

From "þe forme" to "þe fynisment":  
Seasonal Passage in  
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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I

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (hereafter cited as *SGGK*) has been unanimously praised as one of the great achievements of Middle English literature. It is no exaggeration to say that the natural or landscape descriptions in the poem contribute to its high evaluation especially in the genre of romance. However, it must be noticed that the descriptions of nature or landscape are not merely peculiar to the *Gawain*-poet, but are in a well-established tradition. Nature is, as I shall present fuller discussion later, delineated as a sort of rhetorical topos in Medieval literature.<sup>1</sup> It is a possible type of formal word pictures conventionally acknowledged as a literary technique. The poets of the Middle Ages, generally speaking, tend not to reflect their individual opinions or philosophy in the nature-descriptions but to elaborate their rhetorical skill in them.

In *SGGK*, however, there is the passage which is hard to regard just as a mere typical topos in rhetoric. It is the description of seasonal passage in the opening lines of the second fit. In order to show us the transition of the plot which bridges the first two fits, the *Gawain*-poet represents a

change of four seasons with lyrical alliteration; winter, spring, summer, autumn, and again winter. Even though he states "And wynter wyndez aȝayn" (530)<sup>2</sup>, before the stanzas on the seasons we hear his murmuring: "A ȝere ȝernes ful ȝerne, and ȝeldeȝ neuer lyke, / þe forme to þe fynisment foldez ful selden" (498-99). To put it plainly, he considers that when another new winter comes around, it is not the same winter a year ago. The two lines illuminate the poet's aphoristic utterance which is far beyond the rhetorical precept. Then what does the *Gawain*-poet intend to suggest by the passage?

Here the human growth of the hero, Gawain, which is one of the main themes of *SGGK* seems to lie hidden in the two lines and the following passage on the seasons. Our concern, therefore, is to examine the relationship between the *Gawain*-poet's view of man reflected in Gawain and his view of transitional seasons depicted at the opening of the second fit in *SGGK*. As a beginning, thus, I will concretely survey the problematic passage of revolving seasons. Next I attempt to illustrate how Gawain develops himself through his fault, then finally explore what exists at the bottom of the *Gawain*-poet's view of seasons.<sup>3</sup>

## II

Before moving on to a closer examination of the problematic seasonal passage at the beginning of the second fit, it is helpful to observe briefly the general idea of nature-descriptions in the Middle Ages as a poetic topos. Nature or landscape is delineated from the poets' viewpoint of conventional rhetoric, that is, as a poetical requisite necessary to make a parade of their literary technique. E. R. Curtius, in his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, gives the name of "topos" to such

descriptions.<sup>4</sup> As example of the topos, he mentions two types of nature-descriptions, "the invocation of nature" and "ideal landscape" called "locus amoenus."

Originally, the former had a religious significance. Classical authors invoke not only gods and goddesses but also natural powers and natural objects such as earth, heaven, streams, winds, sea, or sun. Medieval poets, on the other hand, do not invoke nature but enumerate its components.<sup>5</sup> Such medieval style of enumeration is also found in the topos of the latter, "ideal landscape." The rhetoric of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages determines the ideal landscape of poetry, one of the principal motifs of nature-descriptions. The poets do not represent natural reality but idealize and again enumerate its components. The descriptions of an ideal landscape (generally called "locus amoenus") need routine constituents, for example, blue sky, green trees, blooming flowers, singing birds.<sup>6</sup> Although the level of their quality depends on poet's skill, we frequently come across examples of such "locis amoenis" in many poems in those days. The best-known example is perhaps the ideal garden in *Roman de la Rose* or the famous spring passage in the prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*.

Now let us turn our discussion, with what has been observed above in mind, into the passage of the four seasons which is the point we mainly explore in this paper. At the end of the first fit, the *Gawain*-poet warns Gawain, who has accepted the challenge by the Green Knight, not to flinch from any hardships as a knight (487-90). Then the second fit opens as follows:

A ȝere ȝernes ful ȝerne, and ȝeldeȝ neuer lyke,

þe forme to þe fynisment foldez ful selden.

Forþi þis 3ol ouer3ede, and þe 3ere after,

And vche sesoun serlepes sued after oper:

. . . . .  
 Schyre schedez þe rayn in schowrez ful warme,  
 Fallez vpon fayre flat, flowrez þere schewen,  
 Boþe groundez and þe greuez grene ar her wedez,  
 Bryddez busken to bylde, and bremlych syngen  
 For solace of þe softe somer þat sues þerafter  
     bi bonk;

. . . . .  
 Bot þen hy3es heruest, and hardenes hym sone,  
 Warnez hym for þe wynter to wax ful rype;  
 He dryues wyth dro3t þe dust for to ryse,  
 Fro þe face of þe folde to fly3e ful hy3e;

. . . . .  
 And þus 3irnez þe 3ere in 3isterdayez mony,  
 And wynter wyndez a3ayn, as þe worlde askez,  
     no fage,

Til Me3elmas mone

Watz cumen wyth wynter wage; . . .

(498-501, 506-11, 521-24, 529-33)

The passage of changing seasons above serves the purpose of treating the "locus amoenus" as a literary topos.<sup>7</sup> It is conventionally used for a prologue or division in poetry.<sup>8</sup> To be more detailed, in order to introduce a fresh section of the story or to indicate the division of successive scenes, a "locus amoenus" passage is inserted in poetry, for example, at the prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* or in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.<sup>9</sup> Also in *SGGK* the passage seemingly serves the same function. As a prologue, it is situated at the beginning of the second fit,

where it serves as a division of the plot from the challenge scene at Camelot to Gawain's adventure.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, extending the function of the "locus amoenus" as a prologue, some critics direct their attention to the relationship between Gawain's state of mind and the nature-descriptions in the poem.<sup>11</sup> Describing all four seasons and their revolution, as D. Everett notes, implies the rapid and inevitable passing of the year which appeals to Gawain's anxiety about the confrontation with the Green Knight lying ahead. For him "Time flies" too rapidly like an arrow, and now it is time for his "unious uyage" (535). Hence, it seems explicit that the seasonal passage not only correlates to the structure of the poem's plot, but symbolically expresses Gawain's state of mind in some way or other.

Yet this still leaves a question unanswered. Although the inevitable transition of time symbolizes Gawain's worried mood, the symbolism does not completely express the full range of the aphoristic passage of the *Gawain*-poet in the first two lines quoted above (498-99). Then how should we consider the two lines? As far as I know, many critics seem to regard them merely as a part of following season-descriptions with their lyrical tone. Some few like J. A. Burrow suggest that cyclic and repetitious seasons of the year are associated with human experience.<sup>12</sup> Yet, from the view of the *Gawain*-poet the seasons are, although cyclic, not repetitious. He declares that the "forme" and the "fynisment" of year "ȝeldez neuer lyke," that is, the poet considers that the transitional seasons do not describe the repetitious locus of a circle but that of a spiral whose beginning and ending never mesh.

Noteworthy here is Theodore Silverstein's argument which seems to be the most popular attitude toward the passage in lines 498-99. He

suggests that it is an adaptation from Proverbs and the Latin of Cato's moral distichs: "Laughter shall be mingled with sorrow, and the end of myrth is heuynes" and "When you are happy, beware of misfortunes."<sup>13</sup> The point is that he regards the "forme" as happiness and the "fynisment" as misfortune. In other words, because there exist unknown perils lying in one's future, one's situation is not the same as a year ago, for Gawain happily enjoyed the feast in Camelot but after the swiftly changing year he is now in trouble.

To investigate whether Silverstein's analysis is valid or not, let us attempt to verify the context which leads to the problematic two lines. Before the lines, the poet comments "Gawan watz glad to begynne pose gomnez in halle, / Bot þa3 þe ende be heuy haf þe no wonder; . . ." (495-96). "pose gomnez" signifies the Green Knight's challenge to Arthur's court, who offers to let any man decapitate him by a blow on condition that he may give one in return a year hence. Gawain accepts this challenge of the Beheading Game, since he believes that to decapitate the Green Knight is equivalent to killing him, and so never dreams that he will be in a situation to receive a return blow. This is why he was "glad to begynne pose gomnez." Contrary to his expectation, however, the Green Knight picks his head up cut off by Gawain, and, before the Knight departs, the head bids Gawain to search for the Green Chapel for his return blow. Thus, "þe end be heuy." If Gawain received a blow, it would be impossible for him, who is a mortal, to keep living.

Considering the concept observed above, we may say that Silverstein's argument about the two lines 498-99 seems to be pointless. According to him, the reason for the *Gawain*-poet's view of years which never pass the same twice and whose beginning and ending never coincide is because

Gawain, who was happy last winter, is now in a "heuy" plight. Yet Gawain's gladness already turned to heaviness last winter when he determined to receive the anticipated return blow. Then what actually do these two lines imply?

The clue to answer the question consists in the symbolism of the four seasons and the ages of man. Generally, the cycle of seasons is associated with the ages of man's mutability divided into four as four seasons. To borrow the phrases from the *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, spring corresponds with man's "infancy," summer with "childhood," autumn with "maturity" or "decline," and winter which occupies almost all the seasonal background of *SGGK* (except for the season-descriptions at the beginning of the second fit), with "death" and "rebirth."<sup>14</sup> By way of explanation, the winter season has the double character of man's death and rebirth, in other words, the ending and the beginning of man's life.

Man in *SGGK* is represented by our hero, Gawain. Considering the symbolism of winter's dual value, the ending and the beginning of man's life, it is possible for us to regard "forme" and "fynisment" in lines 498-99 not only as those of seasons which are never the same, but also as the phases of man's, Gawain's life, who changes and develops himself through the poem. Therefore, I will shift my emphasis away from the debatable passage of cyclic seasons to how Gawain grows up from the beginning to the ending of the poem.

### III

Although *SGGK* adopts the basic pattern of the return-motif, which is one of the familiar conventions, especially in Arthurian romance, the way of its treatment in the poem is somewhat different.<sup>15</sup> As a rule, a romance

opens and ends at Arthur's court, Camelot. In addition, a knight sets out from the court for his adventures, finally returns to the court in glorious success. In *SGGK* the story also opens and closes at Camelot. However, unlike other Arthurian heroes, Gawain returns to Camelot not in conventional glory but in self-confessed shame. Through his blunder in chivalry, he realizes his frailty and imperfection, then returns to Arthur's court as a shameful penitent. Let us, for the moment, discuss Gawain's enlightenment through the poem, that is, how Gawain is described at the beginning, "forme," why he commits the failure, and, as a consequence of it, what Gawain learns at the ending, "fynisment."

In Middle English Romances, Gawain seems to become established as a noblest representative of knighthood, as is suggested by Chaucer's "Squire's Tale," "That Gawayn, with his olde curteisye."<sup>16</sup> In *SGGK* Gawain's perfection in all virtues is, for example, suggested by the depiction of his crest, the pentangle called "þe endeles knot" (630). On the surface of his shield (and also on his surcoat) the pentangle is printed, and on the reverse side the image of Mary. The former typifies Gawain's chivalrous virtues, the latter his religious faith. According to the *Gawain*-poet, the pentangle is "bytoknyng of trawþe" (626), and he spends 47 lines to explain its symbolism (619-65). The following is a part of the descriptions:

þe fyft fyue þat I finde þat þe frek vsed  
 Watz fraunchyse and felaʒschyp forbe al þyng,  
 His clannes and his cortaysye croked were neuer,  
 And pité, þat passez alle poyntez, þyse pure fyue  
 Were harder happed on þat hapel þen on any oþer. (651-55)

Gawain is the only knight who has every one of the virtues symbolized by



the pentangle, and hence the only knight who "acordez" (631) with it.

As such a splendid hero, his conduct in the first half of the poem deserves the honor of the pentangle. For instance, when the Green Knight challenges Arthur's court to the Beheading Game, even though "non wolde kepe hym with carp" (307), Gawain alone bravely offers himself to accept the terrible request. Moreover, Gawain's winter journey from Camelot to Bertilak's castle also testifies his courage. He is strong enough to defeat various enemies such as wolves or wood-trolls, and bold enough to persist in his severe journey.

Not only in physical courage as stated above, Gawain also excels in the virtue of courtesy, as is proper for the hero in courtly romance. His supreme courtesy is especially emphasized at Bertilak's castle. For three days, although he comes back at night, Bertilak goes out hunting. And each day, while the host is absent, his wife visits Gawain and attempts to persuade him to accept her love. In spite of her amorous approach getting more open day by day, he refuses her lure in order to observe his loyalty to Bertilak. Yet, while he evades the lady's offer, at the same time, he maintains his manner with complete courtesy to her. Thus, he does not fail in either loyalty to the host or courtesy to the lady.

Despite his fame as the flower of chivalry, however, Gawain commits a serious fault in the knightly code on the third day. His blunder is that he breaks a compact with Bertilak. Gawain and Bertilak agree to exchange their day's winnings at the end of all three days. At the night of the first day, Bertilak presents venison to Gawain, and Gawain returns a kiss to him which is given by the lady. Except for the number of kisses, the outline is almost repeated on the second day; exchange of boar and two kisses.

The crucial moment comes on the third day which genuinely tests Gawain's loyalty to Bertilak, as is hinted at by Bertilak's proverbial statement: "þrid tyme þrowe best" (1680). Before her leave-taking from Gawain's room, the lady who at length abandons her sexual temptation offers him her beautiful green girdle as a keepsake. According to her explanation, whoever wears the girdle, he "myȝt not be slayn for slyȝt vpon erþe" (1854). When Gawain recognizes the magical power of the girdle of protecting its wearer from death, although he has previously said that he will receive no gift from her, he falls into the trap of accepting the girdle. For Gawain, who is anxious about the approaching date of the Beheading Game, the girdle seems to be "a juel" (1856). Gawain is under an obligation to give it over to Bertilak, yet he hides it, and tells a lie at the scene of the exchange of winnings, "[a]s is pertly payed þe chepez þat I aȝte" (1941), and consequently he breaks his compact with Bertilak.

Now Gawain, who is fearful about the confrontation with the Green Knight and, thus, breaks his word to Bertilak, imparts a completely different image from the previous one portrayed as an idealized perfect knight. At the Green Chapel when he realizes his fault (and I shall return to this point later), he confesses that he is guilty of "unleqté" (2499) to Bertilak caused by his "cowardyse" (2379). To put it plainly, Gawain's cowardice makes him afraid of the meeting with the Green Knight, and makes him hide and keep the magic girdle in order to protect his own life, then makes him to lose his loyalty to Bertilak by breaking his faith on the exchange of winnings. Gervase Mathew remarks that the most significant virtues in chivalry are "prowess and loyalty."<sup>17</sup> Gawain fails in these virtues because of his "unlewté" and

"cowardyse."

Changing from a brilliant hero to a coward who has the human fear of death, Gawain begins to show unchivalrous behavior inappropriate to his previous image in several ways. For example, he suffers from insomnia on the last night at Bertilak's castle (2006-08), because his growing fear about the Beheading Game disturbs his sleep. Besides, when he prepares himself to be decapitated at the Green Chapel, he involuntarily flinches a little from the Green Knight's anticipated blow (2265-67). Therefore, after he gets the green girdle, he changes into a coward, or rather to an ordinary man who is weak and has some faults.

At the Green Chapel the Green Knight heaves his enormous ax aloft three times, and only with his third blow he slightly wounds Gawain's bare neck. According to the Knight's explanation, the three strokes are grounded on the previous compact of the exchange of winnings at Bertilak's castle. That is to say, the two threatened strokes are the results of Gawain's loyalty to Bertilak on the first two days and the slight wound on his neck from the third stroke is the punishment for his disloyalty on the third evening. The Green Knight also reveals that he is Bertilak himself, and he purposely left the green girdle to his wife in order to test Gawain's loyalty.

Greatly shocked by the truth, Gawain contritely begins to confess his blunder in the following words:

For care of þy knokke cowardyse me taȝt  
 To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake,  
 þat is larges and lewte þat longez to knyȝtez.  
 Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer  
 Of trecherye and vntrawþe: boþe bityde sorȝe. . . (2379-83)

The Green Knight warmly replies to Gawain that his fault is completely "pured as clene / As þou [Gawain] hadez neuer forfeþed syþen þou watz fyrst born" (2393-94), and praises him as "þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote jede" (2363). Nevertheless, Gawain regards his fault as quite a serious one, and takes an oath to wear the girdle all the rest of his life as a token of his misdeed.<sup>18</sup>

At last, wearing the girdle, Gawain returns to Camelot. Here again we can hear his shameful confession almost similar to the one at the Green Chapel, except for the fact that this time Gawain's confession is a voluntary one. Although it is a part of the return-motif to tell one's adventures to the court after one's return, Gawain's adventure story is not covered with general glory but with "gref and grame" (2502). Finally he shows them the green girdle as an evidence of his unfaithfulness, although the court, comforting him, agrees to consider the girdle as "þe renoun of þe Round Table" (2519).

Gawain, who gallantly departed from Camelot as a pentangle-hero believing in his perfect virtues, now returns as a dishonorable and disgraced knight. Yet, is this conclusion really correct? In other words, is Gawain still a shameful knight after his return to Camelot? It is certain that when Gawain broke faith with Bertilak at his castle he was an unchivalrous coward who lost the most significant knightly virtues, prowess and loyalty. However, since we hear Gawain's confession twice, in which he realizes and repents his fault, and humbly declares that he will wear the green girdle as a sign thereof, it is difficult for us to consider him to be shameful. Rather, he seems to grow up into a more praiseworthy penitent than he used to be, because now he attains modest enlightenment that he is not an abstractly ideal knight symbolized by

the pentangle but a humanly imperfect man who has frailty and weakness similar to us. This is why the Green Knight praises Gawain as "þe fautlest freke" and the court regards the girdle as "þe renoun of þe Round Table."

It is worth noting that Gawain wears the green girdle on top of his surcoat (2486-87), on which the pentangle is inscribed. Now the green girdle is emblematic of Gawain's transgression from the knightly virtues, and the pentangle is emblematic of his pride in them. Thus, the image of Gawain, who realizes his own frailty, putting the girdle on the pentangle signifies that his humbleness overcomes his self-conceit about his perfect virtues. At this stage the girdle and the pentangle together explicitly signify Gawain's human growth.

So far, we have seen that, although the basic pattern of the return-motif is observed in the poem, the image of the hero, Gawain, at the "fynisment" is completely different from the image at the "forme," because of his change and growth.

#### IV

Let us now return to the problematic two lines about the transitional seasons: "A ȝere ȝernes ful ȝerne, and ȝeldeȝ neuer lyke, / þe forme to þe fynisment foldeȝ ful selden" (498-99). When we consider the "forme" and the "fynisment" in line 499 again, with Gawain's mental development in our mind, it would be possible to assume that the two words not only signify the beginning and ending of a year which seldom coincide, but also imply Gawain's beginning and ending in the poem as not according, because of his mental growth.

In order to prove the assumption, winter's dual symbolism, "death" and

"rebirth," must be recalled here. It is emphatically significant that Gawain's adventure which alters his character is delineated in the winter season, particularly before and after New Year's Day. The third day at Bertilak's castle on which Gawain perpetrates his fault is New Year's Eve, namely the day of a year's death. The day when he discerns his fault and contritely confesses it at the Green Chapel is New Year's Day, the day of the year's rebirth. Allegorically, Gawain dies of his misconduct on New Year's Eve, and owing to his repentance for it he is reborn on New Year's Day. Or rather, the former Gawain, who was puffed up with his unspotted virtues, died and then is reborn into the superior man who finds himself out.

Furthermore, the shape of the pentangle also correlates with Gawain's growth. The reason the pentangle typifies perfect virtues is that it has "þe endeles knot" (630), for it is a figure which has five points, and each line overlaps and is locked with another, so is endless everywhere (627-29). The pentangle's endless knot, with no beginning and ending, is untied by Gawain at the crucial moment on the third evening at Bertilak's castle. In other words, despite the fact that the pentangle was regarded as the symbolism of Gawain's ideal quality, he is not a complete knight with no beginning and ending but a man who can transform himself gradually and progressively like a seasonal transition.<sup>19</sup>

It seems reasonable to conclude, from what has been said above, that the *Gawain*-poet intentionally relates transitional seasons to Gawain's spiritual enlightenment which is the heart of the poem. The season-descriptions at the opening of the second fit in *SGGK* fill the role not only of the prologue to the fit as a rhetorical topos of "locus amoenus" but of the prologue to Gawain's whole adventure which leads to his growth. The

two lines, therefore, are a clue to the hero's change, carefully foreshadowed by the poet.

Because of human frailty, no child of Adam can be perfect or infallible, as is expressed in the biblical phrase: "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26. 41).<sup>20</sup> Yet it is possible for him to improve himself progressively by means of realizing and repenting of his weakness. The *Gawain*-poet's view of the seasons, that the year revolves not like the repetitious locus of a circle but like that of a spiral, also holds true in the case of his view of man. For the poet, the life of earthly man is, even though he can never become a perfect being like his supreme God, a sort of pilgrimage toward his moral growth. Gawain's pilgrimage in *SGGK* is presented to the reader or audience in some measure as an example of the life of man.

Generally, poets in the Middle Ages, chiefly in romances, rarely attempt to achieve individual originality, but tend rather to modify details of plots which already exist, or to polish up rhetorical skills as they retell a familiar story. This is why there are often varying versions of the same story side by side.<sup>21</sup> The *Gawain*-poet has an exceptional ability to inject new meanings into old forms, to revivify conventional landscape descriptions by means of his imaginative genius. We can still hear his voice, although faint and feeble, in the seasonal passage I have discussed here, as he invites us to realize that the cycle of the year is not only a rhetorical topos but also a significant illustration of the moral development of the hero.

## Notes

1. Ernst Robert Cúrtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Ser. 36 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953) 92-97, 183-202.
2. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, 2nd ed., rev. Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967). All subsequent references are to this edition and verse numbers are parenthesized in the text.
3. As is generally known, Medieval views of nature, which are linked with the philosophical thinking of the world in the Middle Ages, vary considerably. For the significance of the word, "nature" or "kind," in Medieval literature, see C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge UP, 1967) 24-74. To discuss nature as a whole is beyond the scope of this brief paper, therefore, I have limited our discussion on nature to the modern sense of the word as natural or landscape description.
4. Curtius 92-97, 183-202. He also enumerates many other topoi, such as "topics of consolatory oratory," "historical topics," "affected modesty," and so on (79-105).
5. Curtius 93.
6. W. T. H. Jackson, *The Literature of the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia UP, 1960) 225. Besides, he indicates the relation between love poetry and the praise of spring (8).
7. D. A. Pearsall, "Rhetorical 'Descriptio' in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,'" *MLA* 50 (1955): 132.
8. Tadahiro Ikegami, "The Nature in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Studies in English Literature* 60 (1964): 3.
9. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, based on *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1987) 591 (Text F 128ff); Thomas Malory, *The Works of Thomas Malory*, ed. E. Vinaver, 2nd ed., vol III (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 1119.
10. Concerning the other nature-descriptions in *SGGK*, the winter journey to the castle of Bertilak is a prologue to Gawain's trial in the castle (691-735), the winter descriptions at the beginning of the fourth fit to his journey to the Green Chapel (2000-05), and his journey to the Chapel to an incident at the



Chapel (2077-86).

11. Dorothy Everett, *Essays on Middle English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955) 81-82; Ralph Elliot, "Landscape and Geography," *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997): 107-13. They argue that the winter descriptions at the beginning of fourth fit not only suggest the prologue of the sternness of Gawain's trial, but also imply his state of mind, as being afraid of the Beheading Game on that morning. His journey to the Green Chapel in the scene of natural wilderness symbolizes, according to them, his bewilderment, being anxious for the confrontation with the Green Knight.
12. J. A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the Gawain Poet* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) 101.
13. The original of these quotations in Latin is "Risus dolore miscebitur, et extrema gaudii luctus occupat" (Proverbs xiv. 13), "non eodem cursu respondent ultima primis" (Cato, i. 18). See, Theodore Silverstein, "The Art of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *U of Toronto Quarterly* 33 (1964); rpt. in *Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Donald R. Howard and Christian Zacher (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1968) 183-88.
14. Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976) 408.
15. Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 195.
16. Chaucer 170. In French Arthurian romances, on the other hand, Gawain has evil reputation as a philanderer, who is an expert in love-talking. See, A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970) 198-99; M. Mills, "Christian Significance and Romance Tradition in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *MLA* 60 (1965); rpt. in Howard and Zacher 101-02.
17. Gervase Mathew, "Ideals of Knighthood in Later Fourteenth-Century England," *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederic Maurice Powicke*, ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin and R. W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948) 358.
18. Many critics point out that the dialogue between Gawain and the Green Knight here takes the form of a sort of penance; Gawain plays the part of a penitent and the Green Knight, of a confessor. See, for example, Burrow 106;

Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (London: Associated UP, 1983) 98-99.

19. In other respects, J. J. Mogan points out that in the Middle Ages the image of mutability of plants like grass or flowers correlates to that of human life. See, Joseph J. Mogan, Jr., *Chaucer and the Theme of Mutability* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969) 32-33.
20. The biblical quotation is from the Authorized Version.
21. For example, the two main episodes in *SGGK*, "the Beheading Game" and "Temptation," also have their sources and analogues. See, Elisabeth Brewer, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Sources and Analogues*, 2nd ed. (Suffolk: Brewer, 1992).