

FOLKLORE AS A UNIFYING FACTOR IN THE AWNTYRS OFF ARTHURE

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Among the many minor Middle English romances that have attracted little serious notice is *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*. One of the major critical problems thus left unexamined is that of the poem's apparent disunity; it is a short poem (715 lines) in the Arthurian tradition and consists of two distinct episodes which appear to be only vaguely related. F.J. Amour has characterized this relationship as existing only in "identity of time and place"¹ and as nothing sufficient to form a conclusive whole. The few scholars who see much virtue in this romance tend to prefer the first (A) episode and often dispense entirely with discussion of the second (B).² The second episode, when it is subjected to critical scrutiny, is most often seen as a moral balance to the first in keeping with the standards of Arthurian romance.³ The story line as a whole has been called "weak and meager"; George Kane feels that "the thin little thread of narrative" is lost amidst the poetry, and that after the pleasure in words fades all that is left is boredom.⁴

But for some reason this weak and meager story appealed to a relatively large segment of the medieval English audience, as is attested by its survival in four manuscripts dating from 1440 A.D. to around 1500 A.D., and one late copy.⁵ Dialectical evidence shows a northern origin and a subsequent spread

southward.⁶ Only a high degree of popularity could account for such a continuance in written and oral transmission.

Literary critics have sought reasons for this popularity mainly within the limited context of the text itself, with reference to similar themes found in previous literary works. Occasional ventures into the question of possible influences from the surrounding cultural milieu have been tenuous at best and have not been explored to a satisfactory extent. The following analysis will attempt to outline the present scholarship and to take these suggestions further using a folkloristic point of view with the goal of showing **The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn** as a unified whole composed within the spirit of several vital cultural traditions.

An outline of the action is necessary to further discussion. The A episode, a "unique incident, without parallel in the Arthurian cycle,"⁷ begins with a hunt led by King Arthur at the Terne Wathelyn. Gawain and Guenevere, garbed in fine apparel, separate themselves from the active hunting and go to rest under a laurel tree. Their repose is disturbed as the sky darkens and a wintry storm occurs. While the hunters take cover elsewhere, a gruesome ghost arises from a nearby lake to confront Gawain and the queen. Upon the knight's hasty approach to the figure and his conjuration for it to speak in the name of Christ, the apparition reveals itself to be Guenevere's mother, warning her daughter by her own hideous example to take heed. She then requests the saying of thirty trentals (a series of masses for the souls of the dead) for the salvation of her own soul and for the benefit of her daughter's. The ghost, in addition to warning against the sin of pride, prophesies the downfall of Arthur

through the sin of covetousness. She urges Gawain to take heed of France, hints at the future treachery of Mordred, and foretells Gawain's own ignominious death. After these gloomy prognostications, the spirit glides away, the sky clears, the hunters return to learn of the visitation, and they all go off to supper.

The B episode opens while the court is feasting. A strange knight and his lady approach the king's dais where the lady asks for justice from Arthur for the wrongs previously done to the knight. He introduces himself as Galeron of Galloway and challenges the court to combat; his grievance is that Arthur had appropriated his lands and given them to Gawain. A fight is arranged for the following day; meanwhile Galeron is sumptuously housed for the night. Arthur calls a council in order to deal with the problem at hand; Gawain then volunteers to act as the court's champion. The ensuing fight is fierce and both combatants are severely wounded, even Gawain's horse is slain. When the fight is resumed on foot, Gawain appears to be winning, so the lady appeals to Guenevere to intercede with the king. But before Arthur can stop the battle, Galeron surrenders. The lands are satisfactorily redistributed, the court returns to Carlisle where the wounded are treated, and Galeron marries his lady. Guenevere commands masses to be read for her mother; there the adventure ends.

Although the episodic nature and the apparent thematic disparity have caused consternation among the critics, the versification is generally praised. According to O'Loughlin, "the coupling of two such unrelated themes is certainly naive, but in other respects the poem displays a not inconsiderable art. The difficult stanza, combining long alliterative

lines riming abababab with an alliterating wheel cddc, is well handled."⁸ Even George Kane grudgingly admits the "verbal resource displayed," although he finds it smothering to the sense of the narrative.⁹ The stanza form of nine alliterative long lines, the ninth of which plus four short lines of two accents each forms the wheel, may have been part of a revival of a verse form popular in the North which also corresponds to a revival of unrhymed alliterative long-line verse in the west of England. Important to an understanding of the poet's dramatic and thematic use of stanza linking is Oakden's observation that *The Awntyrs* has a final repetition of alliteration in all but eight stanzas, although Oakden believes the poet to have intended use of the device throughout.¹⁰ Ralph Hanna has found the "rounce-fallis" stanza of this romance to have, like *Pearl*, a fixed system of end-rhyme that acts to yoke the individual lines into a larger unit. Hanna also notes the repetition of material--a phrase or word--from the eighth line in the ninth line, a technique which draws the long lines and the wheel into a closer relationship.¹¹ It seems curious that such care would be devoted to assuring unity in the formal structure if a similar unity should be neglected in the treatment of theme. Surely the Middle English audiences demanded as much of delight in the story line as they did of skill in presentation.

Consideration of the possible sources for *The Awntyrs* has directed attention to the cultural resources that the poet (or poets) had available. There is no apparent direct written source from which the poem is taken, although J.D. Bruce believes there to have been an earlier French version long since lost.¹² Other scholars have discarded Bruce's notion and have concentrated on English analogues. One possible source for the theme

in the **A** episode is the **Trentalle Sancti Gregorii**. David Klausner has made a case for this idea in his examination of the exempla found in **The Awntyrs**, specifically the early fourteenth-century **A** version.¹³ Correspondences exist between Gregory's tortured visions of his dead mother and the Arthurian apparition: both Gregory and Gawain conjure the ghost to speak; the ghosts are the viewers' mothers; both mother-ghosts allude to past sins for which they have been condemned; and the recommended remedy is the same in both cases--although the exact nature of the trental as a series of thirty masses has been transformed in **The Awntyrs** into thirty trentales. Klausner also sees in the spiritual manifestation of Guenevere's mother an inheritance from an extensive family of popular minatory tales. Collections of exempla revolve around the notion of the adulterous woman and include mention of hell-spawned toads and serpents as representatives of adultery and illegitimate children, suggestions that also are found in **The Awntyrs**. Such tales contain themes of incomplete confession, of the torments of the damned, and of such sins as luxury and pride: all these are failings and results implied in the appearance of Guenevere's mother.¹⁴ Robert Gates relates the ghostly appearance to the motif of the mortal who is visited by a fairy under a tree or near a body of water, a motif that occurs in other popular romances such as **Sir Gowther**, **Sir Degaré**, and **Sir Orfeo**.¹⁵

One theory of the poem's origins is also an attempt to solve the problem of unity. Ralph Hanna posits the **A** section to be a deliberate foreshadowing of the final tragedy in the **Alliterative Morte Arthure** through a development of the spiritual shortcomings in the early stages of the Arthurian court, exemplified in the predeliction of the charac-

ters for ritual forms of action and formalized gesture "which offer them no protection against the most powerful vicissitudes of life and death."¹⁶ The mention of Arthur at the beginning of the poem is thus seen as a subtle suggestion that the audience reconsider both the glories of the greatest British king and the eventual futility of all his accomplishments; it serves to remind that "his period of ascendance is limited by time and fortune, those inescapable forces which finally bring his heroic civilization to bitter ruin with internecine strife."¹⁷ This shift from triumph to doom and the lack of sufficiently clear moral ideas needed to guide the Arthurian court in times of crisis become the focus of **Awntyrs A.** Hanna sees the hunting scene as operating on two levels within this sphere: that of courtly recreation and that of military discipline in which Arthur directs and organizes the movements of his men. Ironically, the Terne is a place of magical connotations; it is a proper abode of ghastly, ghostly figures, and the physical might of Arthur's warriors becomes ineffectual in the supernatural domain. Gawain's capacity for action in such a setting stems from his role outside the military context; as the male figure of courtly love he is dressed for occupations of delight rather than for war. Guenevere's appearance underlines the frivolous and sensual aspect. She also is attired in beautiful clothing that is ornamental rather than strictly functional; her garb is unfit as either real or symbolic protection against exposure to the elements, whether they be environmental (the violent storm) or spiritual ("the neglected soul which lies beneath

them"¹⁸). Her role, according to Hanna, parallels Gawain's in her rejection of Arthurian ideals by her almost shrewish insistence on Gawain's companionship, and in her reviling of the absent knights.¹⁹ Neither Guenevere's sophisticated but nonauthoritarian veneer nor Arthur's domination in the hunt proves adequate in the face of the immediate supernatural; so the A section acts as a symbolic forecast of the natural events culminating in the downfall of the Arthurian empire.

Hanna believes that the thematic structure of *The Awntyrs A* is emphasized in its versification. The A section is devoted primarily to a movement from the present into the future, and the rounce-fallis stanza with its inherent reiterations enhances this effect. Guenevere lives from moment to moment and regards the future only as a continuation of the present situation; the internal connections of the stanza form reflect the concept of cyclical repetition while allowing the narrative itself to escape stasis. The device of stanza-linking moves the blocks of stories together in a continuous progression whereby *The Awntyrs A* becomes a unified whole and "the total effect becomes one of the constant interweaving of tiny details into a relentless pattern which moves in a predetermined direction."²⁰ The pattern is made obvious to the audience but not to the characters in the action.

Although Hanna argues for an artistic unity in A, he feels that the B section is inferior, especially when taken outside A's context. He regards the difference as a matter of poetic incompetence, both in style and content. Stanza-linking and internal iteration are lacking in portions of B; treatment

of these when they do appear varies from "limited verbatim repetition to complicated punning effects."²¹ The slight thematic shift is not considered sufficient to warrant such a change in technique. Hanna takes this as evidence that the two sections are in fact separate poems composed by different poets, and joined at some later date by an overzealous scribe on the basis of vague similarities.

As the main event in **B** is a stock romance occurrence--the chivalric challenge brought on by an argument over property rights--the poet of **B** is seen as less learned than that of **A**; the former has exercised little of the creativity that is evident in the work of the latter. The archetypal romance motifs of discourteous challenge, tournament battle, and the rewards of civilized virtues are only skeletally fulfilled in **B** as opposed to **A**'s integration of the eclectically diverse material drawn from both religious and romance sources. More important to Hanna is the minimal resemblance of **B** content to the **Alliterative Morte**. These disjunctures serve as evidence of Hanna's support of Herman Lübke's theory that **The Awntyrs** was derived from, and essentially still is, two separate poems, with **B** poem inserted into the moral context of **A**. The question of authorship, however, is not so easily settled. Amours, George Neilson, and others have proposed, and proven to their own satisfaction, that the poem is the hitherto missing **Awntyre of Gawane** by Huchown of the Aule Ryall, a fourteenth-century Scottish Ecclesiastic.²² Robert Gates has rejected both of the above conclusions and, using much the same evidence plus investigations of oral-formulaic

narrative poetry, concludes that *The Awntyrs* may be a completely formulaic piece from oral tradition.²³

That *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is composed of two distinct episodes in undeniable, but the naiveté of such a joining of themes becomes questionable when the work is viewed in light of its significance outside the narrowest domain of written literature. It is in the consideration of the poem as a complete message that techniques of folklore scholarship can come to the aid of literary criticism. So far the problem has lain in the restrictions imposed through looking at the text apart from any context other than previous literary texts; what remains to be done is an examination of the cultural traditions that underlie and give meaning to the written rendition. Since the studies of Parry and Lord, the oral nature of much medieval poetry has been recognized. Only in a few cases can authorship be unerringly assigned to a specific poet, and even then it is difficult to separate an individual's creative genius from the traditional materials so often used as source and inspiration.²⁴ It is therefore not my intention here to trace the literary elements to their bases in folklore, but it is rather to demonstrate that an understanding of the traditions that in part shape the text of *The Awntyrs* is important for interpretation of the poem.

When the poem is viewed in terms of its outstanding cultural components, several features predominate. These are the activity of the hunt, the belief in spirit manifestation, and a conglomerate of elements from folk Christianity. The first forms a framework within which

the others operate to impart symbolic meaning to the action of the two episodes.

The first clue to the dominant character of the hunt is the space which it occupies. If the only function of the hunt were to introduce the actors and to provide a woodland setting for the supernatural occurrence, there would have been no poetic reason to elaborate the scene into eighty-three lines in a work of only seven hundred and fifteen lines. Although none of the literary critics appear to have recognized its formal importance, the procedure of the hunt provides both the setting and the linking thread for the internal events.²⁵ The thematic structure of the hunt as frame is marked initially in lines 1-13 and finally in lines 710-715, and is emphasized by the identity of the first line and the concluding couplet. Use of the hunt as a narrative framework would probably set up certain expectations in the minds of the medieval audience, drawing on their experience of the actual activity, and on their knowledge of hunting in tradition and as a narrative device. An understanding of the rules of hunting would work in concord with familiarity with the Arthurian cycle to produce a particular message.

In *The Stag of Love*, Marcelle Thiebaut outlines the form of the hunt as follows: the quest begins, the priority is established, intermediate feasting occurs, the quarry is located (then driven to the extremes of suffering, exhaustion, and death), the quarry is taken and dissected, and the spoils are distributed.

The essential action of the medieval hunt follows a pattern that makes it conform to narrative structure; even

in its simplest form the hunt meant movement toward conflict. As hunting became a pastime of the aristocracy, it took on ritualistic qualities in addition to its mundane functions. The quest for the stag was endowed with symbolism drawn from orthodox and folk Christianity. The hind was allegorized as the pure soul of mankind chased by diabolical hunters who seek to snare it with its own net of the five senses or to shoot it with deadly arrows of desire.²⁶ On the other hand, the hunter-figure was incorporated into the tradition of the hero: "desire impells the hunter on his Journey toward the hunted quarry; the force that strikes the hunted quarry to flee is necessity. On the hunter's side, therefore, the plot may move from desire to consummation, on the victim's from necessity to death or reprieve."²⁷ Thiebaux also suggests that the inclusion of a hunt in a romance narrative can be "the prelude to a hero's crucial experience. The quarry has been slain or eluded its pursuers, the crisis of the hunt subsides, the hunter's mood of exhaustion deepens into vision and prophecy."²⁸ Along these lines, participation in a hunt can also lead to an expansion of the hero's awareness of his own identity or to an alteration in his life, as the three conventional conclusions to a pursuit are that 1) the hunter is successful, 2) the hunter is transformed into the pursued, 3) the hunter finds himself doomed to an endless chase. Metaphorically the chase becomes an imperative journey by which a mortal is led to a situation charged with experience.

Evidence that Arthur was connected with the hunt in oral tradition is found

in accounts of his pursuit of a supernatural boar and of his status as leader of the Wild Hunt.²⁹ Thus the Arthur who leads his hunting courtiers by the Terne carries with him into the narrative a complex of associations and symbols. It is known beforehand that this Arthur, a hunter after honor and glory, will eventually be caught by his own pursuit. His martial bearing and his control of the hunt, combined with the prophecies of doom in the **A** episode and his graciousness in the **B** serve to remind the audience of his character in the **Alliterative Morte Arthure**. Here is a tragic Arthur: the very strengths that make him great become the weaknesses that lead to his destruction. His conflict is like that of Oedipus; the "truths he pursues and captures are those in his doomed nature."³⁰ The audience knows that whatever is learned by the characters in the story will not avail them, for the fate has already been set. Gawain and Guenevere are in part reflections of Arthur's insistence on honor and pride and can no more be saved from their downfall than can Arthur himself. Moral instruction is therefore directed at the audience, and is only nominally and temporarily for the Arthurian figures.

As the scene shifts from the active hunters to the non-participants, the roles of hunter and quarry are reversed. Rather than suffering the exhaustion of exertion, these two repose almost slothfully under a laurel and are startled, like the deer, into sudden awareness of danger by the spectacular approach of the ghost. They become identified with the quarry, and the ghost with the hunter: the animals of the forest

flee from her as they did from earthly pursuers. This reversal serves to introduce the motif of the spiritual journey as posited by Thiebaux. The ghost is motivated in her pursuit by a desire for salvation. Such a consummation can be achieved only through Guenevere. The aristocratic couple is compelled by the chivalric code to adhere to two opposing patterns of behavior: attention to ornamentation and the dictates of courtly love on one hand, and a headlong flight in search of adventure and new lands on the other. The ghost is the embodiment of these empty matters that have been assumed as the essentials of living; her appearance is a symbolic realization of the chase.

In the Christian iconographic tradition, the quarry represents the driven human soul; the baying hounds signify pride, doubt, care, sorrow, and age; the hunters are ignorance, vanity, malady, and death.³¹ The ghost, with her burning burden of previous ignorance and vanity which lead to her present suffering, is a blend of this tradition with the supernatural aspects of the Wild Hunt; her role as hunter is underscored and made doubly fearful. But she also carries elements of the benevolent Christ-like hunter (similar to Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) who pursues her victims with knowledge; she attempts to bring them to an awareness of their position in this world, and to an understanding that it is their own human frailties, rather than her horrific visage, that will chase them to mortality.

In addition to its function of setting up an interpretive framework, the hunt functions "to achieve the separation of the protagonist from his familiar

notions of reality and order and procure for him his isolation."³² Gawain and Guenevere attain their seclusion through the departure of the hunters following the quarry's traces. This same device for separation is found in the Russian **bylina** of Ivan Godinovich where Ivan's comrades follow the footprints of a bison, a wolf, and a wild boar, thus leaving Ivan alone to face the revenge of his abducted bride's rightful suitor.³³ The animal victims serve to remove the constraints of the social world so that the protagonists become the substitute quarry open to the assault of the hunter. The queen and her knight have withdrawn from the regular order of life and are available for mystic (rather than physical) confrontation.

Inside the framework with its interlacing of Christian symbolism and pagan tradition, themes drawn from Celtic legends and contemporary folk Christianity blend to create the powerful scene at the lake. The common Celtic motif of a perilous meeting between mortal and otherworldly being merges with the **visio** of medieval dreamlore; the latter was believed to give true information about heavenly things and future events.³⁴

Undern, the very hour that marks the adventure is indicative of the frailty of human nature in the face of unknown forces. A parallel sequence in the **Al-literative Morte** makes this idea explicit. Arthur dreams that he is visited by a glorious woman carrying the Wheel of Fortune on which kings ride and from which they fall. Arthur is initially treated well, but at midday the Wheel causes his destruction. Within the span of twenty-seven lines, the motifs of the

woodland hunt, military might, the Wheel of Fortune, supernatural meeting, and the dangerous hour of noon are united. **Undern**, or noon, is a traditional time of temptation to spiritual sloth and boredom, and so is particularly apt as the time of moral failure.³⁵

Guevere's spiritual sloth is reflected in her difficulty in understanding the ghost's requests that she first become aware of the true nature of her fine clothes, that she should then indulge in charitable activity, and that she should prepare a **mynning** (a series of thirty requiem masses intended to shorten time spent in purgatory) for her mother's soul. Guevere fails to recognize the incongruity of her pride, which is based on her noble lineage and proper behavior; the irony lies in her mother's warning against adultery, a reference both to Guevere's future betrayal of Arthur and to the probability that the queen herself was the product of illicit love.³⁶ But rather than accept her spiritual obligations toward herself or others, Guevere thrusts the burden onto those who are to perform the masses. Her inability to apply the example of the ghost to herself is indicative of a fatal flaw in the Arthurian court.

In some ways the **A** section can be seen in its relationship to devotional narrative as a folk guide to piety. Some medieval poems present the idea that purgatorial punishment can be diminished or completely relieved through devotional acts or acts of mercy on the part of the living. Hanna has cited an example from the **Pricke of Conscience** (IV 3586-3589) as representing this idea, and on the basis of that tale and the

legends of Saint Patrick's Purgatory and Owayne Miles (in which a journey through purgatory and hell is a penance for sin), he argues that the first episode is not simply a request for relief from suffering but a full scale attack on the luxury of the Arthurian court. It is a confrontation of the guiding figure of Guenevere with the horrors of hell, in which she is warned "to recognize that life must be lived in the consciousness of the Last Things and that imitation of divine charity and grace is an imperative even in the aristocratic world of love and war."³⁷ Two foci emerge from this confrontation. The gruesome description of the ghost introduces horror into the human experience, and the accompanying purgatorial environment provides a background for the prophecy of doom. The ghost's blackened and naked body, existing in a fiery world which instantly consumes clothing, is juxtaposed with the elaborate descriptions of the queen's finery and the court's sumptuousness; the frightful shrieks and moans of the apparition jangle against the hunter's carefree calls. The ghost acts as the symbol of the reality that underlies worldly vanity; her history serves as a negative guideline to proper behavior, made explicit in her instructive speech.

At the onset of the confrontation Gawain appeals to Christ in his conjuring of the ghost and Guenevere appeals to Mary. This moment of prayer and possible opportunity for contemplative self-examination is replaced, however, by the more secular question-and-answer session with the ghost. The exchange reveals a didactic intent, especially in Guenevere's questions

"What wrathes God most at þi meting?" (1.238) and "What bedis miȝt me best to þe blisse bring?" (1.249). The spirit replies "pride" to the first and "pity on the poor, charity, virtue, and almsdeeds" to the second.

The expectations of vision are fulfilled and prophecy follows. The ghosts's reference to **False Fortune . . . / That wonderful whele-wright** (11.270-271) not only reflects her own torments but also foreshadows the above mentioned fate of Arthur. The motifs of Fortune's wheel and the transitory glory in this world are closely connected with the **ubi sunt** tradition and form a corollary to the traditions behind the ghost-figure. Guenevere's failure is here paralleled by Gawain's inability to perceive the futility of the chivalric code of warfare. The hour of **undern** not only signals the queen's spiritual fragility, but plays on the notion of Gawain's mythic origin and the popular idea that his physical power waxed and waned according to the passage of time; at noon he was an ordinary man with common weaknesses.³⁹ In his questioning, his pride and over-confidence are revealed.³⁸ He fails to understand the warning that the glories of conquest are transitory, that continued covetousness of land will only bring defeat to the empire, and that the violent expenditure of energy on the part of the king is morally undirected and will end in self-destruction and dishonor. The ghost has also warned of the treachery breeding in the king's own hall in the form of Mordred, who displays that same undirected and dangerous energy. Gawain altogether misses the import of this reference, for his attention

is on the immediately previous prophecy of his own death in a **slake** (a hollow in a mudbank) (l. 298).

Within the prophecy is also the link between the hunter-Arthur and the beasts he slays for recreation and the conqueror-Arthur and the future slaughter of his own and other peoples. Although the hunters retire from the hunt without game, the "prize of the contest may not be the animal . . . originally set out to capture, but some other acquisition or burden of wisdom with which he must learn to endure."⁴⁰ But the hunting Arthur whose temporary quarry has eluded him does not profit by the event in the woods; the ghost foretells that he will carry his pursuit far beyond the bounds of the proper order of things. While Gawain and Guenevere had been on the fringes of the physical hunt but in the heart of the instructive chase, Arthur's situation is reversed.

The framework of the hunt is not yet complete: there is more to it than instruction and entertainment. It also has a sacramental function in which violent energies are at once expressed and contained through ritual fulfillment. The secular aspect of the ritual was interrupted by the intrusion of the storm and the ghost. The outlet for frustration and desire was cut short; the true conflict always betokened by the hunt has not yet occurred. The initial confrontation demonstrated only the instructive side of the chase; the queen and her knight had passively submitted to the apparition although they did not fully understand her strictures. Indeed the inversion of roles resulted in a culmination of spiritual desires on the part of the

internal hunt, but there was no balance of culmination of desire in the earthly realm. The missing conflict from the **A** section is realized in the **B** section through the fight between Galeron and Gawain. The questing after the quarry is over, and the intermediate feast before the final hunt has begun.

Galeron's appearance and challenge to the court are not unprecedented. The motif of the entrance of a threatening stranger is seen in Welsh materials such as **Kulhwch and Olwen**.⁴¹ The challenge itself is remarkably similar to that made by Gromer Somer Joure in **The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell** (Gromer also appears after an unsuccessful hunt). The thematic link of this episode with the **A** is evident when Galeron's lady addresses Arthur in the same terms as the ghost used for Gawain and the queen. Galeron's own words challenge the integrity of the entire Arthurian world much as the ghost challenged individual integrity. Spiritual failure on the personal level is magnified into the moral failure of the chivalric code in the public domain.

The subsequent battle is long and drawn out, and ends in a Pyrrhic victory. Although Galeron's is a rightful claim, standards of Arthurian romance demand that Gawain be the victor. The chivalric trial by combat demanded by Galeron and accepted by Gawain has failed to settle the dispute. The law of the court is no longer truly effective. Although Guenevere has taken heed of her mother's injunctions and tried to intercede after Gawain is badly wounded and his horse is slain, it is Galeron who offers respite by surrendering. The climax of the hunt is finally over; the old ways are defeated

but in a way that the courtiers do not clearly perceive. The knights and ladies have become so many Gawains and Gueneveres, all headed for destruction in their private hunts. But for now the hunt of the poem is completed and the spoils are parceled out. Galeron regains his land and marries his lady, and Gawain receives other lands and displays some spiritual growth by suggesting that Galeron be knighted. Consummation is achieved on several levels.

If *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is regarded as a single romance united by the framework of the hunt, the tripartite romance structure becomes evident. The world of social reality is embodied in the normal activity of the aristocrats indulging in one of their favorite pastimes. The main obstacle to fulfillment of their desire for success is their own pride. Representatives of this court are isolated in an environment vulnerable to the supernatural where the roles of hunter and hunted can be reversed and the normal order of life can be disrupted, perhaps forever. The ghost is a representative of both the hellish and heavenly forces, and her function is complemented by the material world. The passive and personal adventure is balanced by an active and public adventure. The chaos of the supernatural is extended into the real world, into what should be a period of integration and renewal for society. After the final confrontation there is a period of festivity and personal fulfillment; oddly enough it is the intruders of both sections who experience the latter. Galeron and the ghost obtain their desires. The ironic use of the romance motifs and structure play on the audience's knowledge of

traditions; there can be no establishment of a new society within the context of Arthur's endless and self-defeating hunt for honor. The chase is exciting, but the result is death.

In effect, *The Awntyrs* is a frame tale, with the inner narrative parallel in structure and theme with the outer; there are two hunts--the spiritual and the secular--the elements of which are intricately interwoven. A complex of oral and written, secular and religious traditions are blended to achieve a balance between the benevolent ideal of Christianity and the rigors of pre-Christian retribution. The narrative, like the hunt, follows a predetermined direction moving from the controlled exercise of the courtly chase, to the isolated chaotic extranormal experience, to a world of disharmony within apparent harmony. The message is complex and reflects a growing cultural tension between the heroic and the anti-heroic, and between the romantic and the anti-romantic.

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NOTES

¹ F. J. Amours, *Scottish Alliterative Poems* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1897), p. xliii.

² John Speir's essay in *Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) is a prime example of this neglect.

³ See David N. Klausner, "Exempla and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*," *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972):307-325.

- ⁴ George Kane, **Middle English Literature** (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 52.
- ⁵ For history and more detailed description of the manuscripts, see Robert Gates' and Ralph Hanna's introductions to their critical editions: Robert Gates, ed., **The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne: A Critical Edition** (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969) and Ralph Hanna III, **The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn: an Edition based on Bodleian Library Ms. Douce 324** (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974).
- ⁶ For detailed discussion of dialect, see A. G. Hooper, "The Awntyrs off Arthure: Dialect and Authorship," **Leeds Studies in English and Kindred Languages** 4 (1935): 62-74.
- ⁷ Amours, p. lxxx.
- ⁸ J. L. N. O'Loughlin, "The English Alliterative Romances," in **Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages**, ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 527.
- ⁹ Kane, p. 52.
- ¹⁰ J. P. Oakden, **The Alliterative Poetry in Middle English** (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1930), pp. 218-24.
- ¹¹ Hanna, p. 310.
- ¹² James D. Bruce, **The Evolution of Arthurian Romance** (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), p. 127.
- ¹³ Klausner, p. 310.
- ¹⁴ See Klausner, p. 311 for examples of these exempla.
- ¹⁵ See Gates, p. 19.
- ¹⁶ Ralph Hanna III, "The Awntyrs of Arthur: an Interpretation," **Modern Language Quarterly** 3 (1970):27. Hereafter cited as Hanna, **MLQ**.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 278.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 284.

¹⁹ See Veronica M.L. Skinner, "Guenevere: A Study in the Arthurian Legend" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1975), pp. 103-109 for further discussion of the attitude towards Guenevere in *The Awntyrs*, especially in Skinner's rebuttal of the stance taken by Hanna on Guenevere's demanding nature, and on Hanna's mistake in separating the ghost's recommendation for charity from the plea for a *nyynyng*.

²⁰ Hanna, *MLQ*, p. 289.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

²² *Amours*, pp. li-lxxxii.

²³ Gates, pp. 34-41.

²⁴ See Carl Lindahl, "On the Borders of Oral and Written Art," *Folklore Forum* 11:2 (1978):94-123.

²⁵ Speirs comes close to identifying the hunt's significance when he mentions a possible underlying connection between the deer-and-boar slaying and the experience of Gawain and Guenevere, but he leaves the suggestion undeveloped, in Speirs, p. 254.

²⁶ See Thiebaux's discussion of medieval Christian allegory in Marcelle Thiebaux, *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 45-48.

²⁷ Thiebaux, p. 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁹ Instances of these beliefs were recorded by Nennius in 826. For a brief discussion, see Roger S. Loomis, "Arthur," in Funk and Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, ed. Maria Leach and Jerome Fried (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1972), pp. 71-73. Also see Bruce, pp. 47-51, for a discussion of Arthur and his dog Caval's role in the hunt of Wild Hunt (Motif E501).

³⁰ Thiebaux, p. 52.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

32 Ibid., p. 56.

33 Personal communication, Felix Oinas, 29 November 1979.

34 See J. E. Stevens, **Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches** (London: Hutchinson University Press, 1973), pp. 108-112, for a view of the relation between Celtic legend and medieval dreamlore.

35 In addition to the connection drawn by Hanna between the hour of the event and various traditions involving demons who appear at noon to people slothful in their faith, it is also in the monastic tradition the hour of potential loss of faith. For examples of the temptation at noon, see **Lives of Saints**, ed. Father Joseph Vann, O. F. M. (New York: John J. Crawley and Co., Inc., 1954) and Margaret A. Murray, **The Witch Cult in Western Europe** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), pp. 40, 101, and 122.

36 A parallel incident is found in **Gesta Romanorum** complete with reference to the incestuous birth of Pope Gregory. J. D. Bruce (pp. 53-55) sees a relationship in **Guigemar** by Marie de France of the chase and supernatural prophecy, the latter concerns adultery and resultant grief.

37 Hanna, **The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne**, p. 28.

38 See A. B. Taylor, **An Introduction to Medieval Romance** (London: Heath Cranton, 1930), p. 78.

39 Gawain's lack of understanding and his rashness are hinted at earlier in the poem and are presented in what Hanna and Klausner agree to be a comic light. In his explanation of the darkness brought on by the supernatural storm, "Hit are þe clippes of þe son, I hed a clerk say," Gawain reveals that a clerk can have more knowledge of the real world than does one of Arthur's best knights. (AA l. 94) And although the creatures of the forest flee from the hellish spectre, the true quarry, Gawain, rushes up to her with a confidence that his sword will be strong enough to protect him (AA ll. 111-12 and 124-25).

⁴⁰ Thiebaux, p. 57.

⁴¹ See Bruce, pp. 47-51 for a discussion of the threatening stranger motif, and see O'Loughlin, p. 527 for a list of Galeron's appearances in other romances.