the romance *Sir Gowther*, in which the male protagonist seeks atonement through the expropriation of the animal identity of a dog,[60] Ywain also must earn his humanity through humility, selflessness and without human identification.[61] Ywain's consumption of blood and raw meat identifies him as 'other'. His association with nature, as opposed to culture, is

emphasised through his ingestion of raw food. Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that the 'raw' is affiliated with nature, the cooked with culture. Therefore, Ywain's assimilation into an animalistic state of being symbolises a rejection of society.[62] The polluting quality of food is examined by Mary Douglas, who argues that 'a distinction is made between cooked and uncooked food as carriers of pollution. Cooked food is liable to pass on pollution, while uncooked food is not'.[63] Because pollution is a social construct, the cooked, or culture, may be threatened by pollution. However, the uncooked, or natural, lacks the risk of pollution, because it is removed from society. Ywain's animalism displays his affiliation with the raw, natural 'otherworld' of the forest. He eats uncooked meat, not because he is himself polluted, but because his identity requires complete removal from human civilisation. Ywain's consumption of cooked food coincides with his first experience of another human. At this point, Ywain begins the slow process of social reintegration.

The adventures undertaken by Ywain are acts of atonement and sacrifice. His lack of identity, or name, places him on the threshold between society and the unknown. This lack of identity is directly related to his evolution as a human being. Hamilton argues that 'his humanity is integrally interwoven with the love and lordship he has betrayed. He can no longer call himself Ywain…he takes his identity from his lion and under that label he wins renown. He defines himself then as the lord of a true servant, the one who has truly won the allegiance of a beast'.[64] This also acts as a means to further Ywain's personal development towards his attainment of true chivalry and honour. Herein lies the distinction between Ywain's liminal experience and the liminal

nature of the female characters themselves. The liminal experience of the female protagonists is constant. The ways in which this is manifested throughout the romance may alter; however, it is, in some form, continual. The only variants are the elements which define their characters. Because these elements transgress traditional gender boundaries and acceptability, the female characters can never 'evolve', because evolution can not be achieved unless the liminal experience is left behind. As a result, the women remain on a threshold, retaining the power that accompanies a liminal state of being.[65] Ywain's experience between borders is defined, not by his gender, but by his personal and heroic development. His journey is a liminal transition, in which he progresses from immaturity to manhood. Ywain's reconciliation with Alundyne signifies the culmination of his personal liminal journey and evolution. Because the women begin in a space of authority and maturity, they retain their existence between realms indefinitely.[66] The result is the existence of two female characters who are able to transgress the limits of gender-defined roles which enables them to possess the attributes typically valued by the masculine world of chivalry and male society.

---

[1] The differences between Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Middle English adaptation have been examined by critics whose arguments revolve around the emphasis on love in the former as opposed to the latter's emphasis on issues of troth. Hamilton argues that 'Whereas Chrétien's *Yvain* explores the conflict and reconciliation of love and prowess, *Ywain and Gawain* is instead concerned with the basis of an honourable society on men and fidelity'. Hamilton, Gayle K. 'The Breaking of Troth in *Ywain and Gawain*. *Mediaevalia* 2 (1976) 112. See also Tony Hunt, 'Beginnings, Middles and Ends: Some Interpretative Problems in Chrétien's *Yvain* and its Medieval Adaptations'. *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*. Ed. Leighy A. Arrathoom, (Rochester, Michigan: Solaris Press Inc., 1984). John Finlayson, '*Ywain and Gawain* and the Meaning of Adventure'. *Anglia: Zeitshrift Für Englische Philologie*, Volume 87, (1969). David Matthews, 'Translation and Ideology: The Case of *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Neophilologus* 76 (1992, July).

[2] Gayle K Hamilton. 'The Breaking of Troth in *Ywain and Gawain*'. 113.

[3] Hamilton briefly examines Lunet's troth and ability to keep her word however, she argues that the maintaining of one's word can have negative connotations as well as positive. 117.

[4] *Amis and Amiloun*. Ed. Edward E. Foster. *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*.

(Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1997). All further references will be to this edition.

[5] *Emaré*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973). *Lay le Freine*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). *Sir Tryamour*. Ed. Harriet Hudson. *Four Middle English Romances*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 1996). All further references will be to these editions.

[6] The name 'Tryamour' occurs in the Middle English *Sir Launfal* and belongs to the hero's fairy lover. The meaning of the name, 'three loves', is peculiar and may possibly be related to the significance of the number three in the Welsh Triads and triple manifestations within the literature. In their notes on *Sir Launfal*, Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury suggest that 'Tryamour' may mean this or it may mean literally 'to try, or test love'. In either case, the connection between the fairy lover and Sir Tryamour is unclear. See Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961). *Sir Launfal*. Ed. A.J. Bliss. (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1960).

[7] For further discussion on these texts, see Margaret Robson, 'Cloaking Desire: Re-Reading *Emaré*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996). See also Amanda Hopkins, 'Female Vulnerability as Catalyst in the Middle English Breton Lays', *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Phillipa Hardman, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002). For a discussion on love and marriage in relation to *Lay le Freine*, see Elizabeth Archibald, '*Lai le Freine*: The Female Foundling and the Problem of Romance Genre'. *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*. Ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert, (England: Longman Publishing, 2000).

[8] *Ywain and Gawain*. Ed. Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington, EETS. OS. 254 (1964) Lines 720-730. All further references will be to this edition.

[9] The relationship between troth and the supernatural can also be seen in *Sir Launfal*, in which the fairy Tryamour reclaims her gifts and her love for Launfal when he breaks his troth to her. In *Sir Orfeo*, Orfeo's harp has the supernatural quality of making the world at peace. It is this 'magic' that enables him to retrieve his wife from the fairy world. *Sir Orfeo*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). All further references will be to this edition.

[10] Michelle Sweeney. *Magic in Medieval Romance: From Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000) 121.

[11] For an interesting discussion of magic, or the apparent lack thereof, in Middle English romance, see Helen Cooper, 'Magic That Does Not Work'. *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976). For further reading on magic in medieval romance, see Anne Wilson's *The Magical Quest: The Use of Magic in Arthurian Romance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

[12] The use of language in the Middle Ages is explored by Sandy Bardsley in her article 'Sin, Speech and Scolding in Late Medieval England', in which she explores social concerns regarding speech and discourse and how these concerns are made evident in art and literature. For a discussion regarding the concept of 'fama' and dialogical discourse in Middle English romance, see Richard Horvath's 'Romancing the Word: Fama in the Middle English *Sir Launfal* and *Athelston*'. Both articles are in *Fama: The Politics of Talk in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Thelma Fenster, David Lord Smail. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[13] The theme of the fairy healer appears in other medieval literature. Maureen Fries examines Morgan le Faye in 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Faye in Medieval Romance'. *Arthuriana* 4 (1994). She examines the positive, healing qualities that Morgan had in earlier works, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* and the *Prose Merlin*. In *Sir Launfal*, it could be argued that the fairy Tryamour psychologically heals Launfal, as well as financially, through her supernatural power and her love. See also Elizabeth Williams ' "A Damsell By Herselfe Alone:" Images of Magic and Femininity from *Lanval* to *Sir Lambewell*' *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, for a discussion on their treatment of the 'fairy lover' in Middle English literature. Williams examines attitudes to beauty and magic in conjunction with female sexuality in *Lanval, Sir Launfal* and *Sir Lambewell*. For a more general discussion on the fairy lover and magic,

see Laurence Harf-Lancner, 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers', *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster (New York: Garland, 1996).

[14] Ywain now possesses the ability to seek atonement for his sins. He undergoes another rite of passage on his quest of personal development, entering into a stage where, following a retreat from his country, he is able to return. Nutt, Alfred. 'Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of the Celts'. *Folk-Lore Record* 4 (1881).

[15] Fries defines the female heroes as existing 'to encourage male prowess: her agency is "selfless" in that it exists for patriarchal—male rather than female—purposes'. She defines the female counter-hero as follows: she 'holds values which are not necessarily those of the male culture in which she must exist. Her actions are as likely to hurt the hero as to help him. Rather than only occasionally exhibiting powers greater than most women, like the female hero the counter-hero consistently fills roles ordinarily attributed only to men'. 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. 68.

[16] Hamilton points out that Ywain 'undertakes the task to defend the well in order to gain his beloved. Meanwhile, she takes a new husband with such precipitous speed because she understands that providing her well's defense is her primary responsibility. Ywain glories in his marriage and in the new position it has given him. He little considers the burdens that go along with it'. 'The Breaking of Troth in *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Mediaevalia: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 2 (1976) 126.

[17] Ywain's feminisation is enforced by his associations with the lion later in the narrative. Associations between animals and men occur frequently in hagiography and indicate the saint's obedience, gentleness and passiveness, all qualities traditionally associated with women. However, the feminisation of the saint is positively portrayed. In Middle English romance, relationships between men and animals also denote obedience. In *Sir Gowther*, Gowther behaves as a dog and lives amongst dogs in an act of obedience and contrition to the Pope. Ywain and the lion are loyal to each other as a result of Ywain's kindness, sympathy and gentleness, rather than conquest and subjugation. In the lives of St. Jerome and St. Francis, the relationship between the men and animals is explicitly conveyed. Jerome, through his associations with a lion, and Francis with the animal kingdom. See Jacobus de Voragine. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints, Volume 2*. (2 Volumes) Translated William Granger Ryan. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[18] The conditions set by Alundyne for Ywain are as follows: she says ' "I gif yow leve/ Until a terme that I sal sayn,/ Bot that ye cum than ogyne!/ Al this yere hale I yow grante/ Dedes of armes forto hante./ Bot, syr, als ye luf me dere,/ On al wise that ye be here/ This day twelmoth how som it be,/ For the luf ye aw to me./ And if ye com noght by that day./ My luf sal ye lose for ay'." (1500-1510).

[19] This display of grief is similar to the reaction demonstrated by Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo*, in which she tears at her body and appears to be insane. Lines 78-96.

[20] Tomas O'Caithasaigh. *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt*. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1977) 5.

[21] Arnold Van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960) 147.

[22] In a study of the Nyakyusa tribe, Mary Douglas discusses how during the mourning ritual, the people 'embrace the symbols of death [as] a kind of prophylactic against the effects of death; the ritual enactment of death is a protection, not against death but against madness...madness will come if they neglect the ritual of freely accepting the corruption of the body; sanity is assured if they perform the ritual'. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. (London and New York: Rouledge, 1966) 219.

[23] *Sir Degaré*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). *Sir Gowther*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973). *Lybeaus Desconus*. EETS, O.S. 261. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). All further references will be to these editions. See chapter 4 for a full discussion of motherhood and sexuality with particular reference to *Lybeaus Desconus*

[24] The dramatic way in which both women attempt to disfigure their bodies recollects the attempts made by several female saints in medieval hagiography to become asexual beings. However, in hagiography, the act of disfigurement is undertaken to become less sexual, less female, usually in order to avoid marriage, so they may dedicate themselves to God. According to her hagiographers, Saint Brigid blinded herself so as to appear less attractive when her family threatened marriage. See *Bethu Brigte*. Ed.

Donncha Ó hAodha. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978). The motif of saintly self-inflicted harm is complex and has been explored in relation to self-starvation. Caroline Walker Bynum points out the large numbers of female saints who undergo self-inflicted starvation in an attempt to be closer to God. This is often rewarded with the ability to live on the Host alone, despite lack of nourishment. Because the reasons for self-inflicted bodily harm in a female saint are different from a mourning romance heroine, it is imprudent to compare them to each other. While one is motivated by religious faith and aspiration, the other is a social response to a corporeal situation. The only true similarity they share is the use of the body as representation of their state of mind. See also Caroline Walker Bynam, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987). Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[25] Michelle Sweeney. *Magic in Medieval Romance.* 135.

[26] *Ywain and Gawain.* Line 741.

[27] Sweeney examines the social consequences of Ywain's broken promise. She states that, 'his disregard for his wife implies that he has not taken into consideration his oath before God, nor has he weighed the social implications of his failure to honour the verbal contract between them. In a society that values the word of a man as his bond, Ywain is traitor to his community and to himself. This rendering of events...justifies Ywain's complete break with society and sojourn into the wilderness'. *Magic in Medieval Romance: From Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer.*133.

[28] It is significant that one of Ywain's final challenges which enables him to evolve, reintegrate and reconcile with his wife, is the reinstatement of Lunet into society.

[29] Sir Thomas Malory. *Malory: The Complete Works.* Ed. Eugéne Vinaver. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). All further references will be to this edition.

[30] The mouth as threshold is examined in David Williams's *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature.* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999) 141. See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World.* Translated by Helene Iswolsky. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984). E. Jane Burns. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993)

[31] Michael Camille also points out the significance of the liminal as it relates to the body. He says that in the Middle Ages 'Openings, entrances and doorways, both of buildings and the human body...were especially important liminal zones that had to be protected'. Camille, Michael. *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art.* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) 16. See also Kim Phillips 'Bodily Walls, Windows and Doors: The Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth Century English Books for Women'. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy.* Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol Meale and Lesley Johnson. (Turnhout, Belguim: Brepols, 2000). For further discussion on marginal art in medieval manuscripts, see David A. Sprunger, 'Parodic Animal Physicians From the Margins of Medieval Manuscripts'. *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays.* Ed. Nona C. Flores, (New York: Garland, 1996). For an examination of gender in relation to medieval female mystics and liminality, see Kathleen Biddick, 'Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible'. *Speculum* 68 (April, 1993).

[32] Nutt's 'Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula' is defined in his article 'The Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of The Celts'. Found in the 1881 *Folk-Lore Record 4.* In it, he outlines the criteria that may be found universally in an heroic biography. He utilised theories of evolutionary biology by applying them to the study of folklore and he argued that folklore studies should be approached through culture.

[33] Tomas O'Cathasaigh. *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt.* 2.

[34] Arnold Van Gennep discusses the concept of liminal territories in *The Rites of Passage.* He argues that 'the rite of passing between the parts of an object that has been halved, or between two branches, or under something, is one which must, in a certain number of cases, be interpreted as a direct rite of passage by means of which a person leaves one world behind him and enters a new one'. (19) I would argue that Van Gennep's interpretation of a rite of passage, the liminal state in which one exists between worlds, is that space in which the hero resides until he has completed his trials and is fully incorporated into the world which he aims to exist.

[35] Joseph Campbell. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, (London: Fontana Press, 1949,1993) 97.
[36] *Sir Perceval of Galles*. Ed. Mary Flowers Braswell. *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, 1995). All further references will be to this edition.
[37] *Sir Gowther*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973). All further references to this text will be to this edition.
[38] Stephen Knight discusses how romances which enforce feudal ideals serve to validate the practices of those in power. He argues that in the 'fair unknown' romances, chivalry and courtesy act as a camouflage for military brutality. See 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romance'. *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*. Ed. David Aers, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986). For a discussion of heroic identity, see Phillipa Hardman, 'The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002). See also Morgan Dickson, 'Female Doubling and Male Identity in Medieval Romance'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*.
[39] *Sir Amadace*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973). *Sir Isumbrus*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973) *Sir Cleges*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001). *Sir Launfal*. Ed. A.J. Bliss. (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1960). All further references will be to these editions.
[40] For an exploration of the family relationship as it appears in various romances, see Felicity Riddy, 'Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[41] For an interesting article on *Sir Amadace*, see Elizabeth Williams, '*Sir Amadace* and the Undisenchanted Bride: The Relation of the Middle English Romance to the Folklore Tradition of "The Grateful Dead."' *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Rosalind Field. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999).
[42] See Phillipa Tristram's *Images of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature*. (London: Elek Press, 1976). for a thorough discussion of the aspects of mortality and attitudes to mortality. See in particular chapters 4 and 5. See also chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion on the mortality and mutability motif.
[43] The theme of the unfaithful queen and her (often younger) target for a sexual relationship is a common folkloric and mythological motif which recollects the Old Testament tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, in which the older wife attempts to seduce the younger Joseph and, when met with refusal, accuses him of initiating sexual advances to her husband. This is reflected in *Sir Launfal*, through Queen Guenevere. For further reading, see John D. Yohannon, *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in World Literature: An Anthology of the Chaste Youth and the Lustful Stepmother*. (New York: New Directions, 1968). See also Margaret Sclauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens*. (New York: AMS Press, 1927).
[44] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. Second Edition Revised Norman Davis. (Oxford: Claredon, 1925, 1967). All further references will be to this edition.
[45] Before Gawain is about to embark on his quest, it is stated that all the people say that 'Warloker to haf wroȝt had more wyt bene,/ And haf dyȝt ȝonder dere a duk to haue worþed:/ A lowande leder of ledeȝ in londe hym wel semeȝ,/ And so had better haf ben þen britned to noȝt,/ Hadet wyth an aluisch mon, for angareȝ pryde./ Who knew euer any kyng such counsel to take/ As knyȝteȝ in cauelaciounȝ in Chrystmasse gomneȝ!/' (677-683) Earlier, the Green Knight says ''Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdlez chylder;/ If I were hasped in armes on a heȝe stede,/ Here is no mon me to mach, for myȝteȝ so wayke./'(280-282). In his article 'Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy', Ad Putter points out the significance of facial hair, arguing that the lack of it questioned the 'maleness' of the individual. *Arthurian Romance and Gender*. Ed. Freidrich Wolfzettel. (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 1995). For more discussion on masculinity, see Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages'. *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Claire A. Lees, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). See also Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530*. (London and New York: Methuen, 1984).
[46] All of these criteria are outlined by both von Hahn and Alfred Nutt. 'The Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of the Celts'. *The Folk-lore Record* 4 (1881).
[47] John K. Bollard. '*Hende Words*: The Theme of Courtesy in *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Neophilologus* 78

(1994, October) 666.

[48] In the romance *Sir Degaré*, the hero begins life as a socially marginalised individual whose abandonment by his mother and illegitimate birth force him to overcome his status and assimilate into chivalric society through a series of tests. It is only after he comes dangerously close to engaging in a sexual relationship with his unknown mother, that his true parentage is discovered and his status reconciled. See Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts, 1995).

[49] John Stevens. *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches*. (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973) 80.

[50] The issue of personal honour and Ywain's egoism directly contradicts his newly made bond to Alundyne. Ojars Kratins emphasises the extent to which the marriage in *Ywain and Gawain* is motivated not by emotion, but by common sense. He states that the author of *Ywain and Gawain* 'leaves the impression that, when Ywain agrees to protect her lands against Arthur and the Lady accepts him in marriage, she has concluded what is primarily a practical business matter'. 'Love and Marriage in Three Versions of "The Knight of the Lion."' *Comparative Literature* 16 (1964) 38. This has tremendous implications for Ywain's broken promise. It becomes not an issue of personal emotion, but a broken legal contract.

[51] The character of Gawain in this romance is represented as an individual whose knightly abilities contradict chivalric obligations and morals. His character is more like the Gawain of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* than with his characterisation as a courtly and moral knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*. It is this somewhat critical characterisation of Arthur and his court in the alliterative tradition that calls into question the true nature of the court as a place of integrity or one of inept hypocrisy. For discussion of the characterisation of Gawain in Middle English romance, see Clare R. Kinney, 'The (Dis) Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Claire A. Lees. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Mary Dove, 'Gawain and the Blasme Des Femmes Tradition'. *Medium Aevum* 41 (1972). Thomas Hahn, 'Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Dinah Hazell explores the condemnation of Arthurian society in *Sir Launfal* in her article 'The Blinding of Gwennere: Thomas Chestre as Social Critic'. *Arthurian Literature 20*. Ed. Keith Busby and Roger Darymple. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003).

[52] Ywain's marginalisation implies an insanity which is unquestionable and extreme. In *Landscapes of Fear*, Yi-Fu Tuan examines the definitions of madness and the reaction taken against it in the Middle Ages. He states that 'mad people are those whose minds wander. Without the control of rational minds, their behaviour is erratic, either harmlessly adrift or violent. From ancient Greek times to the late medieval period, madmen received...two basic kinds of treatment: the violent were chained in private houses and religious institutions; the harmless were lightly supervised and allowed to mingle with the populace. When the insane became too numerous and troublesome, they were ejected from the city and encouraged to drift through the countryside'. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979) 188.

[53] Penelope B. R. Doob. *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974) 54.

[54] Derek Pearsall explores the issue of insanity within the romance *Sir Orfeo*. He examines Heurodis as becoming 'other' and Orfeo's response as one of loss or mourning. See 'Madness in *Sir Orfeo*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. For further discussion on madness in *Sir Orfeo*, see A.C. Spearing 'Sir Orfeo: Madness and Gender'. *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, and Bart Veldhoen, 'Psychology and the Middle English Romances: Preliminaries to Readings of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo,* and *Sir Launfal*'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. (Amsterdam: V.U. University Press, 1990).

[55] Alfred Adler examines sovereignty in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*. In his article 'Sovereignty in Chrétien's *Yvain*', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 62 (1947, June) he argues that Laudine requires Yvain's sovereignty at the end of the romance. Adler focuses primarily on

the male protagonist, and ignores the sovereignty possessed by Laudine. I would argue that it is Laudine's sovereignty which enables both Yvain, and Ywain's social advancement.

[56] The connection between kingship and the feminine, often represented as the land, is a common motif in medieval Irish literature. Heurodis's relationship with her husband and his reaction to her abduction may be interpreted as an echo of the Celtic theme, whereby kingship cannot be possessed by a man without the proper mate. For further discussion, see Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, (Maynooth: Maynooth Monographs, 1990) and Manuel Aguirre, 'The Riddle of Sovereignty', *Modern Language Review* 88 (1993, April).

[57] Bart Veldhoen. 'Psychology and the Middle English Romances'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. 121.

[58] Corine J Saunders. *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) 3. Saunders also points out the liminal nature of the forest itself, as a place both wild and unknown, yet populated and cultivated. 4.

[59] In her article 'Human Animals of Medieval Fables', Joyce Salisbury examines the use of animals in these texts and the ways in which they mirror both the ideal and undesirable traits of humanity. The lion in its loyalty to Ywain, therefore demonstrates the quality Ywain must and does acquire. *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*. Ed. Nona C. Flores. (New York: Garland, 1996).

[60] In his article, 'Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Inhuman c. 1400', Jeffrey Jerome Cohen examines Gowther's resistance to familialism and the progression from the monstrous body, to the transitional body of the dog that becomes his identity. In *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. (New York: Garland, 2000). In the case of Ywain, the progression is similar, in which Ywain's lack of identity before meeting the lion, is as abject, or monstrous, as Gowther's physical body. It is only when both characters become the animal, either physically or through association, that personal evolution occurs. For further reading on *Sir Gowther*, see Joanne A. Charbonneau, 'From Devil to Saint: Transformations in *Sir Gowther*', and Michael Uebel, 'The Forest Within: The Subject of Abjection in *Sir Gowther*', *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Albrecht Classen. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

[61] While *Ywain and Gawain* cannot be classified as a penitential romance like *Sir Gowther* or *Sir Isumbrus*, it contains similarities to this class of romance. The hero's transgression, his subsequent realisation of his sin, and the penance he must undertake to undergo rebirth into the world, is inherent within *Ywain and Gawain*. However, the lack of the interference of a Christian influence precludes this romance from such classification. It is, however, interesting that it is a woman to whom restitution must be made, rather than a king or God. For an exploration of the penitential romances, see Andrea Hopkins' *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

[62] The penitential rejection of human society is also an issue in *Sir Gowther*. Gowther's penitence for his transgressions is to behave like a dog, without speaking and eating only the scraps from the table.

[63] Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1966) 41.

[64] Gayle Hamilton. 'The Breaking of Troth in *Ywain and Gawain*'. 131.

[65] Joseph Falaky Nagy points out the extraordinary abilities of liminal figures in his article 'Liminality and Knowledge in Irish Tradition'. He argues that 'because the liminal transcends normal distinctions between separate categories, it poses a threat to social and epistemological order; yet the liminal also serves as a bridge between society and areas of reality from which it is separated but about which it needs to know'. *Studia Celtica* 16-17 (1981-1982) 135-136.

[66] In *The Rites of Passage*, Arnold Van Gennep defines the liminal experience that accompanies rites of passage. He says 'a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition) and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)'. Ywain progresses through these three stages in his development, however the female protagonists remain permanently liminal, in a state of transition. 11.

Chapter 6: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

The centrality of women, both physically and symbolically, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is highly significant: women are the primary influence upon the male protagonist's action, yet do not exist solely for his benefit rather, they occupy the liminal space between social incorporation and supernatural 'otherness'. As a result, they provide the impetus for action within the romance through their abject liminal condition and ability to cross boundaries, displaying their incorporation into Arthurian society. However, the women are motivated not by the need for a hero, but by rivalries between each other. The result is an inversion of prescribed social designations, as the focus shifts from a central, male-dominated culture within the romance, to a world dominated by women: in this world, men become the tools through which women interact with each other. The assimilation of the feminine girdle into the chivalric, male community is the final symbolic incorporation of the feminine into Arthurian society and Gawain's misogynist discourse signifies a realisation of the central role of women that is implicit throughout the romance. As a result, Gawain's perceived weakness at the end of the narrative is not so much the chivalric failure of an idealised knight, but the acquisition of human identity and an awareness of female social integration and influence. The society to which he returns is unable to comprehend Gawain's disappointment or recognise his personal growth due to its isolation. This chapter will examine the ways in which women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exist as liminal individuals through their simultaneous social centrality and classification as female 'other'. The interaction between these women and the male protagonist will also be explored, with particular emphasis on the inversion of gender-specific notions of space.

Heroes and Otherworlds

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight shares similar traits with the other romances in this study however it is different from the typical Middle English Arthurian romance in certain specific ways the most obvious is the hero's implied failure and despondency at the end of the romance. This 'failure' exists in relation to the primary unconventional and atypical feature of this text, the central position of the otherworld of Hautdesert within the romance. Gawain only fails if he is measured against the impossible ideals which he represents within Arthurian society. It is only when the otherworlds become central and Arthur's society is shown as peripheral, that Gawain proves himself to be human and not an ideal. It is this shift that makes *Sir Gawain* atypical; usually, Arthurian romance heroes prove by the end of the romance that they belong to Camelot, the 'central' civilisation. Gawain also proves that he belongs to a central, human civilisation; however, that civilisation is not the chivalric, male-dominated society of Camelot, but the otherworldly Hautdesert. The difference is that Gawain rejects the central society and returns to what has become 'other' based on its super-human idealisations and expectations. His 'failure' is not so much his human weakness, but his inability to recognise the weaknesses of Arthurian society. The existence of women as dominant agents of power as well as the motivational significance of Guenevere will also be examined in this chapter. Guenevere's position as an individual who is able to inspire events occurs as a result of her relationship with Morgan and it is her mis-judged strength that inspires the quest itself.

Otherworlds may be natural, like the forest in which Lybeaus Desconus is raised, or supernatural like Lady Tryamour's tent in *Sir Launfal* but, regardless of how they may be defined, otherworlds are crucial elements within Middle English Romance.[1] Otherworlds are places that encourage growth and maturity in the male protagonist, or realms entered out of social necessity. Dorothy Yamamoto's study of boundaries in Medieval literature addresses the issue of the 'wild man' and she argues that the wilderness in which this individual exists is both isolated, yet not totally removed, from society's consciousness. She states that:

> The forest's proximity—both literal and metaphorical—and its implication in many different areas of human activity, is reflected in the lives of those who inhabit it. The wild men of the romances are not generally to be found in remote or isolated places—instead, their ground is typically criss-crossed by the trackways of encroaching civilisation and consequently generates many personal encounters.[2]

Here, the forest is a natural otherworld which incorporates elements of society and the transgression of such boundaries provides the impetus within narratives. Therefore, these natural otherworlds, or wildernesses, become liminal spaces which are simultaneously 'real', yet unknown, transgressable yet socially threatening. However, the wilderness may be connected to supernatural otherworlds: in *Sir Orfeo*, the natural otherworld of the forest is the realm into which the male protagonist proceeds following his wife's abduction.[3] When Sir Orfeo enters the fairy realm, he crosses the threshold between two types of otherworlds; the realms of natural and supernatural wilderness. Orfeo's existence in the first, like Ywain, signifies his personal state of mind. Commenting on *Sir Orfeo* in 'Psychology and the Middle English Romances', Bart Veldhoen argues that:

> The course of action is dictated by the connection shown in Orfeo between love and government, which are linked together in the ideal of harmony that Orfeo represents. By losing his wife he has lost his self, and therefore his people have lost him too. The wilderness into which he goes is his own psychological state of loss and vulnerability.[4]

Once he crosses into the fairy realm he witnesses the grotesque inversion of society that defies humanity in its trivialisation of life and death. Orfeo is met by a monstrous scene in which human suffering in its many manifestations, is preserved in a gallery of misery and Orfeo sees his wife amongst other abductees, all of whom are frozen in the state of physical and mental agony. This gruesome sight is juxtaposed with the opulence and beauty of the king's hall and the courtly pursuits in which they engage[5] and the restoration of Heurodis signifies Orfeo's defeat of this supernatural otherworld and his reinstatement into a society that is properly defined. Otherworlds are the realms in which the hero undergoes change that will eventually result in his integration or re-integration into society: they are rarely places of permanent occupation (*Sir Launfal* of course being the obvious exception.[6]) Above all, they promote the centrality of chivalric, male-dominated society through their occupation of liminal and sometimes marginal space. Rider argues that otherworlds:

> valorise the ideals of the central aristocratic world; they permit the representation and imaginative satisfaction of its materially or morally unrealizable desires; they conform and elaborate its identity through representations of what it is not. And their peculiar complexity comes from their ability to do all of these things simultaneously.[7]

The question, then, becomes, how to examine a romance in which otherworlds occupy the central space and male-dominated society is pushed to the periphery? In *Sir Gawain*, the otherworld is both a wilderness and a supernatural realm, a real

space in which daily occupations are present, yet also a realm of active female magic.[8] This otherworld provides the central focus for the narrative as soon as the Green Knight enters Arthur's hall and the challenge is accepted. Gawain's journey into this otherworld is, in fact, a journey into the 'real world' and it is this discovery at the end of the romance that is so difficult for Gawain to accept. The natural wilderness Gawain enters at the beginning of his quest implies both his own liminal occupation of space and alludes to the 'wild man' motif.[9] Before Gawain encounters the society of Bertilak's castle, he must first undergo a period of solitude in the wilderness. Gawain's wilderness is both a geographical reality and a state of mind as Gawain psychologically becomes 'other;' like the traditional wild man, he passes between realms that are inverted versions of traditional social conventions. When Gawain eventually arrives at Bertilak's castle, his own otherness is fully realised: like Ywain, Gawain's period in the wilderness plays a significant role in his acquisition of identity [10]. However, the identity earned by Gawain is one that results in psychological marginalisation from Arthurian society as he becomes a human, imperfect individual with the capacity for sin, rather than a chivalric ideal.[11]

An anomaly within *Sir Gawain* is the lack of detail concerning the hero's encounters with otherworldly creatures and ferocious animals while in the wilderness. [12] While mention is made of Gawain's battles with dragons, ogres and wolves, far more emphasis is placed upon his psychological state and difficulty in tolerating the elements.[13] This highlights the significance of Gawain's human identity even before it has been established. Rather than focusing on his ability to triumph in combat, an aspect that typically promotes the heroic characterisation of

the knight, the poet concentrates on Gawain's humanity; his despondency, his physical coldness, and his faith in God. Because in this romance Arthurian society represents an ideal, emphasis is not placed on the values of that society, but upon the reality of Gawain's humanity.[14] Unlike Ywain and Lybeaus, Gawain's quest results in his own otherness within the society he left behind. The 'otherness' of Gawain's identity enforces the centrality of the otherworlds responsible for that identity; in traditional quest romances, the culmination of the hero's journey is social integration and inclusion into the central society within the romance and this pattern is also evident in *Sir Gawain*. If we are to accept the central placement of otherworlds within this romance, then Gawain succeeds in cultural assimilation. By proving his capability for imperfection in the beheading challenge at the Green Chapel, Gawain also proves his humanity and therefore his right to be incorporated into Morgan's and Bertilak's society. The blood which associates Gawain with Arthur more importantly, links him with Morgan, the true central sovereign figure. Bertilak displays this relationship at the end of the romance, saying:

> þat is ho þat is at home, þe auncian lady;
> Ho is euen þyn aunt, Arþurez half-suster,
> þe duches doȝter of Tyntagelle, þat dere Vter after
> Hade Arþur vpon, þat aþel is nowþe.(2463-2466)

Gawain's failure to acknowledge this relationship is evident in his refusal to accept the invitation to return to Hautdesert. Bertilak asks him:

> "to com to þyn aunt,
> Make myry in my hous; my meny þe louies,
> And I wol þe as wel, wyȝ, bi my faythe,
> As any gome vnder God, for þy grete trauþe."(2467-2470)[15]

but rather than accepting this invitation, Gawain returns to the true otherworld that is Arthur's realm.

As soon as Gawain leaves Arthurian society, he enters into a landscape that is identifiable in 'real' terms. R.W.V. Elliott examines the topography of the West Midlands and its relationship to the wilderness described in *Sir Gawain*. Elliott discusses the parallels that exist between the poet's description of the landscape and geographical features of the West Midlands.[16] By placing Gawain within an identifiable geographical area, the quest gains an amount of realism. Harvey De Roo states that Hautdesert 'represents medieval aristocratic life more fully than Camelot did. Whereas all we saw in Camelot was partying, here are the three major social rituals of the knight: hunting, feasting and "luf-talking." And here is the moral experience of the knight in real life: ambiguity, deception, the hard choice'.[17] As a result a dichotomy is established between the geographically identifiable 'otherworld' and the mythical region of Camelot. The centrality of this otherworld within the romance is supported by the fact that it is real. Camelot, on the other hand, maintains its mythical identity through both its unrealistic ideals and lack of identifiable spatial occupation. The areas surrounding Camelot are mentioned as Gawain travels through them, implying the placement of Camelot as somewhere on the west coast. Mention is made of north Wales, the isles of Angelsey, Holy Head and Wirral however, Camelot is placed in or near the realm of Logres, a name referring to England in its entirety.[18] Camelot's placement is therefore, definably British, enforcing its national identity, but yet unidentifiable enough to maintain its sense of mystery and idealisation. However, by becoming the central and plausible territory within the romance, Hautdesert enforces its

correlation with human reality rather than with heroic idealism and Gawain learns what it is to be human in a realm that is potentially more identifiable in terms of its geography and values, than the legendary idealised court from which he originates.

The associations between women and otherworlds are common within Middle English romance. Previous chapters have explored the extent to which otherworlds facilitate female liminal identity and highlight their positions on thresholds, rather than in margins. In romances in which women are defined as human, their otherworldly occupation usually indicates the external imposition of magic or sorcery in relation to their bodies. In *Lybeaus Desconus*, the Lady of Sinadoun exists in a space which confines her physically and a body which has been altered by magic.[19] In this same romance, the lady Violette is physically and sexually threatened by the supernatural giant. Likewise, in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, the physical depiction of Dame Ragnell's body is dictated by sorcery imposed by her stepmother. The motif of the 'noon-day demon' which is present in *Sir Orfeo, Sir Gowther* and *Sir Degaré*, also connects female sexuality and the body to otherworldly violation.[20] John Block Friedman examines the traditions associated with this motif and he argues that 'the author of *Sir Orfeo* had good precedent for putting Heurodis into the hands of a fairy abductor. The king of the otherworld, both in his satanic and in his fairy aspect, was traditionally a creature with a penchant for fair women'.[21] In these romances, the female body is threatened by supernatural intervention. However, in romances where women permanently exist in an otherworldly realm, they are able to employ magic themselves. Because they occupy realms in which traditional social structures and values are absent, these women become 'other'; they are not simply socialised

women temporarily confined within or influenced by otherworlds, they represent those worlds. The relationship between women and magic in Malory's *Works* has been examined by Geraldine Heng who argues that:

> While only one man, Merlin, is decisively associated with the practice of sorcery, the reference of magic to women is almost casual, reflexive; even nameless figures who make the briefest appearances may possess magical objects and spells, and work enchantment: it is a language depicted by the test as being ubiquitously familiar to women.[22]

In the romance *Sir Launfal*, the fairy lover, Lady Tryamour, is both defined by her supernatural identity and simultaneously defines the world to which she belongs. Tryamour's tent is a place much like herself; opulent, elegant, sexual and, above all, magical.[23] Launfal's transgression against his lady results in the absence of the 'other' while concurrently threatening his existence within human society. The otherworld, represented by Tryamour, may enable Launfal's social re-integration, but it is dangerous. The message is clear: Launfal cannot be an otherworldly individual within society. That he chooses to leave society in favour of Tryamour emphasises that very weakness that brought them together: Launfal's largesse is indicative of his inability to be assimilated into a society that is based on wealth and hierarchies, as it is his over-generosity that causes his initial marginalisation. By choosing a life in which social concerns, such as money and feudal loyalties, are superfluous, Launfal acknowledges his own knightly limitations and rejects them. Tryamour's domination of the male protagonist emphasises the opposition between society and the otherworld that she represents. Because Launfal chooses loyalty to the female agent as opposed to Arthur, he denies the gender hierarchy of feudal society. However, in *Sir Gawain*, a shift occurs which places the female-dominated otherworlds at the centre of the

romance. As a result, the ways in which the female characters achieve liminality may be defined, not so much by the placement of the women, but by the placement of the worlds that they represent.

Gawain's quest is, like Lybeaus' and Ywain's, one that defines his identity; however, unlike the typical hero, Gawain's quest does not result in the confirmation of his chivalric and heroic abilities and values. His quest provides him with two very distinct messages: the first, that he is human and subject to human weakness; the second, that as a man he must accept the influence, both sexual and political, that women possess. Arlyn Diamond points out that women,

> were members of a class as well as gender, second-class citizens but not, therefore marginal in medieval social and economic relations. History informs us that they were not always mere passive objects of exchange in the arrangements by which wealth and power were accumulated, maintained and distributed. Nor were they just representations in masculine texts, shadows in the masculine psyche.[24]

Like Lybeaus, Gawain's quest involves an educational aspect.[25] However, unlike in *Lybeaus Desconus*, where Arthur's court represents maturity and identity, in *Sir Gawain*, the court is the cradle which Gawain must leave in order to gain maturity and human identity, as opposed to an idealised sense of self. The immaturity of Arthur's court is implied through the childish nature of Arthur himself and the Green Knight's accusation that 'Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdleȝ chylder'.(280)[26] This immaturity is confirmed at the end of the poem with the court's inability to comprehend the significance of the girdle. The girdle itself represents this feminised otherworldly space.[27] By keeping it as a token of his capacity for sin, Gawain recognises both his own humanity and the inevitability of

female influence. The Virgin Mary on Gawain's shield is replaced by an object whose symbolism is directly connected to female sovereignty. However, because they lack experience and exist within the safe confines of Camelot, the knights are unable to recognise the true significance of the girdle. By assimilating the girdle as a symbol of male chivalric heroism into their dress, they inadvertently maintain the inversion of gender prescriptions that was initiated by Morgan. The girdle's true symbolism as an object of female sexuality and sovereignty is, ironically, preserved by those who fail to see it as such.

When Gawain volunteers to accept the Green Knight's challenge, he enters into the first phase of personal growth. Clare Kinney examines the ways in which constructions of masculinity appear within *Sir Gawain*. She points out the Green Knight's overt physical masculinity which appeals to the traditional criteria of 'maleness'.[28] The intrusion of the challenger is a motif that is common in Middle English Arthurian romance and usually constitutes a challenge for one of Arthur's knights. What is unusual in *Sir Gawain* is both the reluctance of the knights to take up the challenge and the gender of the challenger. Often, when a challenge is initiated by a male character, it takes place outside the court and society. In *The Weddyng*, Arthur is approached by Sir Gromer Somer Joure while out hunting in Inglewood forest. Similarly, in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, Sir Galeron's challenge is made in the temporary dwelling of the hunting party at Rondolesette Halle.[29] While knights are often faced with martial contests, the majority are proposed outside social boundaries. However, challenges made within the confines of society and community are often proposed by women. Both Elene and Lunet voice their challenges within the court. In *Sir Launfal*, Tryamour herself challenges the court

simply through her presence. In these romances, the public female voice provides the challenge that leads to rehabilitation. In *Sir Gawain*, the Green Knight's masculinity is unquestionable and his physicality denotes his strength and maturity; however, he provides a link between Morgan and Guenevere. The response to the challenge proposed by the Green Knight is unconventional, as no one volunteers and it is left to Arthur to defend the Round Table's reputation. Arthur says "'Gif me now þy geserne, upon Godeȝ halue,/ And I schal bayþen þy bone þou boden habbes.'"(326-27) [30]

The appearance of Bertilak's castle occurs when Gawain starts to become despondent. The castle indicates the presence of a society far removed from Arthur's court, but a society nonetheless.[31] The castle is described as:

> A castel þe comlokest þat euer knyȝt aȝte,
> Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,
> With a pyked palays pyned ful þik,
> þat vmbeteȝ mony tre mo þen two myle. (767-770)

When Gawain enters the castle, he enters the place that will provide the means for his development. However, while the women in *Sir Gawain* all aid Gawain in his maturation, it is not their objective or purpose. Gawain's presence at the castle indicates Morgan's failure and Guenevere's victory: if Morgan had succeeded in her plan, Guenevere would have died of fright upon witnessing the Green Knight's decapitated, speaking head. Douglas M. Moon constructs an interesting argument that because Guenevere was not unreasonably frightened by the Green Knight 'we are forced to conclude that Morgan intended the Green Knight to have some special significance for Guenevere and for Guenevere alone'. [32] Moon argues that the

purpose is to test Guenevere's chastity.[33] This interpretation acknowledges women as the focus of the romance; however, I am not concerned with the reasons for this interaction, but rather what this opposition suggests for the narrative as a whole. The enmity between these women lies at the centre of the narrative and provides the incentive for narrative action. When Gawain arrives at Hautdesert, social constructions of gender become inverted. In this space dominated by women, but yet socially central, Gawain becomes a marginal individual as he struggles to maintain those ideals which define him in Arthurian society. In this space, this society outside Arthurian idealism, emphasis shifts to a place dominated by women. The concept of feminised space begins to develop from the point at which Gawain enters the castle. Susan Murray argues that:

> First, the castle can be said to be a metaphor for the feminine with all the mysterious enclosed spaces implied by both women and castles. Second, since the presence of a woman, and eventually an heir, is requisite in the lord's establishment of the stable home/demesne, the castle may be considered representative of domestic and social codes that are the foundation of a stable social entity.[34]

The application of Murray's assertion to *Sir Gawain* helps to clarify the liminal nature of both Morgan and Lady Bertilak, the two women who inhabit the castle. The presence of women within the feminised space of the castle implies the preservation of the gender-hierarchy and structure of traditional chivalric society.[35] However, the fact that these women maintain sovereignty within this society simultaneously identifies them as other and as a result, Morgan and Lady Bertilak exist on the threshold between socially acceptable, domestic female, and otherworldly autonomous woman.

Liminal Women and Otherworlds

In 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*, Sheila Fisher argues that:

> If men could redefine and thereby control experience for other men, as Bertilak does for Gawain, and, indeed, as the poet does for his audience, then Morgan's power would be diffused. But the poem and its poet know better, because they know the story of Arthur and because women, in the legend and in life, cannot be effectively marginalised...If women were legally and politically marginalized within feudal society, they were nonetheless central, biologically, economically, *and* politically, to its continuation.[36]

Fisher recognises the power of women as an implicit component within the narrative; however, she argues that they are placed within the narrative margins because of the threat they pose to men. While this theory is interesting, it maintains an approach to the text that is male-centred. I would argue that by approaching these female characters as individuals who straddle social and physical boundaries, a shift occurs whereby the demarcation of the social centre changes to accommodate this different classification of women within the romance. By acknowledging the liminal qualities of these female characters, the space that they occupy becomes central rather than peripheral. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* there are three women around whom the actions of the male-dominated world rotate: Guenevere, Lady Bertilak and Morgan le Faye. This section will examine each of these women and explore how they achieve centrality through their liminal identity. I will also examine the Virgin Mary and her existence as an ideal whose liminal identity differs from the human women within the romance.

Morgan le Faye

Felicity Riddy comments on the juxtaposition of the old and disguised Morgan and the young and beautiful Lady Bertilak, arguing that the sexualised presentation of these two female bodies serves to emphasise Gawain's sexual desire. She says that this 'gives us a momentary glimpse of male heterosexual desire, of the directly physical response that Gawain seeks to efface and transcend with his courtesy'.[37] I would argue that this dichotomy alludes to the sovereignty possessed by these women and that Gawain's reaction to their physicality emphasises his ignorance of their authority. A juxtaposition of this nature also occurs with Guenevere and her mother in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* which emphasises human mortality and the impermanence of life. In *Sir Gawain*, however, the contrast between the two women signifies the inevitability of age and time, but it also introduces the loathly lady motif into the romance along with its associations with female sovereignty. It is Lady Bertilak's sovereignty over Gawain in the bedroom that leads to his sexual awakening, and Morgan's sovereignty through her magic abilities and liminal identity, which place women at the centre of the romance.

Morgan le Faye exists as the most significant and liminal figure within the romance. She exists on the threshold between civilisation and wilderness, simultaneously acting within both realms. While her presence within the romance remains unknown until the end, she is the reason for the narrative's action in the first place. As Arthur's kin, she is linked by blood to his society, yet she challenges Arthurian society and values. Fisher points out that Morgan 'is always simultaneously lurking at the fringes and inescapably at dead centre, related to

Arthur and to Gawain, just as her influence is at the narrative centre of the romance'.[38] Morgan, situated within the otherworld of Hautdesert, creates that otherness through her simultaneous feminine identity and authority. By initiating the action within the narrative, Morgan becomes a central figure; however, by directing her actions at another woman, she facilitates the centrality of the feminine otherworld. As has been discussed, the traditional association of otherworlds with women is common in Middle English romance. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* the relegation of the typically central, male-dominated Arthurian realm to the margins is unique and occurs as a result of Morgan's liminal identity and ability to infiltrate both realms at once.

Morgan's placement in the otherworld of Hautdesert is examined by Michael Twomey, who explores her sovereignty in the otherworld, or wilderness. He argues that Morgan's sovereignty extends to encompass both Bertilak and Gawain. He states that Gawain:

> May wear the green girdle and the nick on the neck on his body, but he carries Morgan in his body, in his blood. Whereas earlier Gawain believed that his worth came from the blood of his uncle Arthur, now he learns that the same blood is Morgan's. Although this final revelation is surely the greatest surprise for Gawain, because it brings the foreign, female, magical Morgan from a wilderness castle called Hautdesert to lodge within Gawain himself, Bertilak has at the same time admitted something equally momentous about himself: that just as Morgan resides in Gawain's blood, she also resides in Bertilak's feudal identity.[39]

Morgan's otherworldly, magic nature also serves to place her in a liminal position. She is described by Lord Bertilak as 'Morgne þe goddes' (2451) and her name 'Morgan le Faye' identifies her as fairy, or supernatural. Morgan exists as both a natural and supernatural woman in the otherworld, occupying spaces associated

with nature, culture and magic simultaneously. As kin to Arthur, Morgan is human and while she resides outside Arthurian society, she may still be considered a part of it through her blood.[40] In the otherworld of Hautdesert, Morgan is simultaneously the older matron and the sovereign of the house, a liminal position that is achieved through her royal blood and her own supernatural autonomy.

Guenevere

In the beginning of the romance, the placement of the queen at the Christmas feast anticipates her importance within the romance itself. Guenevere's position at the centre of the festivities where she may be seen and admired by all contrasts sharply with the description of Arthur as 'sumquat childgered'(86). However it is not until the end of the romance that Guenevere's pivotal role is exposed. She exists as a liminal figure, whose passive and silent appearance is combined with a simultaneous influence over society in her place in the position of honour at the table. The description of the queen not only places her in a position of reverence, it also serves to emphasise her sovereignty. In Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, Guenevere also appears as the central focus of the court: in this tale, Guenevere's judicial authority over the rapist knight suggests the correct answer to the question 'what do women most desire'. The appearance of the 'other' at court, in both narratives, precipitates a gender struggle and Guenevere's presence in both provides an unseen yet crucial indication of the significance of women.[41]

Guenevere's lack of discourse is, in itself, significant. In *Sir Gawain*, women's speech occurs only outside Arthur's jurisdiction. In a romance where

speech, particularly female speech, is associated with domination and power and is itself a source of influence, the Queen's silence would appear to indicate her marginalisation. Fisher argues that 'not moving or speaking, Guenevere here is marginalised to such an extent that she is buried in the poem'.[42] However, Guenevere's existence within Arthur's society provides the reason for interaction between the female characters, and therefore, the narrative itself. Gawain becomes as much a messenger from Morgan to Guenevere as the Green Knight had been the previous year. Bearing the same colour green, Gawain returns to Arthur's court as the instrument of Morgan's influence through the Green Girdle, the symbol of the feminine and of humanity. That Guenevere does not comply with the traditional expectations of the 'frightened woman', indicates a subversive quality within the queen's character and demonstrates a mutual awareness between herself and Morgan. Marina Warner discusses how silence is used in folk-tales and literature by women as the only option available to assert and prove themselves. She says that 'women's capacity for love and action tragically exceeded the permitted boundaries of their lives—this self-immolatory heroism was one of the few chivalrous enterprises open to them'.[43] While I agree with Warner that silence is used by women to assert themselves, I do not believe that it is the *only* option. Guenevere's silence throughout the beheading ordeal emphasises this ability to remain unmoved in the face of adversity. Because Guenevere appears in a situation which tests her sovereign position, reaction, either verbal or physical, would expose weakness. As a result, silence preserves female sovereignty. To relegate Guenevere to the margins, viewing her as little more than one of Arthur's possessions, is to ignore the objective and inspiration for the test itself. Guenevere's existence within

Arthurian society provides the means through which the test may occur and Sir Gawain, the representative of this masculine society, may be educated.[44]

The Virgin Mary

The Virgin Mary's presence is made clear in the arming episode. Gawain's rich and opulent armour signifies the characterisation and reputation of the knight to whom it belongs. Gawain's reputation as both the paragon of chivalry and a knight famed for his associations with women, is implied through the imagery present on his armour. The pentangle symbolises his troth and the five knightly virtues of fraunchyse, felaȝschyp, clannes, cortayse and pité, while the periwinkles, turtledoves and truelove flowers embroidered on the silk beneath his armour signify his association with love and women. [45] The depiction of the Virgin Mary found on the inside of Gawain's shield implies Gawain's sexual 'purity' or inexperience and it is this image to which he turns when he needs strength. Both Phillipa Hardman and Eileen Power have recognised the parallels between the Virgin Mary and the courtly lady. Power contends that 'the cult of the lady was the romantic counterpart of the cult of the Virgin'.[46] However, Hardman asserts that:

> The connection between Gawain's looking at the image of the Queen of Heaven and his unfailing valour is more than a boost to his morale such as a knight might gain from glancing at a picture of his lady before going into battle. The word 'belde' has a range of associated meanings: "courage," "power," "aid," "support," "help," "comfort," "defence," "protection," which suggests a more active role for the image of the Virgin in relation to her knight. It recalls the promises frequently attached to Marian devotions, assuring the faithful of her help, especially at the hour of her death, a number of which stipulate that the devotion is to be practised while looking at an image of the Blessed Virgin.[47]

For Gawain to be 'Mary's knight', he must therefore subscribe to the ideals she represents, specifically chastity, or 'clannes'. As both virgin and mother Mary embodied an ideal of womanhood impossible to emulate. In her examination of the cult of the Virgin Mary, Marina Warner suggests,

> that the Mother of God should be a virgin was a matter of such importance to the men of the early Church that it overrode all other considerations, including the evidence of revelation itself...Sexuality represented to them the gravest danger and the fatal flaw; they viewed virginity as its opposite and its conqueror, sadly failing to appreciate that renunciation does not banish or overcome desire.[48]

The Virgin Mary plays a significant role within the romance and, like Gawain, exists as an ideal. While her idealisation is divine, Gawain is himself human and therefore subject to sin. As a result, the subsequent maturation of the hero and the acquisition of human identity, specifically through his experiences with Lady Bertilak later in the romance, undermine this relationship. Gawain can no longer exist as 'Mary's Knight' once he has engaged on an adult level with a human woman, that is, once he himself is no longer an ideal, but a sexually awakened man. Mary, like the other three women in the romance, may be regarded as a liminal figure. Her sovereignty as Gawain's first lady and as Queen of Heaven establishes her position between the transcendental and the tangible world. Her power over Gawain is evident through his prayers. Gawain prays:

> "I beseche þe, lorde,
> And Mary, þat us myldest moder so dere,
> Of sum herber þer heȝly I myȝt here masse
> And þy matyneȝs to-morne, mekely I ask,
> And þerto prestly I pray my pater and aue
> and crede." (753-758)

Mary straddles the border between supernatural and natural identities: she is the mother of God who exists in heaven, yet is also a part of the natural world as she was once an earthly woman and it is Mary's humanity that promotes her religious significance. Christ's own humanity, which is attained through his mother, is related to his redemptive power. However, her position as an ideal is indisputable and inflexible. Paradoxically, Mary functions as a representation of the impossibility of human perfection. Her holiness is defined based on exceptional divine intervention which enables her to achieve what is humanly impossible; to be both mother and virgin. Mary is never physically present within the romance. The only tangible manifestation of her presence is in the painting on the inside of Gawain's shield and it is this icon to which Gawain directs his attentions and that which inspires his actions. Because the painting represents an image, the ideals associated with that image provide inspiration to Gawain as a symbol, rather than as an individual. Therefore, the Virgin's influence exists only as long as he is able to subscribe to those ideals.

Lady Bertilak

To appreciate the extent to which Lady Bertilak is central within the narrative, the ways in which she exists as a liminal character must be defined. Perhaps the most significant aspect of her liminal identity is her use of physical and spoken language. Where the presence of the overtly sexual female body is, in Middle English romance, often linked to base and sordid notions of sexuality[49] and is therefore categorised as 'other', in *Sir Gawain*, female sexuality exists within the confines of the feminised 'space' of the bedchamber and is utilised by a woman of

nobility.[50] The dominance displayed by Lady Bertilak in the bedroom emphasises her ability to exist between gender boundaries. On the one hand, she conforms to the typical romance heroine through her beauty, nobility and ability to engage in 'luf-talking'.[51] On the other hand, she is sexually voracious, articulate, and above all, dominant. While Lady Bertilak appears to be the traditional feudal wife, she is, in fact, a significant part of the feminised otherworld. In the bedroom, Lady Bertilak becomes the fairy lover when she metaphorically 'arouses' Gawain from his sleep.[52] Here, another inversion of convention takes place, as the motif of the 'noon-day demon' is invoked. The otherworldly identity of Lady Bertilak, combined with her blatant sexuality, promotes this image. In the traditional 'noon-day demon' romance, the heroine's abduction or violation occurs when she occupies a space that is foreign: this mysterious space can be a forest or even a garden, but is always outside, beyond the feminised space of domestic interiors. In *Sir Gawain*, the bedroom provides the foreign setting for Gawain. Rather than facing an opponent in the familiar realms of traditional otherworlds such as forests, swamps and fields, in which male activity commonly takes place, Gawain's encounter takes place within this traditionally feminine location and the surprise and apprehension he feels when confronted by Lady Bertilak, stems from confusion and disbelief. Heng states that:

> By posing as the active, desiring subject, and positioning Gawain in the role of quarry—the wriggling object of her desire—the lady tips over both terms, to stage a startling, if humorous disruption of that sexual vocabulary with its organising hierarchies and prescriptions. Of necessity, the procedure interrogates Gawain's belief in the possibility of a closed or completed masculine, chivalric identity; an assumption grounded in false confidence, as he sets forth from Arthur's court, in the talismanic efficacy of the images of pentangle and Blessed Virgin to bestow some secure identifications.[53]

Like Lady Tryamour in *Sir Launfal*, Lady Bertilak is able to maintain sovereignty over the knight however, this is determined, not by Gawain's desire for wealth and social integration, but by his desire to maintain an unrealistic ideal. Cathalin Buhrmann Folks argues that when Gawain enters Bertilak's castle, his heroic expectations of the quest are far removed from the reality he faces: she contends that Lady Bertilak's manipulation of the knight results in the exposition of his comic humanity, even before his acceptance of the girdle.[54] Because Gawain's humanity transgresses the borders between the Arthurian realm and otherworlds, his self-perception as a chivalric ideal exists only as a construction of the society in which it is promoted and as a result, Gawain becomes 'other' as the world of Hautdesert becomes centralised within the romance.

Lady Bertilak and Gawain engage in courtly discourse which emphasises their physical sexuality through the liminal orifice of the mouth. Language becomes the bond through which intimacy is attained and the kisses exchanged in the bedroom act as an amalgamation of those sexualised orifices; as a result, Gawain undergoes sexual awakening. Lady Bertilak's discourse is significant because language is the medium through which action is undertaken: her female voice, combined with the social expectations of her sex, not to be the wooer, but the wooed, places her between idealised female and masculine pursuer.[55] Monica Brzezinski Potkay remarks that 'the Lady in these scenes reverses the gender roles of the ordinary courtly scenario: she employs the rhetoric usually used by the male lover as she addresses the Gawain who occupies a feminine position. The Lady aggressively woos, Gawain gingerly resists'.[56] Catherine LaFarge's study of the huntress in

Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* is enlightening with regard to gender roles and prescriptions. She states that:

> The huntress combines the features of feminine and masculine in an alarming fashion. Eschewing the company of men, she has the arms and proficiency of a man supported by men's exclusive corporate fellowship transposed to members of her own sex...Lancelot, meanwhile, has been feminised. Like Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, he has been caught off-guard, snoozing in an arena outside his field of competence.[57]

Here, the dichotomy between male and female is contrasted with social, gendered expectations. Lady Bertilak's voice proposes the final challenge Gawain must face, with regard to the Green Girdle. Colleen Donnelly argues that Lady Bertilak's discourse provides Gawain with important advice. She states that Lady Bertilak,

> acts as a teacher as well as a tester, reminding him that it is unwise to drop your guard in a strange place. If Gawain had recognised that this is the best advice he has been offered so far, rather than dismissing her words as simple jest, he may have saved himself a good deal of grief.[58]

Indeed, it is Gawain's failure to realise the significance of women and female discourse that results in his final disillusionment. Language itself becomes significant from the moment Gawain enters Bertilak's castle. In this feminised domain, speech denotes power. In Arthur's court, emphasis is placed upon the action that unfolds before and after the Green Knight's arrival. However, in Bertilak's castle, language is the means through which action is established. The oath that Gawain makes to the Green Knight at the beginning of the narrative not only tests his troth, but also uses language to motivate subsequent action.

Gawain's participation in the exchange of winnings pact not only establishes the dichotomy between masculine and feminine space, but also places him in a position of subservience, as he remains in the feminine domain of the bedroom. The parallels between the hunt and the pursuit of Gawain by Lady Bertilak have been much explored.[59] What is significant is the attribution of gender to space; here, the boundaries are not inverted, but preserved. Instead of the 'otherworld' existing as a physical inversion of social prescriptions, as in *Sir Orfeo*, or containing obvious implications of magic, as in *Sir Launfal*, the realm of Bertilak's castle appears as a functional society, in which men hunt, women stay indoors and Mass is attended. The result is the perception of a society in which life conforms to normal, feudal ideals, but which is, in fact, dominated by women. The dominant female influence is subtle, yet present, and it is only at the end that it is fully realised.

Gawain's final encounter with the Green Knight is, to Gawain, the culmination and purpose of his quest: to him, it is the reason why he left the security and contentment of Arthur's court, braving the elements and facing foreign territories. If we are to agree with Gawain's classification of his quest, then his inability to live up to the chivalric ideals promoted by his society is his failure. The life-preserving girdle becomes the token of his infidelity and weakness and demonizes the women who 'led him astray'. However, to read the narrative in this way is to see it through the eyes of an idealised construction of chivalric masculinity. This chapter has examined how women within *Sir Gawain* are themselves the basis for the construction of the narrative: by recognising the centrality of women within this romance, a shift occurs whereby designated

'otherworlds' become the nucleus around which action is based. The significance of Gawain's experience, his perceived failure, may therefore be seen in a positive light. Claire Kinney remarks that,

> The poem that contains Gawain can also envision a knight-hero who, rather than constructing an exclusive and alienating ideal of chivalric manhood, might re-imagine himself in terms of a fallible—if nevertheless admirable—humanity that admits common ground with the Other (whether that other is female or a male who does not belong to the community of Camelot)[60]

Gawain's realisation of his own humanity coincides with the recognition of women, both as sexual individuals and as agents of authority. The girdle, a female garment, not only symbolises Gawain's enlightenment, but infiltrates male-dominated culture, breaking a small, but significant gender prescription. Gawain's despondency arises from the maturity he has gained: like Lybeaus, Gareth, Perceval and Ywain, Gawain's quest has been one of self-exploration and eventual enlightenment. However, rather than enabling inclusion, Gawain's maturity psychologically isolates him from the community to which he returns. The anti-feminist tirade[61] may be unkind and unjust, but it emphasises the fact that Gawain is now aware that women *can* have significant influence upon society. By blaming women, Gawain proves without a doubt that he is human, as the tirade contravenes courtly codes of conduct and emphasises his transgressions: like Adam, Gawain blames a woman for his own human weakness. More significantly, however, Gawain's rant displays an acknowledgment of women as individuals rather than bodies. Rather than recognising only their physicality, as he had on his first meeting with the two women, Gawain is able to credit them with a capacity for action, involvement and even sovereignty. He has been taught that femininity has more faces, more voices, than the silent queens of Camelot and Heaven.

[1] Otherworldly realms within medieval romance have been explored by critics. Corine J. Saunders examines the romance landscape, looking at the function of the forest within the narratives in *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993). Jeff Rider explores the ways in which otherworlds exist and are defined within romance. 'The Other Worlds of Romance'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance: From Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000). Anne Wilson, *The Magical Quest: The Use of Magic in Arthurian Romance*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988). J.E. Stevens, *Medieval Romance*. (London: Hutchinson University Press, 1973). Claude Luttrell, 'The Arthurian Hunt with a White Bratchet'. *Arthurian Literature IX*. Ed. Richard Barber. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989). Geraldine Heng, 'Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory'. *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*. Ed. Keith Busby. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1990). Helen Cooper, 'Magic That Does Not Work'. *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976).

[2] Dorothy Yamamoto. *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 152.

[3] In Derek Pearsall's discussion of *Sir Orfeo*, he examines Orfeo as an individual who displays signs of psychological instability. See 'Madness in *Sir Orfeo*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presenented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996).

[4] Bart Veldhoen. 'Psychology and the Middle English Romances: Preliminaries to Readings of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo*, and *Sir Launfal*'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. (Amsterdam: V.U. Univeristy Press, 1990) 120-21.

[5] *Sir Orfeo*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001) Lines 385-415. All further references will be to this edition.

[6] At the end of the romance, Launfal leaves Camelot for Avalon with Lady Tryamour following his unjust treatment by Arthur and rescue by Tryamour. In this romance, the otherworld is the space of Launfal's integration and it is achieved through his relationship with Tryamour. Arthur's court is portrayed as unjust and weak as the king refuses to believe in the innocence of his knight. For further discussion on *Sir Launfal*, see Susan Crane. 'Launfal's "Largesse": Word-Play in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*'. *English Language Notes* 25 (1988, March). Laurence Harf-Lancner. 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. (New York: Garland, 1996). Amanda Hopkins. 'Female Vulnerability as Catalyst in the Middle English Breton Lays'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Phillipa Hardman. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002) Horvath, Richard. 'Romancing the Word: *Fama* in the Middle English *Sir Launfal* and *Athelston*'. *Fama: The Politics of Talk in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Thelma Fenster and David Lord Smail. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003). Bart Veldhoen. 'Psychology and the Middle English Romances: Preliminaries to Readings of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo*, and *Sir Launfal*'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. (Amsterdam: V.U. University Press, 1990). Elizabeth Williams. ' "A Damsell By Herselfe Alone": Images of Magic and Femininity from *Lanval* to *Sir Lambewell*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*.

[7] Jeff Rider. 'The Other Worlds of Romance'. 129.

[8] See Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance*.

[9] Yamamoto examines how the wild man motif occurs in relation to the Green Knight/Lord Bertilak. She argues that the Green Knight and Bertilak simultaneously contradict traditional assumptions of categorical definition. She states that 'the body of the Green Knight is framed to tease us about his identity: like Arthur and his court, we are meant to be genuinely puzzled about who, or what, he is. *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*. 174. However, while the Green Knight/Bertilak does shift between supernatural and traditional feudal identities, the fact remains that both of these identities belong to the otherworld, which is defined by both its supernatural and simultaneously central nature. While Lord Bertilak appears to be a typical feudal lord, he is consciously under the influence of Morgan le Faye. It is Morgan who orchestrates the entire sequence of events. Bertilak follows Morgan, acting on her behalf throughout the narrative.

[10] See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. (London: Fontana, 1993, 1949). See also Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1932).

[11] Christopher Wrigley examines Sir Gawain from an anthropological perspective, with particular emphasis on rites of passage between adolescence and adulthood in '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: The Underlying Myth'. *Studies in Medieval English Romances*. Ed. Derek Brewer. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988). See also C.S. Lewis, 'The Anthropological Approach'. *Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. Donald R. Howard and Christian K. Zacher. (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968). For a discussion on folklore motifs within the romance, see Claude Luttrell, 'The Folk-Tale Element in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Studies in Medieval English Romances*. Ed. Derek Brewer. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988).

[12] While in the natural wilderness, the hero commonly experiences supernatural or natural phenomena that not only test his skills as a knight, but also sharpen those skills, preparing him for the final challenge at the end of the quest and justifies his inclusion into chivalric society. This can be seen in the quests of Lybeaus Desconus, Ywain, Sir Degaré, and Sir Tryamour, as well as Malory's Sir Gareth.

[13] For further discussion see Bart Veldhoen, 'Psychology and the Middle English Romances'.

[14] For an interesting discussion of Gawain's human nature and identity, see William F. Woods, 'Nature and the Inner Man in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 36 (2001-2002).

[15] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. Second Edition Revised, Norman Davis. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) Lines 2467-2470.

[16] R.W.J. Elliott. *The Gawain Country: Essays on the Topography of Middle English Alliterative Poetry*. (Yorkshire: The University of Leeds, School of English, 1984).

[17] Harvey De Roo. ''Undressing Lady Bertilak: Guilt and Denial in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 27 (1992-1993) 313.

[18] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Lines 691-702.

[19] For a full discussion on *Lybeaus Desconus*, see chapter 4. For further reading on magic in Medieval romance, see Helen Cooper, 'Magic That Does Not Work'. Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance*. Anne Wilson, *The Magical Quest: The Use of Magic in Arthurian Romance* John Stevens, *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches*.

[20]The pattern of the 'noon-day demon' motif is as follows: The woman enters an 'outdoor' space alone and often to escape trouble (in *Sir Degaré*, the risk of incest, in *Sir Gowther*, the inability to bear an heir) and is confronted with an otherworldly male being who either begets a child on her (as in *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Gowther*), or abducts her (as in *Sir Orfeo*) *Sir Degaré*. Ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, 2001) Lines 77-122. *Sir Gowther*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. (London: Dent, 1973) Lines 61-84. *Sir Orfeo*. Lines 65-175. While this space may be connected to the personal dwelling of the woman (as it is in Sir Gowther) its significance lies in the fact that it, like the female body, is penetrable. Unlike the walls of the castle which prove shelter and protection from intruders in a very real sense, the garden is a space more vulnerable to attack.

[21] John Block Friedman. 'Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon'. *Speculum* 41 (1996, January) 27.

[22] Geraldine Heng. 'Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory'. *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*. Ed. Keith Busby. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Co., 1990) 285.

[23] When Launfal first meets Tryamour, the description of her tent and her body portray unequalled wealth and overt sexuality. 'For hete her cloþes down sche dede/ Almest to her gerdystede:/ þan lay sche vncouert./ Sche was as whyt as lylye yn May,/ Or snow þat sneweþ yn wynterys day--/ He seygh neuer non so pert'. *Sir Launfal*. Ed. A.J. Bliss. (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1960) Lines 289-294. This overt sexual display, combined with the physical description of their night together (For play lytell þey sclepte þat nyȝt,/ Tyll on morn hyt was dalylyȝt'. 349-350) demonstrates Tryamour's significance as an otherworldly woman who inverts the traditional role of male 'wooer' to attain a lover. Her position as the dominant partner is displayed through her decision to engage both sexually and financially with Launfal, and is further enforced by her ability to save him at the end of the romance.

[24] Arlyn Diamond. 'Unhappy Endings: Failed Love/Failed Faith in Late Romance'. *Readings in Medieval English Romance*. Ed. Carol M. Meale. (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1994). See also Sheila Fisher, 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster *(Arthurian Women: A Casebook*: New York Garland, 1996).

[25] See Colleen Donnelly, 'Blame, Silence, and Power: Perceiving Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medieavalia* 24 (2003) 282. Donnelly argues that Lady Bertilak's primary influence is as that of teacher, rather than temptress. She also points out that 'Gawain's inability to see and correctly interpret the clues about his testing that surround him is indicative of male ineptness about the complexity of women'. 281.

[26] For further discussion of masculinity in the Middle Ages, see Stephen Knight, 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romances'. *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*. Ed David Aers. (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986). Vern Bullough, 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages'. *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Claire A. Lees. (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[27] For an interesting discussion of the girdle and the feminine, see Geraldine Heng, 'Feminine Knots and the Other in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *PMLA* 106 (1991, May).

[28] Clare R Kinney. 'The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medieval Masculinities*.

[29] The location of this site is debatable. The narrative begins with the hunt in Inglewood forest and the meeting at the Tarn Wadling, progresses to the site of the feast at Rondolesette Halle and the battle at Plumpton Land, then ends with the return to Carlisle. Andrew R. Walkling argues that Rondolesette Halle provides an area that is temporary for the hunting party. He says 'going to Carlisle would mean leaving Inglewood forest and disrupting the ongoing progress of the hunt; instead, the court withdraws to the furthest bounds of the forest, thereby allowing, not only the continuation of the hunt's formal stages, but also the utilization of Rondolesette Halle in the service of the poem's message'. 'The Problem of "Rondolesette Halle." *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. *Studies in Philology* 100 (2003, Spring) 7.

[30] Rebecca S. Beal discusses Arthur's identity as synonymous with civilisation in 'Arthur as the Bearer of Civilisation: *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, 11. 901-19'. *Arthuriana* 5 (1995). See also A.C Spearing 'Central and Displaced Sovereignty in Three Medieval Poems'. *Review of English Studies* 33 (1982 August).

[31] See William F. Woods, 'Nature and the Inner Man in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 36 (2001-2002). In this article, Woods examines the juxtaposition of the natural wilderness and the civilised Hautdesert.

[32] Moon discusses the possibility that the Green Knight was sent as bait from Morgan to Guenevere to test her chastity. See 'The Role of Morgan Le Faye in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 67 (1966) 47-48. See also Albert B. Friedman, 'Morgan Le Faye in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Speculum* 35 (1960).

[33] The traditions that associate Guenevere with adultery extend back to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittanie*, in which she marries Mordred, Arthur's nephew, while still married to Arthur. In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, Guenevere marries Mordred and bears his children. Guenevere's adultery with Lancelot is first mentioned in Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charette* and later, in the English tradition, in the French-inspired *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. Her characterisation as a negative and manipulative adulteress is also present in Marie de France's *Lanval* and the later Middle English *Sir Launfal*. However, the connection between Guenevere and sovereignty is made clear through her associations with kingship. In the *Wesh Triads*, Arthur marries three Gueneveres (or Gwenhywfars). This triple incarnation of a sovereignty figure is common in early Irish sources, where the sovereignty of Ireland is represented by the three goddesses Eriu, Banba and Fodla. In the *Historia* and the *Alliterative Morte*, Mordred's usurpation of the throne is symbolised by his 'marriage' to Guenevere and, in the latter, enforced through the production of offspring. This ability to ensure dynastic succession emphasises Guenevere's power as a fertile sovereignty figure. In the Welsh *Culhwch and Olwen* and the *Dream of Rhonabwy*, Guenevere bears Arthur's sons and is not the negative, adulterous queen of French and English sources. This shift from fertility to barrenness is paralelled by a shift in the characterisation of Arthur from fertile king in the Welsh sources, to seemingly impotent ruler in the *Historia* and *Alliterative Morte*, to a man so virile he is able to impregnate his own sister, in Malory's *Morte*. This would seem to imply that Guenevere is unable to produce children and the lack of an heir is due to her barrenness, rather than Arthur's. See Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Ed. Neil Wright. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988). *The Alliterative Morte Arthur*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. *King Arthur's Death*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986). Malory, Sir Thomas. *Malory: The Complete Works*. Ed. Eugene Vinaver. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). *Sir Launfal*. Ed. A.J. Bliss. (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1960). Marie De France. *The Lais of Marie De France*.

Ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby. (London: Penguin, 1986). *The Mabinogion.* Ed. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1949). *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads.* Ed. Rachel Bromwich. (Cardiff: The University of Wales Press, 1961).

[34] Susan Murray. 'Women and Castles in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory'. *Arthuriana* 13 (1993) 18.

[35] For discussion of gender in an historical context, see Kim M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540.* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003). Kim Phillips, 'Bodily Walls, Windows and Doors: The Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth-Century English Books For Women. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy.* Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol Meale and Lesley Johnson. (Belgium: Brepols, 2000). Eileen Power, *Medieval Women.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[36] Sheila Fisher. 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. 91.

[37] Felicity Riddy. 'The Speaking Knight: Sir Gawain and Other Animals'. *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Honour of Valerie M. Lagorio.* Ed. Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley. (New York: State University Press of New York, 1994) 152. Cathalin Buhrmann Folks argues that the pairing of the women may suggest that they are both one and the same, and that the poet assumes the reader's knowledge of the loathly lady motif. 'Gentle Men, *Lufly* and *Loothly* Ladies, *Aghlich Maysters*: Characterisation in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Noble and Joyous Histories: English Romances, 1375-1650.* Ed. Eilean Ní Cuilleanain and J.D. Phiefer. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993). See also Maureen Fries 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Faye in Medieval Romance'. *Arthuriana* 4 (1994) and Fries, 'The Characterisation of Women in the Alliterative Tradition'. *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century.* Ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach. (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981). See also, Harvey De Roo, 'Undressing Lady Bertilak: Guilt and Denial in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'.

[38] Sheila Fisher. 'Leaving Morgan Aside'. 89.

[39] Michael Twomey. 'Morgan le Faye at Hautdesert'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries.* Ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst. (Dallas, Texas: Scriptorium, 2001) 113.

[40] Morgan's liminal nature is also apparent in Malory's *Morte*, in which she exists as a supernatural woman, skilled in sorcery, yet born within society and linked to Arthur by blood. Her negative characterisation through much of the *Morte*, is contradicted at Arthur's death, as she is one of the otherworldly ladies who escorts him to Avalon. The various characterisations of Morgan le Faye are explored by Maureen Fries in 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Faye in Medieval Romance'. See also Geraldine Heng, 'The Feminine Subtext in Malory' and Dorsey Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte D'Arthur.* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

[41] John Carmi Parsons examines the role of the queen as intercessor and its associations with motherhood in 'The Pregnant Queen as Counselor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood'. *Medieval Mothering.* Ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. (New York: Garland, 1996). He notes that 'intercession and childbearing were the two functions of her office upon which her coronation *ordo* dwelled most intently'. p. 42. In *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, Guenevere's intercession in the joust saves both Gawain and Galeron's lives.

[42] Sheila Fisher. 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. p. 82.

[43] Marina Warner. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers.* (London: Vintage, 1994) 393.

[44] For further discussion of Guenevere in Medieval literature, see Charlotte A.T. Wulf, 'A Comparative Study of Wace's Guenevere in the Twelfth Century'. *Arthurian Romance and Gender.* See also Martin B. Shichtman, 'Elaine and Guinevere: Gender and Historical Consciousness in the Middle Ages'. *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays Towards a Cultural Anthropology.* Ed. Edelgard E. Dubruck. (New York: Edwin Mellon, 1989).

[45] For further discussion see Thomas Hahn. 'Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance.* Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Bonnie Wheeler, 'Romance and Parataxis and Malory: The Case of Sir Gawain's Reputation'. *Arthurian Literature 12.* Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. (Cambridge: D.S Brewer, 1993). Mary Dove, 'Gawain and the Blasme Des Femmes Tradition'. *Medium Aevum* 41 (1972).

[46] Eileen Power. *Medieval Women*. 20.
[47] Phillipa Hardman. 'Gawain's Practice of Piety in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medium Aevum* 68 (1999) 254-255. For a discussion of the Hebrew construction of gender as it appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* see Catherine S. Cox, 'Genesis and Gender in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*',. *The Chaucer Review* 35 (2000-2001).
[48] Marina Warner. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and The Cult of The Virgin Mary*. (London: Picador, 1976) 50. See also Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*.
[49] In *The Weddyng* and Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, the overtly sexual nature of the loathly lady is obvious through her desire to marry Gawain and the knight, and through her consumption of large amounts of food.
[50]Riddy discusses how Lady Bertilak's use of courtly language is indicative of both her nobility and her sexuality. 'The Speaking Knight: Sir Gawain and Other Animals'.
[51] For a discussion on the definition of 'luf-talking' in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* see Thomas Honegger, '*Luf-Talkyng* and Middle English Romance'. *Towards a History of English as History of Genres* Ed. Hans-Jurgen Diller and Manfred Gorlach. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag. C. Winter, 2001).
[52] For further discussion, see Elizabeth Archibald, 'Women and Romance'. Companion to Middle English Romance. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. (Amsterdam: V.U. University Press, 1990). See also Laurence Harf-Lancner, 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. (New York: Garland, 1996). See also Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*.
[53] Geraldine Heng. 'A Map of Her Desire: Reading the Feminism in Arthurian Romance'. *Perceiving Other Worlds*. Ed. Edwin Thumboo. (United Kingdom: Times Academic Press, Unipress, 1991) 254.
[54] Cathalin Buhrmann Folks. 'Gentle Men, *Lufly* and *Loothly* Ladies, *Aghlich Maysters*: Characterisation in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'.
[55] See Judith Weiss, 'The Wooing Women in Anglo-Norman Romance'. *Romance in Medieval England*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol Meale. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991).
[56] Monica Brzezinski Potkay. 'The Violence of Courtly Exegesis in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose. (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 116. For further discussion, see Sharon M. Rowley, 'Textual Studies, Feminism, and Performance in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 38 (2003).
[57] Catherine LaFarge. 'The Hand of the Huntress: Repetition and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*'. *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. (London: Routledge, 1992) 265.
[58] See Colleen Donnelly. 'Blame, Silence, and Power: Perceiving Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'.
[59] The hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is explored by Dorothy Yamomoto in *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature.* She states that 'hunts in the poem provide a "bodily" subtext to the narrative of Gawain's stay at Bertilak's castle and his subsequent journey to the Green Chapel. Hunting was a celebration of man's ability to order and re-shape the natural world, to ordain boundaries, to inscribe human sovereignty upon the bodies of the not-human, but its discourse rested upon a forgetting of the fact that humans are bodies too'. P. 130. See also Anne Rooney, 'The Hunts in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *A Companion to the Gawain Poet.* Ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson. (Woodbridge, 1997). Claude Luttrell, 'The Arthurian Hunt With a White Bratchet'. *Arthurian Literature 9.* Ed. Richard Barber. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989). Avril Henry, 'Temptation and Hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medium Aevum* 45 (1976). Henry L. Savage, 'The Significance of the Hunting Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 27 (1928).
[60] Clare R. Kinney. 'The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medieval Masculinities Regarding Men in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Claire A. Lees. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
[61] For examination of Gawain's tirade, see Catherine Batt, 'Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, The Pentangle, and Narrative Space'. *Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992). Geraldine Heng, 'Feminine Knots and the Other in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. Gerald Morgan, 'Medieval Misogyny and Gawain's Outburst Against Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Modern Language Review* 97 (April, 2002).

Conclusion

In this thesis, I demonstrate that women in these Middle English Arthurian romances are fundamentally central to the narratives and that it is only when we are able to look past borders that are perceived as restricting that we see the true significance and autonomy of these women. The originality of this thesis is embedded in its aim to examine Middle English Arthurian romance from a perspective, which emphasises the position of the female characters within the chosen texts as liminal, rather than marginal. This requires an approach, which utilises joint anthropological and feminist analysis, while enforcing a dramatic shift in perspective of the texts themselves. While much critical attention has been paid to Middle English Arthurian romance, there is a scarcity of critical analysis, which promotes women as more than simply the peripheral or secondary inhabitants of medieval romance. The combination of feminist and anthropological investigation into this genre is missing from current scholarship. My aim is to remedy this absence through the hypothesis and reasoning present in this thesis. The decision to organise this thesis by text, rather than by theme was undertaken in an aim to demonstrate the progression of key concepts such as liminality and the abject, the female body and discourse. While a clear progression of these concepts occurs throughout the thesis, I shall offer here a review of the key arguments and their development in the course of this study.

Throughout this thesis, I show how the female characters in the five specified narratives are liminal and how this liminality influences their autonomy and places

them in positions of power. Using Arnold Van Gennep as a starting point for defining the term 'liminal' and looking to Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva to form an understanding of this term, liminality is definable as a state in which an individual or individuals exist on a border; a state in which they have experience of two realms simultaneously without being categorically defined by either realm. The condition of liminality allows for passage between realms of the physical, psychological and social and thus places the individual in a position of power through knowledge while at the same time designating them as abject individuals. My analysis of the liminal identities of the characters in the texts has not been limited to women: it is however, women who gain from a liminal identity. In *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* the permanent, liminal nature of Dame Ragnell is paralleled by the temporary liminal state of Arthur in the forest. While the former benefits from her liminal identity, existing as an autonomous, sovereign individual in male-dominated society, Arthur becomes vulnerable, threatened and nearly deposed. This contrast has implications for the thesis as a whole. I have argued that liminality benefits women because they begin in social and cultural positions devoid of significant power or influence and if they are viewed as peripheral, that lack of power in social terms is further compounded. However, once the perspective is altered and they are viewed as liminal, the knowledge gained by straddling boundaries promotes autonomy and authority. Because men already begin in positions of social power, when they straddle boundaries of experience, that absolute power in one realm becomes vulnerable. Arthur, swordless in the wilderness, is threatened by the absence of the culture he governs, while Ragnell, a woman both wild and civilised, is able to use her liminal

identity to gain further autonomy and power. This pattern progresses through the thesis, as the women, through their permanent liminality, achieve sovereignty and authority, while the temporarily liminal men become increasingly vulnerable. In *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*, the masculine realm of Arthurian society is threatened by the outsider, first through the ghost's prophecy and then in the form of Sir Galeron, while inhabiting the physically liminal territories of the tarn and Rondelesette Halle. Guenevere and her mother, while liminal, both physically and socially, become the central force within the narrative through their abject autonomy and literal sovereignty.

In chapters four and five, the issue of the liminal male versus the liminal female progresses to a new level as both chapters examine 'heroic' texts, in which the development of the male protagonist as an individual worthy of social inclusion is outlined. In *Lybeaus Desconus*, the male protagonist also exists in a temporary liminal state, however he begins life as a liminal individual as a result of his associations with his mother. His subsequent quest is one for paternal identity and social integration, as he struggles to break free from the vulnerability associated with male liminality. The women in this romance however, maintain their liminal identities, existing as characters whose ability to permeate boundaries enhances their power. Elene crosses physical borders, as well as borders of female acceptability when she berates Lybeaus, yet she is central and positive. The Lady of Sinadoun exists between physical and sexual realms and possesses critical knowledge. *Ywain and Gawain* goes one step further, demonstrating not only the physical and social consequences of becoming a liminal male, but the psychological vulnerability that may also accompany that liminal

identity. Ywain's madness in the wilderness emphasises what can happen when these three aspects come together. By contrast, the women in this romance straddle boundaries between the realms of society, madness and the 'other' or abject which in turn enforces a positive reception of these characters. While they are as liminal as Ragnell, the Ghost, and even The Lady of Sinadoun, they achieve an autonomy and sovereignty without appearing to be socially threatening. This culminates in the final chapter in this thesis, which examines *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The central society in this text is one which is controlled by women and in the text a shift occurs, whereby Sir Gawain's inability to maintain chivalric perfection is less a failure and more an indication of his humanity. It is this humanity which emphasises the 'fantasy' and inacheivability of Arthurian society and so places Gawain in the central society of Hautdesert. Sir Gawain's liminal vulnerability is achieved when he renounces his associations with Morgan and Hautdesert and returns to the 'otherworld' of Camelot. The liminal nature of the women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is emphasised through their ability to cross boundaries through speech and power, while at the same time existing as socially included individuals. It is in this text that the climax of the liminal female experience occurs, as Morgan and Lady Bertilak achieve a centrality indicative of their autonomy and dominance in a realm, which exists as the true central society in the romance.

The examination of the female body and the abject has been fundamental to this thesis. Female liminality is inextricably linked with the female body, and it is because of the liminal definition of that body, that it becomes abject. In chapter one I suggested

that to be liminal is to be abject because the liminal breaks through prescribed boundaries and social structures. This has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, as each of the texts possesses female characters whose physicality places them in positions of abject liminality. This is most evident in the case of the loathly lady, whose abject nature is perhaps her most obvious characteristic. In chapter two, the sexual implications of Ragnell's abject nature were examined as a part of her liminal identity. Here, the female body concurrently exists as both a source for potential childbearing and as a repulsive 'other'. The threat the female body poses to society as a source of life, and therefore power, becomes even more threatening when that body appears as the abject other. Ragnell's sexual appetite, evident in her gluttonous consumption of food at the wedding banquet is terrifying and repugnant because it breaks female social prohibitions and highlights the dangers of introducing the foreign into society, especially when the foreign is a sexual and desirous woman. This link between the abject female body, the sexual and maternal carries through to *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*. In chapter three, I discuss how the female body acts as an agent of power through sexuality and procreation. It is this sexual, pregnant female body which is liminal as it mediates between the outside and inside, introducing the product of its liminal composition into society through childbirth. In *The Awntyrs*, the ghost's maternal connection to Guenevere implies a fate of abject liminal occupation on the threshold between the living and the dead. In chapter four I discussed the female body and its associations with motherhood and argued that Lybeaus's mother confers her liminal identity onto her son and his actions throughout the romance are undertaken in an attempt to achieve masculinity and social integration. When Lybeaus meets the

Lady of Sinadoun at the end of the romance, her phallic physicality parallels Lybeaus's own femininity. It is at this point that the metaphorical birth of Lybeaus as a man takes place through the surrogate maternal figure of the Lady and that by announcing his paternity, the Lady confers a masculine identity upon Lybeaus while simultaneously reclaiming her own femininity.

Directly connected to the concept of the abject liminal female body is that of female discourse. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated how speech is a liminal construct, as it transgresses boundaries through the liminal orifice of the mouth and that the ambiguity surrounding the nature of female speech is indicative of the liminal nature of the female speaking subject. I have examined the relationship between speech and sexuality, looking specifically at the 'vagina dentata' as a construct, which mirrors the masculine fear of female sexuality and its direct link to speech, both of which have the potential for metaphorical castration. With this in mind, I have proposed that female discourse, whether positive or negative, is always significant and powerful. In both *The Weddyng* and *The Awntyrs*, female speech is produced as a means to shape society. Dame Ragnell uses her voice to impart the knowledge that will save the kingship and break the spell that has been placed upon her: while her physicality may appear threatening, her discourse is positive. Like Dame Ragnell, the appearance of Guenevere's mother's ghost at the tarn is terrifying and sinister, yet her discourse prophesises rather than threatens. It is the inability of the living to heed her message that damns them to a similar fate, rather than the ghost herself. In both of these narratives, the abject liminal female provides the voice of intelligence,

knowledge and foresight. However, her voice is feared due to her liminal identity and abject nature. In *Lybeaus Desconus* speech is used by Elene to rebel against a culture she believes has offended both her and her lady while in *Ywain and Gawain*, female discourse is at its most powerful when it takes place between two women. Alundyne and Lunet employ discourse as a means for rational decision-making. Similarly, Lunet uses her voice to communicate to Ywain his broken troth and Alundyne's repossession of the magic ring. In both of these narratives, the female speaking subject is identifiably liminal, as she breaks with social conventions through the use of her voice, while simultaneously remaining within male-dominated society. Female discourse, however reaches a new level in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the sexually voracious Lady Bertilak uses language which conforms to acceptable form of courtly discourse, yet is at the same time subversive in its implications. The connections between Lady Bertilak's overtly sexual physical appearance and her discourse indicate that she is more than simply Bertilak's submissive wife.

To Conclude...

Over a decade ago my terrifying yet enthusiastic High School English teacher presented me with a worn copy of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists Of Avalon* with firm instruction that I was read it over the summer holidays and so avoid disrupting a heavy load of coursework. I managed to save it for the weekend, devouring all 1009 pages in the space of two days. I was hooked. Years later I returned to *The Mists* and was fascinated by the ways in which Bradley had taken the famous tales of Arthur and

his knights and, through a simple change of perspective, created a story of women from the ashes of patriarchal discourse. I mention this 'introduction', not only as the source of inspiration for this study, but as its reason. The traditional critical perspectives, which are so fervently adhered to are, in my view, counterproductive to the evolution of medieval textual analysis as a whole. The loathly lady and her sisters are only marginal because we have been *told* they are marginal: they exist as peripheral tools for the advancement or disestablishment of male-dominated culture, only because we *see them as products* of male-dominated culture. But once we ourselves step over the boundaries that mark out gendered prescriptions, we allow the possibility for new analyses and new perspectives. My purpose in this study has been to demonstrate that women who have traditionally been associated with peripheral inhabitation, both in relation to the male protagonists and the texts themselves, are only marginal, only secondary, when we fail to accommodate different perspectives. By altering a patriarchal perspective, I have argued that these women exist as liminal individuals, who are positive, autonomous and crucial.

Primary Sources

The Alliterative Morte Arthur. EETS, O.S. 08. Ed. E. Brock. London: Oxford University Press, (1871).

The Alliterative Morte Arthur. Ed. Larry D. Benson. *King Arthur's Death*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, (1986).

Amis and Amiloun. Ed. Edward E. Foster. *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1997).

The Avowyng of Arthur. Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1995).

The Awntyrs off Arthur. Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1995).

The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne. Ed. Ralph Hanna. Manchester: Manchester University Press, (1974).

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated by V.E. Watts. United Kingdom: Penguin Books, (1969).

The Boke of St. Albans. The Boke of St. Albans: Selections. Ed. Rachel Hands. London: Oxford University Press, (1975).

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales. The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (1987).

The Dance of Death. EETS, O.S. 181. Ed. Florence Warren. London: Oxford University Press, (1931).

De Troyes, Chrétien. *Arthurian Romances*. Ed. and Translated D.D.R. Owen. London: Everyman, 1987, (1993).

Emaré. Eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (2001).

Emaré. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. London: Dent, (1973).

Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Ed. Neil Wright. Cambridge: Brewer, (1988).

The Early English Version of the Gesta Romanorum. EETS, E.S. 33. Ed. S.J.H. Herrtage. (1879), (1963).

The Jeaste of Sir Gawain. Ed. Thomas Hahn. Sir Gawain: *Eleven Romances and Tales*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1995).

King Horn. Ed. Donald B. Sands. *Middle English Verse Romances*. Exeter: Exeter University Press, (1986).

The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain. Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales.* Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1995).

The Lais of Marie De France. Ed. and Translated Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby. London: Penguin, (1986).

Lay le Freine. Eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays.* Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (2001).

Lazamon's Brut. Volume I. EETS, O.S. 250. Eds. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie. (1963).

Lazamon's Brut. Volume II. EETS, O.S. 277. Eds. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie. (1978).

Lybeaus Desconus. EETS, O.S. 261. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. London: Oxford University Press, (1969).

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Malory: The Complete Works.*. Ed. Eugene Vinaver. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1971).

The Marriage of Sir Gawain. Ed. Thomas Hahn. *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1995).

Parlement of the Thre Ages. EETS, O.S. 246. Ed. M.Y. Offord. London: Oxford University Press, (1959).

Prose Merlin. Prose Merlin. Ed. John Conlee. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (1998).

Saint Patrick's Purgatory. EETS, O.S. 298. Ed. Robert Easting. London: Oxford University Press, (1991).

Sir Amadace. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. London: Dent, (1973).

Sir Cleges. Eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays.* Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (2001).

Sir Degaré. Eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (2001).

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Ed W.R.J. Barron. Manchester: Manchester University Press, (1998).

Sir Gowther. Eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (2001).

Sir Gowther. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. London: Dent, (1973).

Sir Isumbrus. Ed. Maldwyn Mills. *Six Middle English Romances*. London: Dent, (1973).

Sir Launfal. Ed. A.J. Bliss. London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, (1960).

Sir Launfal. Eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (2001).

Sir Launfal. Ed. Donald B. Sands. *Middle English Verse Romances*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, (1986).

Sir Orfeo. Eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury. *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (2001).

Sir Orfeo. Ed. Donald B. Sands. *Middle English Verse Romances*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, (1986).

Sir Perceval of Galles. Ed. Mary Flowers Braswell. *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1995).

Sir Tryamour. Ed. Harriet Hudson. *Four Middle English Romances*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts Series, (1996).

The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell. Ed. Thomas Hahn. Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Text Series, (1995).

Wynnere and Wastoure. EETS, O.S. 297. Ed. Stephanie Trigg. London: Oxford University Press, (1990).

Ywain and Gawain. EETS, O.S. 254. Eds. Albert A. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington. London: Oxford University Press, (1964).

Secondary Sources

Ackerman, Robert W. 'The Knighting Ceremonies in the Middle English Romances'. *Speculum* 19 (1944): 285-313.

Adler, Alfred. 'Sovereignty in Chretien's *Yvain*'. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 62 (1947, June): 281-305.

Aguirre, Manuel. 'The Riddle of Sovereignty'. *The Modern Language Review* 88 (1993, April): 273-282.

Ailes, Adrian. 'The Knight, Heraldry and Armour: The Role of Recognition and the Origins of Heraldry'. *Medieval Knighthood IV: Papers from the Fifth Strawberry Hill Conference 1990.* Ed. Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey. United Kingdom: The Boydell Press (1992): 1-21.

Allen, Peter L. 'The Ambiguity of Silence: Gender, Writing and Le Roman de Silence'. *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature.* Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. Syracuse: Syracuse U.P., (1989): 98-112.

Allen, Rosamund. '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Jests and Jousts'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills.* Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. Cardiff: University of Wales Press (1996): 129-142.

Allen, Rosamund. 'Some Sceptical Obervations on the Editing of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature: Essays From the 1985 Conference at the University of York.* Ed. Derek Pearsall. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1985): 5-25.

Allen, Rosamund. 'Place-Names in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Corruption, Conjecture , Coincidence'. *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field.* Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2004): 181-198.

Archibald, Elizabeth. 'Arthur and Mordred: Variations on an Incest Theme'. *Arthurian Literature* 8 Ed. Richard Barber. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1989): 1-28.

Archibald, Elizabeth. 'Women and Romance'. *Companion to Middle English Romance.* Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. Amsterdam: V.U. University Press (1990): 153-169.

Archibald, Elizabeth. 'Lai Le Freine: The Female Foundling and the Problem of the Romance Genre'. *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance.* Ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert. England: Longman Publishing (2000): 39-55.

Armstrong, Dorsey. *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur*. Gainseville: University Press of Florida (2003).

Armstrong, Dorsey. 'Gender, Marriage, and Knighthood: Single Ladies in Malory'. *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*. Eds. Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler. Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (2003): 41-61.

Atkinson, Clarissa W. *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press (1991).

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press (1984).

Bardsley, Sandy. 'Sin, Speech and Scolding in Late Medieval England'. *Fama: The Politics of Talk in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Thelma Fenster and David Lord Smail. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press (2003): 145-164.

Barron, W.R.J. *Trawthe and Treason: The Sin of Gawain Reconsidered, A Thematic Study of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Manchester: Manchester University Press (1980).

Barron, W.R.J. 'Alliterative Romance and the French Tradition'. *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays*. Ed. David Lawton. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1982): 70-87.

Batt, Catherine. 'Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, The Pentangle, and Narrative Space'. *Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992): 117-138.

Batt, Catherine and Rosalind Field. 'The Romance Tradition'. *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature*. Ed. W.R.J. Barron. Cardiff: University of Wales Press (1999): 59-70.

Beale, Rebecca S. 'Arthur as the Bearer of Civilization'. *Arthuriana* 5 (1995): 32-44

Bell, Rudolph M. *Holy Anorexia*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press (1985).

Belsey, Catherine. *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell (1994).

Benkov, Edith Joyce. 'Language and Women: From Silence to Speech'. *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*. Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press (989): 245-265.

Biddick, Kathleen. 'Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible'.*Speculum* 68 (1993, April): 389-418.

Blake, N.F. 'Fabliaux and Other Literary Genres As Witness of Early Spoken English'. *Towards a History of English as a History of Genres*. Ed. Hans-Jurgen Diller and Manfred Gorlach. Heidelberg Universitatsverlag. C. Winter (2001): 145-157.

Blamires, Alcuin, Karen Pratt and C.W. Marx. *Women Defamed and Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1992).

Boklund-Lagopoulou, Karin. ' "This Creature": Discourses on Women and Discourses by Women in the Middle Ages'. *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 1 (1993): 15-39.

Bollard, J.K. 'Sovereignty and the Loathly Lady in English, Welsh and Irish'. *Leeds Studies in English 17*. School of English University of Leeds (1986): 41-59.

Bollard, J.K. 'Hende Words: The Theme of Courtesy in *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Neophilologus* 78 (1994, October): 655-670.

Boureau, Alain. 'The Sacrality of One's Own Body in the Middle Ages'. *Yale French Studies* 85-86 (1994-1995): 5-17.

Breeze, Andrew. '*Gryngolet*, The Name of Sir Gawain's Horse'. *English Studies* 81 (2000): 100-101.

Broadus, Edmund Kemper. 'The Red Cross Knight and *Lybeaus Desconus*'. *Modern Language Notes* 18 (1903 November): 202-204.

Brownlee, Kevin. 'Melusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis'. *Yale French Studies* 86 (1995): 18-38.

Bullough, Vern L. 'On Being a Male in the Middle Ages'. *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Claire A. Lees. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press (1994): 31-45.

Burns, E. Jane. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1993).

Burrow, J.A. *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1965).

Busby, Keith. ' Chretien de Troyes English'd'. *Neophilologus* 71 (1987 October): 596-613.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion.* New York: Zone Books (1992).

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.* Los Angeles: University of California Press (1987).

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 'Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women'. *Food and Culture: A Reader.* Ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. New York and London: Routledge (1997): 1-25.

Cadden, Joan. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1993).

Camille, Michael. *Image On The Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art.* London: Reaktion Books (1992).

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces.* London: Fontana Press (1993).

Chamberlain, David. 'Marie de France's Arthurian Lai: Subtle and Political'. *Culture And The King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Honour of Valerie M. Lagorio.* Ed. Martin B. Schichtman and James P. Carley. New York: State University of New York Press (1994): 15-34.

Charbonneau, Joanne A. 'From Devil to Saint: Transformations in *Sir Gowther*'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance.* Ed. Phillipa Hardman. Cambridge: Brewer (2002): 21-28.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. 'Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Inhuman c. 1400'. *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages.* Ed.Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. New York: Garland (2000): 219-244.

Colwell, Tania. 'Mélusine: Ideal Mother or Inimitable Monster?' *Love, Marriage and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages.* Ed. Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller and Sarah Rees Jones. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols (2003): 181-203.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 'On The Loathly Bride'. *Speculum* 20 (1945, October): 391-404.

Cooper, Helen. 'Magic That Does Not Work'. *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976): 131-146.

Counihan, Carole M. *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning and Power.* New York and London: Routledge (1999).

Cox, Catherine S. 'Genesis and Gender in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 35 (2000-2001): 378-390.

Crane, Susan. 'Launfal's "Largesse": Word-Play in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*'. *English Language Notes* 25 (1988, March): 4-9.

Davis, Rebecca A. 'More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent in *The Weddynge of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*'. *The Chaucer Review* 35 (2000-2001): 430-439.

De Roo, Harvey. 'Undressing Lady Bertilak: Guilt and Denial in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 27 (1992-1993): 305-324.

De Voragine, Jacobus. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints, Volume 2*. Translated William Granger Ryan. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press (1993).

De Vries, Jan. *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*. Translated B.J. Timmer. London: Oxford University Press (1963).

Diamond, Arlyn. 'Unhappy Endings: Failed Love/Failed Faith in Late Romances'. *Readings in Medieval English Romance*. Ed. Carol M. Meale. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1994): 65-81.

Diamond, Arlyn. 'Heroic Subjects: Women and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*'. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*. Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol Meale and Lesley Johnson. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols (2000): 293-308.

Dickson, Morgan. 'Female Doubling and Male Identity in Medieval Romance'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Phillipa Hardman. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2002): 59-72.

Dillon, Myles. *Early Irish Literature*. Dublin: Four Courts Press (1994).

Donnelly, Colleen. 'Blame, Silence, and Power: Perceiving Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medieavalia* 24 (2003): 279-297.

Doob, Penelope B.R. *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press (1974).

Dooley, Ann. 'Arthur of the Irish: A Viable Concept?' *Arthurian Literature 21*. Ed. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2004): 9-28.

Dooley, Ann. 'The Invention of Women in the *Táin*'. *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales.* Ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman. Belfast: December Publications (1994): 123-133.

Dor, Juliette. 'The Sheela-na-Gig: An Incongrous Sign of Sexual Purity?' *Medieval Virginities.* Ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih. Cardiff: Univeristy of Wales Press (2003): 33-55.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo.* London: Routledge Press (1966).

Dove, Mary. 'Gawain and the Blasme Des Femmes Tradition'. *Medium Aevum* 41 (1972): 20-26.

Edie, John. 'Two Notes on *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *English Language Notes* 21 (1983, December): 3-7.

Elam, Diane. *Romancing the Postmodern.* London and New York: Routledge (1992).

Elliott, R.W.V. *The Gawain Country: Essays on the Topography of Middle English Alliterative Poetry.* United Kingdom: University of Leeds School of English (1984).

Fein, Susanna G. 'The Goulish and the Ghastly: A Moral Aesthetic in Middle English Alliterative Verse'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 48 (1987, March): 3-19.

Field, P.J.C. 'Hunting, Hawking and Textual Criticism in Malory's Morte Darthur'. *Arthurian and Other Studies Presented to Shunichi Noguchi.* Ed. Takashi Suzuki and Tsuyoshi Mukai. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1993): 95-105.

Field, P.J.C. 'Malory and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell'. Archiv Für Das Studium Der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 219 (1982): 374-381.

Field, Rosalind. 'The Anglo-Norman Background to Alliterative Romance'. *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays.* Ed. David Lawton. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1982): 54-69.

Findon, Joanne. *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1997).

Finlayson, John. 'Alliterative Narrative Poetry: The Control of The Medium'. *Traditio* 44 (1988): 419-451.

Finlayson, John. 'Ywain and Gawain and the Meaning of Adventure'. *Anglia: Zeitshrift Fur Englische Philologie* 87 (1969): 312-337.

Fisher, Sheila. 'Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. New York: Garland (1996): 77-95.

Fisher, Sheila. 'Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000): 150-164.

Folks, Cathalin Buhrmann. 'Gentle Men, *Lufly* and *Loothly* Ladies, *Aghlich Maysters*: Characterisation in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Noble and Joyous Histories: English Romances, 1375-1650*. Ed. Eilean Ní Cuilleanain and J.D. Phiefer. Dublin: Irish Academic Press (1993): 59-85.

Friedman, Albert B. 'Morgan Le Faye in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'/ *Speculum* 35 (1960): 260-274.

Friedman, John Block. 'Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon'. *Speculum* 41 (1966, January): 22-29.

Fries, Maureen. 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. New York: Garland (1996): 59-73.

Fries, Maureen. 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Faye in Medieval Romance'. *Arthuriana* 3 (1994): 1-18.

Fries, Maureen. 'The Characterization of Women in the Alliterative Tradition'. *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*. Ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach. Ohio: The Kent State University Press (1981): 25-45.

Fries, Maureen. 'How Many Roads to Camelot? The Married Knight in Malory's *Morte Darthur*'. *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Memory of Valerie M. Lagorio*. Ed. Martin B. Schichtman and James P. Carley. New York: State University of New York Press (1994): 196-207.

Ganim, John M. 'Medieval Literature as Monster: The Grotesque Before and After Bakhtin'. *Exemplaria* 7 (1995): 27-40.

Gibson, Melanie McGarrahan. 'Lyonet, Lunete and Laudine: Carnivalesque Arthurian Women'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst. Dallas, Texas: Scriptorium (2001): 213-227.

Gilbert, Jane. 'Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*'. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*. Ed. Jocelyn

Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol Meale and Lesley Johnson. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols (2000): 329-344.

Gilbert, Sandra M and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press (1979).

Glasser, Marc. ' "He Nedes Moste Hire Wedde:" The Forced Marriage in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and Its Middle English Analogues'. *Neuphilologishe Mitteilungen* 85 (1984): 239-241.

Green, Donald C. 'The Semantics of Power: Maistrie and Soverayntee in *The Canterbury Tales*'. *Modern Philology* 84 (1986, August): 18-23 .

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press (1980).

Grimbert, Joan Tasker. 'Misrepresentation and Misconception in Chrétien De Troyes: Nonverbal and Verbal Semiotics in *Erec and Enide* and *Perceval*'. *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*. Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. Syracuse: Syracuse Univeristy Press (1989): 50-79.

Hahn, Thomas. Sir Gawain: *Eleven Romances and Tales.* Kalamazoo, Michigan: Teams Middle English Texts (1995).

Hahn, Thomas. 'Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000): 218-234.

Hamilton, Gayle. 'The Breaking of Troth in *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Mediaevalia: A Journal for Medieval Studies* 2 (1976): 111-135.

Hanna, Ralph III. *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn.* Manchester: Manchester Univeristy Press (1974).

Hanna, Ralph III. '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: An Interpretation'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 31 (1970): 275-297.

Hardman, Phillipa. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance.* Ed. Phillipa Hardman. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2002).

Hardman, Phillipa. 'Gawain's Practice of Piety in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medium Aevum* 68 (1999): 247-267.

Harf-Lancner, Laurence. 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. New York: Garland (1996): 133-151.

Harrington, Norman T. 'The Problem of Lacunae in Ywain and Gawain'. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 69 (1970): 659-665.

Hazell, Dinah. 'The Blinding of Gwennere: Thomas Chestre as Social Critic'. *Arthurian Literature 20*. Ed. Keith Busby and Roger Darymple. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2003): 123-143.

Hellwarth, Jennifer Wynne. *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England*. New York and London: Routledge (2002).

Hemmi, Yoko. 'Morgan La Fee's Water Connection'. *Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature* 6 (1996): 19-36.

Heng, Geraldine. *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Culture*. New York and West Sussex: Columbia University Press (2003).

Heng, Geraldine. 'A Map of Her Desire: Reading the Feminism in Arthurian Romance'. *Perceiving Other Worlds*. Ed. Edwin Thumboo. United Kingdom: Times Academic Press (1991): 250-260.

Heng, Geraldine. 'Feminine Knots and the Other: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 106 (1991, May): 500-514.

Heng, Geraldine. 'Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory'. *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*. Ed. Keith Busby. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co. (1990): 283-300.

Henry, Avril. 'The Temptation and Hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medium Aevum* 45 (1976): 187-200.

Holm, Bent. 'The Hellequin Figure in Medieval Custom'. *Custom, Culture and Community in the Later Middle Ages: A Symposium*. Denmark: Odense University Press (1994): 105-124.

Honegger, Thomas. 'Luf-talkyng and Middle English Romance'. *Towards a History of English as a History of Genres*. Ed. Hans-Jurgen Diller and Manfred Gorlach. Heidelberg Universitatsverlag. C. Winter (2001): 159-182.

Hopkins, Amanda. 'Female Vulnerability as Catalyst in the Middle English Breton Lays'. *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Phillipa Hardman. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2002): 43-58.

Hopkins, Andrea. *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1994).

Horrox, Rosemary. *The Black Death*. Manchester and New York Manchester: University Press (1994).

Horvath, Richard. 'Romancing the Word: *Fama* in the Middle English *Sir Launfal* and *Athelston*'. *Fama: The Politics of Talk in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Thelma Fenster and David Lord Smail. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press (2003): 165-186.

Hunt, Tony. 'Beginnings, Middles and Ends: Some Interpretative Problems in Chretien's *Yvain* and Its Medieval Adaptations'. *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*. Ed. Leighy A. Arrathoom. Rochester, Michigan: Solaris Press Inc. (1984): 83-117.

Huston, Nancy. 'The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes'. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (1985): 119-136.

Hyonjin, Kim. *The Knight Without The Sword: A Social Landscape of Malorian Chivalry*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2000).

Johnson, David. 'The Real and the Ideal: Attitudes to Love and Chivalry as seen in *The Avowing of King Arthur*'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. Amsterdam: V.U. Univeristy Press (1990): 189-208.

Jost, Jean E. 'Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterisation in *The Awntyrs of Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Weddyng of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Albrecht Classen. New York and London: Routledge (2002): 133-152.

Joynes, Andrew. *Medieval Ghost Stories*. Great Britain: The Boydell Press (2001)

Kay, Sarah. 'The Life and the Dead Body: Death and the Sacred in the *chansons de geste*'. *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994): 94-108.

Kay, Sarah. 'Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance'. *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Elspeth Kennedy*. Ed. Karen Pratt. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1994): 23-36.

Kinney, Clare R. 'The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Medieval Masculinites: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Claire A. Lees. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press (1994): 47-57.

Klausner, David N. 'Exempla and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972): 307-325.

Knight, Stephen. 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romances'. *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*. Ed. David Aers. Sussex: The Harvester Press (1986): 99-122.

Kooper, Erik. 'Love and Marriage in the Middle English Romances'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. Amsterdam: V.U. Univeristy Press (1990): 171-187.

Kratins, Ojars. 'Love and Marriage in Three Versions of "*The Knight of the Lion*". *Comparative Literature* 16 (1964): 29-39.

Kreuger, Roberta L. 'Love, Honour and Exchange of Women in *Yvain*'. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. New York: Garland (1996): 3-18.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press (1982).

Kristeva, Julia. 'Stabat Mater'. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (1985): 99-118.

LaFarge, Catherine. 'The Hand of the Huntress: Repetition in Malory's Morte D'Arthur'. *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. London: Routledge (1992): 263-279.

Laskaya, Anne. *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in The Canterbury Tales*. Cambridge: Brewer (1995).

Lawton, David A. 'The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry'. *Speculum* 58 (1983): 72-94.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Raw and the Cooked*. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1964).

Lewis, C.S. 'The Anthropological Approach'. *Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. Donald R. Howard and Christian K Zacher. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press (1968).

Loomis, Roger Sherman. 'Malory's Beaumains'. *Publications of the Modern Language Associations of America* 54 (1939): 656-668.

Luttrell, Claude. 'The Arthurian Hunt with a White Bratchet'. *Arthurian Literature 9*. Ed. Richard Barber. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1989): 57-80.

Luttrell, Claude. 'The Folk-Tale Element in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Studies in Medieval English Romances.* Ed. Derek Brewer. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1988): 92-112.

MacCormack, Carol. P. 'Nature, Culture and Gender: A Critique'. *Nature Culture and Gender.* Ed. Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1980): 1-24.

MacLehose, William F. 'Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child' *Medieval Mothering.* Ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. New York: Garland (1996): 3-24.

McClain, Lee Tobin. 'Gender Anxiety in Arthurian Romance'. *Extrapolation* 38 (1997, Fall): 193-199.

McCone, Kim. *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature.* Kildare: Maynooth Monographs (1990).

McCracken, Peggy. 'The Body Politic and the Queen's Adulterous Body in French Romance'. *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature.* Ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1993): 38-64.

Matthews, David. 'Translation and Ideology: The Case of *Ywain and Gawain*'. *Neophilologus* 76 (1992, July): 452-463.

Matthewson, Jean T. 'Displacement of the Feminine in *Golagros And Gawane* and *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. *Arthurian Interpretations* 1 (1987): 23-28.

Mehl, Dieter. *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1967).

Montaño, Jesus. 'Sir Gowther: Imagining Race in Late Medieval England'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Albrecht Classen. New York and London: Routledge (2002): 118-132.

Moon, Douglas M. 'The Role of Morgan La Fee in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 67 (1966): 31-57.

Morgan, Gerald. 'Medieval Misogyny and Gawain's Outburst Against Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Modern Language Review* 97 (2002, April): 265-278.

Murray, Susan E. 'Women and Castles in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory'. *Arthuriana* 13 (2003): 17-41.

Nagy, Joseph Falaky. 'Liminalty and Knowledge in Irish Tradition'. *Studia Celtica* 16-17 (1981-1982): 135-143.

New Dictionary of Theology. Ed. Joseph Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot Lane. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Press (1990).

Ní Bhrolcháin, Muireann. 'Re Tóin Mna: In Pursuit of Troublesome Women'. *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*. Ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman. Belfast: December Publications (1994): 39-89.

Nutt, Alfred. 'The Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of The Celts'. *Folk-Lore Record* 4 (1881): 1-44.

O'Caithasaigh, Tomas. *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (1977).

Orme, Nicholas. *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530*. London and New York: Methuen (1984).

Parker, Patricia. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property*. London and New York: Methuen (1987).

Parsons, John Carmi. 'The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood'. *Medieval Mothering*. Ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. New York: Garland (1996): 39-61.

Pearsall, Derek. 'Madness in Sir Orfeo'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. Cardiff: University of Wales Press (1996): 51-63.

Pearsall, Derek. 'The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds'. *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays*. Ed. David Lawton. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1982): 34-53.

Phillips, Helen. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure*: Structure and Meaning: A Reassessment'. *Arthurian Literature 12*. Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. Cambridge: D.S.Brewer (1993): 63-89.

Phillips, Helen. 'The Ghost's Baptism in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *Medium Aevum* 58 (1989): 49-58.

Phillips, Kim M. 'Bodily Walls, Windows and Doors: The Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth-Century English Books for Women'. *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*. Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne,

Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol Meale and Lesley Johnson. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols (2000): 185-198.

Phillips, Kim M. *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press (2003).

Phillips, Kim. 'Written on the Body: Reading Rape From the Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries'. *Medieval Women and the Law*. Ed. Noel James Menuge. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press (2000): 125-144.

Potkay, Monica Brzezinski. 'The Violence of Courtly Exegesis in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose. New York: Palgrave (2001): 97-124.

Power, Eileen. *Medieval Women*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1975).

Putter, Ad. 'Arthurian Literature and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy'. *Arthurian Romance and Gender*. Ed. Friedrich Wolfzettel. Amsterdam: Rodopi Press (1995): 34-49.

Putter, Ad. *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet*. London and New York: Longman (1996).

Rampton, Martha. 'The Significance of the Banquet Scene in the *Bayeux Tapestry*'. *Medievalia et Humanistica* 21 (1994): 33-53.

Rank, Otto. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings*. New York: Vintage Books (1932).

Riddy, Felicity. 'Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Kreuger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000): 235-252.

Riddy, Felicity. 'The Speaking Knight: Sir Gawain and Other Animals'. *Culture And The King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Honour of Valerie M. Lagorio*. Ed. Martin B. Schichtman and James P. Carley. New York: State University Press of New York (1994): 149-162.

Rider, Jeff. 'The Other Worlds of Romance'. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000): 115-131.

Robertson, Elizabeth. 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*'. *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*. Ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1993): 142-167.

Robson, Margaret. 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*'. *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*. Ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert. England: Longman Publishing (2000): 219-236.

Robson, Margaret. 'Cloaking Desire: Re-Reading Emare'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. Cardiff: University of Wales Press (1996): 64-76.

Robson, Margaret. 'Animal Magic: Moral Regeneration in *Sir Gowther*'. *Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992): 140-153.

Rogers, Gillian. ' "Illuminat vith lawte, and with lufe lasit.": Gawain Gives Arthur a Lesson in Magnanimity'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. Cardiff: University of Wales Press (1996): 94-111.

Rooney, Anne. *Hunting in Middle English Literature*. Cambridge: The Boydell Press (1993).

Rowley, Sharon M. 'Textual Studies, Feminism, and Performance in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 38 (2003): 158-177.

Salisbury, Joyce E. 'Human Animals of Medieval Fables'. *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*. Ed. Nona C. Flores. New York: Garland (1996): 49-65.

Saunders, Corine J. *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1993).

Saunders, Corine J. 'Women Displaced: Rape and Romance in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*'. *Arthurian Literature 13*. Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. Cambridge: D.S.Brewer (1995): 115-131.

Savage, Henry L. 'The Significance of the Hunting Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 27 (1928): 1-15.

Schictman, Martin B. 'Elaine and Guenevere: Gender and Historical Consciousness in the Middle Ages'. *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays Towards a Cultural Anthropology*. Ed. Edelgard E. Dubruck. New York: The Edwin Mellon Press (1989): 255-271.

Schlauch, Margaret. *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens*. New York: AMS Press (1927):

Schmitt, Jean-Claude. *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1994).

Scowcroft, Mark R. 'On Liminality in the Fenian Cycle'. *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 13 (1987): 97-100.

Segre, Cesare. 'What Bakhtin Left Unsaid: The Case of the Medieval Romance'. *Romance: Generic Transformations from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes.* Ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee. Dartmouth College, Hanover: University Press of New England (1985): 23-46.

Semple, Benjamin. 'The Male Psyche and the Female Sacred Body in Marie de France and Christine de Pizan'. *Yale French Studies* 86 (1995):164-186.

Sessle, Erica. 'Misogyny and Medb: Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism'. *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales.* Ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman. Belfast: December Publications (1994): 135-138.

Severs, J. Burke. *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500.* New Haven, Connecticut: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences (1967).

Shepherd, Geoffrey. 'The Nature of Alliterative Poetry in Late Medieval England'. *Middle English Literature: British Academy Gollancz Lectures.* Ed. J.A. Burrow. England: Oxford University Press (1989): 57-76.

Shepherd, Stephen H. A. 'No Poet Has His Travesty Alone: *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills.* Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. Cardiff: University of Wales Press (1996): 112-128.

Simons, Penny. 'The Squire, The Dwarf and the Damsel In Distress: Minor Characters in *Le Bel Inconnu*?' *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 32 (1996, June): 27-36.

Sjöblom, Tom. 'On the Threshold: The Sacredness of Borders in Early Irish Literature'. *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales.* Ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman. Belfast: December Publications (1994): 159-164.

Smith, Moira. 'The Flying Phallus and the Laughing Inquisitor: Penis Theft in the Malleus Maleficarum'. *Journal of Folklore Research* 39 (2002): 85-117.

Spearing, A.C. '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*'. *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century.* Ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach. Ohio: The Kent State University Press (1981): 183-202.

Spearing, A.C. 'Central and Displaced Sovereignty in Three Medieval Poems'. *Review of English Studies* 33 (1982): 247-261.

Speed, Diane. 'Middle English Romance and the *Gesta Romanorum*'. *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Rosalind Field. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1999): 45-56.

Sprunger, David A. 'Parodic Animal Physicians From the Margins of Medieval Manuscripts'. *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*. Ed. Nona C. Flores. New York: Garland (1996): 67-81.

Stevens, J.E. *Medieval Romance*. London: Hutchinson University Press (1973).

Stock, Lorraine Kochanske. 'The Hag of Castle Hautdesert: The Celtic Sheela-na-gig and the *Auncian* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst. Dallas, Texas: Scriptorium (2001): 121-148.

Sweeney, Michelle. *Magic in Medieval Romance: From Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer*. Dublin: Four Courts Press (2000).

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989).

Townsend, Francis G. 'Chaucer's Nameless Knight'. *Modern Language Review* 49 (1954): 1-4.

Tristram, Philippa. *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature*. London: Elek (1976).

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Landscapes of Fear*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Press (1979).

Turner, Brian S. *The Body and Society*. London: Sage Publications (1996).

Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press (1969).

Twe, Krista Sue-Lo. '*The Awntyrs Off Arthure At The Terne Wathelyne*: Reliquary for Romance'. *Arthurian Literature 20*. Ed. Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (2003): 103-122.

Twomey, Michael W. 'Morgan le Faye at Hautdesert'. *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst. Dallas, Texas: Scriptorium (2001): 103-119.

Uebel, Michael. 'The Foreigner Within: The Subject of Abjection in Sir Gowther'. *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Albrecht Classen. New York and London: Routledge (2002): 96-117.

Van Baker, Michael. 'The Dame and the Knight: Marriage, Sovereignty and Transformation'. *Parabola* 29 (2004): 11-18.

Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1909) (1960).

Vasta, Edward. 'Chaucer, Gower and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady'. *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1995, Fall): 395-418.

Veldhoen, Bart. 'Psychology and the Middle English Romances: Preliminaries to Readings of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo*, and *Sir Launfal*'. *Companion to Middle English Romance*. Ed. Henk Aertson and Alasdair A. MacDonald. Amsterdam: V.U. Univeristy Press (1990): 101-128.

Walkling, Andrew R. 'The Problem of "Rondolesette Halle"in *The Awntyrs off Arthure'*. *Studies in Philology* 100 (2003, Spring): 105-122.

Warner, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. London: Vintage (1995).

Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and The Cult of The Virgin Mary*. London: Picador (1976).

Weiss, Judith. 'The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance'. *Romance in Medieval England*. Ed. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol Meale. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1991): 149-164.

Wheeler, Bonnie. '"The Prowess of Hands:" The Psychology of Alchemy in Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth'. *Culture And The King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays for Valerie M. Lagorio*. Ed. Martin B. Schichtman and James P. Carley. New York: State University of New York Press (1994): 180-195.

Wheeler, Bonnie. 'Romance and Parataxis and Malory: The Case of Sir Gawain's Reputation'. *Arthurian Literature 12*. Ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy. Cambridge: D.S Brewer (1993): 109-132.

Williams, David. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press (1996).

Williams, Elizabeth. '"A Damsell By Herselfe Alone": Images of Magic and Femininity from *Lanval* to *Sir Lambewell*'. *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*. Ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss. Cardiff University of Wales Press (1996): 155-170.

Williams, Elizabeth. 'Sir Amadace and the Undisenchanted Bride: The Relation of the Middle English Romance to the Folktale Tradition of "The Grateful Dead"'. *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*. Ed. Rosalind Field. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer (1999): 57-70.

Wilson, Anne. *The Magical Quest: The Use of Magic in Arthurian Romance*. Manchester and New York : Manchester University Press (1988).

Wilson, Robert H. 'The "Fair Unknown" in Malory'. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 57 (1943, March): 1-21.

Woods, William F. 'Nature and the Inner Man in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'. *The Chaucer Review* 36 (2001-2002): 209-227.

Wrigley, Christopher. '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: The Underlying Myth'. *Studies in Medieval English Romances*. Ed. Derek Brewer. Cambridge :D.S. Brewer (1988): 113-128.

Wulf, Charlotte A.T. 'A Comparative Study of Wace's Guenevere in the Twelfth Century'. *Arthurian Romance and Gender*. Ed. Freidrich Wolfzettel. Amsterdam: Rodopi Press (1995): 66-78.

Yamamoto, Dorothy. *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*. Oxford :Oxford University Press (2000).

Yohannon, John D. *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in World Literature: An Anthology of the Story of the Chaste Youth and the Lustful Stepmother*. New York: New Directions (1968).

Zaerr, Linda Marie. 'Music and Magic in Le Bel Inconnu and Lybeaus Desconus'. *Medieval Forum* 4, (2004 December).

Ziareck, Ewa Plonowska. 'At The Limits: Heterogenity, Alterity, and the Maternal Body in Kristeva's Thought'. *Language and Liberation: Feminism, Philosophy and Language*. Ed. Christina Hendricks and Kelly Oliver. New York State: University of New York Press (1999): 323-346.