

ÇANKAYA UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

MASTER'S THESIS

ASSIMILATION OF THE OTHER
THROUGH FEUDALISM AS THE DOMINANT PARADIGM
in
SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

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JANUARY 2015

Title of the Thesis : **Assimilation of the Other Through Feudalism
As The Dominant Paradigm in
Sir Gawain and The Green Knight**

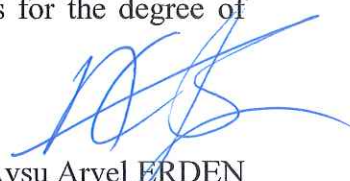
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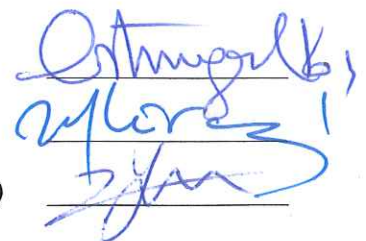
Examination Date : 27.01.2015

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ABSTRACT

ASSIMILATION OF THE OTHER

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January 2015, 77 pages

The socio-cultural changes in the 14th century reach to such a point that the Gawain poet interprets the emerging sets of values as threats towards the feudal order. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* discusses the rising individualist and commercialist traits from this perspective by presenting the condition of the country in terms of historical developments in a broader sense by reminding of Gawain's failure in the 5th century, and discussing the psyche of its time with a specific reference to the role of women. The author's setting the scene in this way enables him/her to discuss political questions regarding the condition of especially Wales, and the text positions the Welsh as the 'other', which must be integrated into the system in order to sustain a unity among the different classes and societies, of feudal order. The author believes that the new sets of values are equal to going pagan, and the aristocracy has for long been in blasphemy since they have lost their purity. Women's participating in politics is regarded as a nuisance which the author believes that the rulers of his/her time are unable to see. In this respect, this thesis discusses how the text presents religion as the solution of the difficulty of integrating the 'other' into feudal hierarchy, the need for the assimilation of Welsh and other social classes, and how the author tries to justify England's colonization project over different territories from Wales to Scotland.

Keywords : Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, feudalism, the other

ÖZET

ÖTEKİNİN ASİMİLASYONU

İşleyen, Onur

M.A., İngiliz Edebiyatı ve Kültür İncelemeleri

Danışman : Doç. Dr. Ertuğrul KOÇ

Ocak 2015, 77 sayfa

14. Yüzyıldaki sosyo-kültürel değişimler öyle bir noktaya ulaşmaktadır ki, Gawain şairi ortaya çıkmakta olan değerler sistemlerini feodal düzene yönelik tehditler olarak algılamaktadır. *Sir Gawain ve Yeşil Şövalye*, Gawain'in 5. Yüzyıldaki hatasını hatırlatarak tarihi gelişmeler açısından ülkenin durumunu daha geniş bir bağlamda sunarak yükselmekte olan bireyci ve ticaretçi akımları bu bakış açısıyla tartışmaktadır, ve zamanının psikesini kadınların rolüne özel bir göndermede bulunarak tartışmaktadır. Yazarın kurguyu bu şekilde oluşturması onun özellikle Galler'in konumunu ilgilendiren politik sorunları tartışabilmesini sağlamakta, ve metin, Gal halkını, farklı sınıf ve topluluklar arasında birlik sağlamak amacıyla sisteme entegre edilmesi gereken feodal yapının 'öteki'si olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Yazar, yeni değer sistemlerinin paganlaşmakla eşdeğer olduğuna inanmaktadır, ve aristokratlar da saflıklarını kaybettikleri için uzun zamandır dine hakaret halindedirler. Kadınların politikada yer alması, yazarın, kendi zamanının yöneticilerinin göremediğine inandığı bir musibet olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu açıdan, bu tez, dini, 'öteki'ni feodal hiyerarşiye entegre etme zorluğunun çözümü olarak nasıl sunduğunu, Gal halkı ve diğer sosyal sınıfların asimile edilmesine duyulan ihtiyacı, ve yazarın Galler'den İskoçya'ya farklı alanlarda İngiltere'nin yürüttüğü kolonileşme politikasını nasıl haklılaştırmaya çalıştığını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, feodalizm, öteki

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1.INTRODUCTION

The pagan world of magic and mythological gods and goddesses, believed to have been discarded and disappeared after the rise of Christianity, comes back in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, demonstrating the poet's reaction against paganism, and his or her concern for true faith in Christianity. As a member of Arthur's court on the one hand, and as a representative of Christian faith on the other, Sir Gawain, the major character of the romance in question, is a figure in between the two respectable institutions of the later Middle Ages, namely the Church and the Aristocracy, demonstrating in his personality the conflict between the two. However, as he mediates between the two feudal institutions and their respective paradigms, the Gawain poet finds the chance to make his/her assertions about the natures of the Church and the Aristocracy: the Church is no longer the ethical jurisprudence for the court, and the Aristocracy, thought to be attached to the pillars of Christianity, is in moral decline. Hence, the author discusses the spirit of his time by harking back to the 5th century; by comparing the intellectual understanding of his time with the time when Christianity, as a fresh monotheistic creed, was spreading in Europe among the various pagan tribes. Hence, the poet's questioning the condition of the court, and the alterations in its relation to religion are the focal points in the text: the birth of Christianity in Europe in the 5th century which caused the paradigmatic shift from the Roman pantheistic belief to the Christian creed (with its moral pillars directing both the aristocratic government and society) is shown, despite some misinterpretations and confusions, to be the epoch making event in history. And what the new paradigm needs, from the viewpoint of the Gawain poet, is the further establishment and sustainability of Christianity in the new paradigm, for the aristocracy, as the poet shows in the text, is prone to turn back to paganism, and hence, to blasphemy. Though the court is supposed to be built upon Christian values, the poet questions to what extent these values have permeated into courtly

life and conduct, and demonstrates in the work that threats of a pagan past towards sincere faith in Christianity still exists.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a work in which the relation between religion and politics is criticized via the juxtaposition of the 5th and 14th centuries' courts. Although the Middle Ages are described as a time of transition, the author portrays how the country has come to its final intellectual climate in his own time, and the failure of the process of transition from the pagan cults to Christian faith by putting Sir Gawain into conditions in which his faith is tested.

Contrary to the early Middle Ages when the main concern of man was otherworldly, and man's relation to God was only through the Church, later Middle Ages, however, witnessed a more humanistic attitude towards life and religion, and also a more increased interest in the worldly affairs. Dissatisfied with the hypocritical practices of the Papacy, the aristocracy in Britain had already posed an opposition to the Church doctrines. The endless struggle of the Papacy for power had resulted in its losing prestige and "although Christianity remained a central figure of medieval life, the Papacy and the Church had lost much of their spiritual authority." (Spielvogel; 2004, p.337) The Gawain poet, having sensed the anti-religious tonality in the 14th century court (a general dissatisfaction with the Church doctrines had arisen by the late Middle Ages mainly due to hypocrisies of the clergy and the aristocracy regarding religion), seems to have interpreted this as a deviation from the mainstream (Catholic) religion, and as blasphemy itself. Hence, the romance has the logic that the court people are going pagan for they have already started seeing faith as a personal relationship between man and God.

The belief that court people have gone pagan dates back to times when, after the decline of the Roman authority, barbarian rulers (or the Gothic tribes) usurped political power in the ex-Roman lands, and Germanic influences were widely seen throughout Europe in the early Middle Ages. In order to secure social order and sustain unity, certain virtues such as loyalty to the lord, dedication to God and Church, personal honour and generosity, were made the pillars of courtly conduct. As a result of devotion to Church, these virtues were broadened to gentleness towards women, the most respected of whom was Virgin Mary. These high standards, imposed upon the warriors serving the court were labelled as chivalry. The

mixture of these ethical codes for warriors gained more importance through the establishment and development of the monarchic states in Europe, and a patriarchal culture was established by the help of Church doctrines. However, this form of culture was criticized by the clergy as attitudes towards women became a matter of discussion especially after the society began to see the corruption of the Church towards the late Middle Ages. The indulgences had already caused the Church to lose its reliability, and the previous strict believers of the Church had begun to see this “holy” institution as a profit-making political body. In addition, serious religious debates about religious doctrines such as “original sin” and the concept of “trinity” had taken place through the medieval period which gave rise to the Great Western Schism¹. In this period, the absolutist approaches of Christian religion and Chivalric code were started to be questioned. Both the English laymen and the upper-classes of society were in a serious conflict in that they felt their bond with nature had been broken, and they had lost their connection with their earlier culture and wisdom. This was the case in England in the 14th century, and the result was a feeling of alienation and anxiety among almost all individuals of all classes in Britain.

Written in the 14th century, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* includes not only the conflicts of a specific period in history (the 5th century), but also the social, political, and religious developments and the related problems till the 14th century. The work comes as a result of the psycho-social condition of the English formed in the following nine hundred years after the 5th century. True, at the beginning of the early Middle Ages, the English were unable to form a unity for they were under the Roman rule. However, in the 5th century, the Romans had to withdraw from England since they were facing serious troubles on account of the Germanic invasions into Italy. No sooner had the Romans left the country than hordes of Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, who were indistinguishable from the Germanic barbarians in terms of their customs, traditions, and institutions invaded the land. The English kept on living in disorder under different rulers’ authority till the end of the period in which they witnessed the change of power into other hands, respectively from the Saxons to the

¹ The Great Western Schism was a period of ecclesiastical division about the legitimacy of different Papal lines between the years 1378-1417. It had varied affects on politics, culture, social life and religion. For a detailed analysis of the period, see Koster, J.R.; Izbicki, T.M. (2009) *A Companion to Great Western Schism*. Brill. Leiden&Boston

Danes. The end of this period was the year 1066 when the Norman rule began in England. The English were faced with different forms of government and political systems during a relatively short period of time in the Middle Ages, and the continuous wars left their traces on the character of the society. The Normans established a strictly territorial feudal system, and reinforced King's powers which led to a clash with the Church as the state became stronger. During the period till the 14th century, the country underwent great social changes due to varied causes such as the change of social strata, the spread of Black Death, and the establishment of courts in which jurisdictions like "trial by jury" were formed. The changes Normans brought about and their different language made the ordinary English feel a serious discomfort since they had lost all their connection with their origins. As the Barons in the new system gained more power, economic distress appeared and soon afterwards, revolts became the common events of the late medieval period. Political struggles and personal ambitions led to the Hundred Years' Wars with the French. Moreover, this period also witnessed a more secular attitude (by the aristocrats) towards religion and Church doctrines which, for a long time, had shaped the social and cultural construction of not only England, but also Europe.

The Gawain poet traces Britain's history back to Rome, and he/she claims that one of the first ancestors of King Arthur is of Roman origin "and far over the French Sea, Felix Brutus, on many broad hills and high Britain he sets, most fair". (Norton Anthology; 2006, p.162) The Gawain poet also connects the Roman history with that of Troy, and regards Romulus as the founder of Rome (2006; p. 162), and by extension, both the Roman Empire and Britain are claimed to have been founded upon conquest and war.² Romans had learned from earlier experiences like Troy, and built a system in which "morality was a matter of patriotism and of respect for authority and tradition. Loyalty to the state took precedence over everything else". (Burns; 1968, p.215) However, the ruling population misused this loyalty, and Rome's many victories led the ruling class to be greedy and autocratic. Due to economic, cultural, and social reasons, the majority of Romans lost their interest in

² From Brian Welter's point of view, "Gawain's soul is in for a big fall, just like a court as naive as Arthur's is prone to the kind of treachery to which Troy was subject", thus making a connection between Camelot and Troy claiming that such a naive court cannot last for long keeping in mind the collapse of Troy. (2000, p. 93)

worldly affairs, and the initial optimism for belonging to the Roman civilization turned, in the closing phases of the pantheistic, and/or emperor worshipping empire, into pessimism. As a result of the Roman religion losing its cultural centrality, those under the Roman rule began to search for new systems and a new spiritual fulfilment. And with the emergence of Christianity in the Middle East, which was then the remote Roman land, salvation and the promise of a better life in the other world were being promised to the ones who were fed up with the decaying Roman ideal.

The emergence of Christianity as the state religion in 380 A.D, and the spreading of the Christian churches into Europe in the following centuries altered all the structures of all the established institution in the West. With the collapse of the Roman Empire, the political lacuna was first to be filled with the Church, and later an allocation of power would take place between the Church and the aristocracy. However, the aristocrats would misuse religion in order to keep their warriors under control, and the clergy would benefit from the aristocrats' need for a moral code that would serve their purposes. Thus, a mutual relation was established between the court and the church in that they both gained from their covenant. Yet, this situation led to different interpretations of religion based upon personal benefits at the end, and hypocrisy gradually preceded over the major virtues of Christianity. The clergy gained wealth by taking their part in politics via religion, and the aristocrats aimed at shaping the religion to fit their personal benefits.

In the romance, however, the Green Knight is depicted as the opposite of the commonly accepted notion of a clergyman. Gawain poet, by positioning Gawain against the figure of the Green Knight (Sir Bertilak), who is depicted as the staunch Christian figure who is half-aristocratic and half-cleric, juxtaposes the unideal against the ideal one. Hence, Gawain is forced to choose between acting according to his court's expectations, and acting according to Christian faith. Despite the fact that the rulers are supposed to act in accordance with religious orders, the poet puts most of the blame on the aristocracy via King Arthur's court. Sir Gawain is, in fact, a pagan unbeliever, and is to be captured in the web through pagan belief in magic. Hence, the trick the Green Knight plays on Arthur's court is to be in accordance with the belief system of the Aristocracy which is paganism. The beheading game is therefore to be interpreted in this respect: it is the poet's trick to attract Sir Gawain to the Green Chapel by way of which Sir Gawain will discover true faith. Though the

pure religion is contaminated by the remnants of earlier pagan faith, still the Church has the power to contribute to the destruction of paganism which is widespread among aristocratic figures like Gawain.

According to Edward Burns, “the early Church was an organism that fed upon the whole pagan world, selecting and incorporating a wide variety of ideas and practices”. (1968, p.259) About the 4th century, Christianity was a minority religion, and it was only possible for Christian values to develop through the aristocracy. As David Petts has pointed out, “it is only with elite groups that any element of agency in the process of religious change is vested; the rest of the population simply passively respond to the power-struggles of an aristocratic minority”. (2011, p.29) The conversion process, rather than being a replacement of old pagan religion with Christianity, was a time of multiple layered belief systems in which the two worldviews existed at the same time. Deborah Shepherd also discusses the early conversion process, and points at the role of elites in establishing the hierarchy of Church administration. For Shepherd, “where elites and towns did not exist, the Church found it difficult to place its pre-formulated structures which were dependent on community support”. (1996, p.1) The gap between the aristocracy and the ordinary man’s understanding of the world was widening. Without support from the community, the elite would have great difficulties protecting their gains from their lands to their achievements.

Sir Gawain acts according to the codes of these elites in his quest. He easily forgets his role as a Christian knight, but still cares for chivalric and pagan ideals. Though true faith requires struggle for religion and its dominion, Gawain is after personal honour and fame, which are the remnants of his pagan past. Contrary to the established religious orthodoxies, the hero is forced to prove his worth as a knight by following the rules of chivalry, whereas he is supposed to be the representative of true Christian belief. The true essence of life is presented by the ruling classes to the British society as religion, yet the contradictory nature of the courtly ideals and religious virtues are embodied in Gawain’s identity in the work.

The essence on which British identity is formed is also central to the work. Pagan societies perceive time as cyclical which means that it has a repeating nature, and it has a close connection with seasons, nature, and agricultural reproduction.

Pagan religions are generally regarded as local, sensual, and libidinous, whereas Christianity is international, ascetic, and moral. Nicole Rice also shows that contrary to pagan ideals in which bodily sensations are elevated, a medieval Christian “shuts out all bodily sensations to ascend toward contemplative perfection.” (2009, p.31) These contrasts between the aristocratic world and the laymen, and between the pagan practices and those of the Church inevitably caused reactions against the new faith which was being imposed upon the society. The society tried to protect and express its own identity through various devices, and unconsciously carried their ancient beliefs inside themselves. David Petts gives an example of one of these early reactions to Church doctrines, and claims that “changes in burial rite are not simply passive reactions to the arrival of the new faith, but carefully constructed responses to these religious changes, building new identities out of the symbolic repertoires provided by the Church.” (2011, p.115) People in the early Middle Ages held onto their own cultures as long as possible, and carried their practices as the pre-Christian modes of expression. Though the society was thought to be built upon Christian values, their attitudes and traditions seemed to have more in common with pagan elements rather than Christian ones.

The reactions against the new faith broadened towards the late middle ages due to social and economic changes. As early as the 6th century, due to the barbarian kings’ incapability of maintaining the organization in their hands and the breakdown of Roman tax system, much of the political authority passed into the hands of nobles and the Church. The growing power of the Church, and moral deterioration of the clergy who began to show more interest in worldly matters more than spirituality, resulted in reactions towards Church doctrines. Many Christians who desired to protest against the worldliness of the Church chose to go to the opposite extremes of the luxurious lives of the clergy. During this period, new understandings of Church doctrines emerged as reactions to the formal exercise of religion. Towards the late middle ages, a great number of English citizens were progressing from Christianity as it was imposed by the Church doctrines to a more personal relationship between man and his spiritual sources. This form of relationship regarded faith as taking an inward direction. As William Mattison notes, “there was a religious conflict of the medieval period in which people gradually would lose trust in the organization of Christianity and begin to worship individually.” (2007, p.20) The individuation

process of religion would cause different types of faith systems. The individuals would neglect one basic feature of Christian belief -care for the other- and develop their own ways of praying. Though the Christian faith requires acting like a community, individualism would cause the majority of people to leave collective movements such as attending the masses.

In the late medieval period, there appeared a tendency to emphasize adventure and conquest, and early Christian ideals were being replaced with the previous pre-Christian ideals which came as a result of the growing dissatisfaction with the absolutist approaches of Church doctrines. During the 12th and 13th centuries, Virgin Mary appeared as a humanizing tendency in religion, and it was widely believed that Mary was not only an ideal woman, but she also cared for the sorrows of mankind due to her tragic loss of her Son. Contrary to the Christian ideal in which life is just a preparation for the life after death, the ordinary man began to care for life for its own sake. Sympathy for the poor and ignorant had risen among the lower classes whereas the majority of the clergy kept leading a wealthy life. No matter how different the demands of the society were, the Church's struggle for power remained as harsh as ever. As Arthur Innes notes, the Papacy engaged in a struggle for power with the secular authority, and nearly every Pope held the belief that "the Church was the champion of the right, and that the triumph of the Church meant the triumph of idealism over materialism." (1913, p.243) The moral decadence in the Church also provoked another reaction which was called "lollardy". Influenced by a powerful thinker, Wycliff, Lollardy defended that relation should be between the individual and his Maker, and it rejected an intermediary authority. This movement carried an anti-clerical tone, and rejected the universally accepted traditional theological doctrines. Similar to the conditions of clergy, the hero also leads a wealthy life, and he cares for his fame in this world rather than getting prepared for the life after death.

Though such movements were condemned as heresies by the Church, the general dissatisfaction continued to exist among many different classes of the society. The Papacy's political moves and demands from secular authorities of various kingdoms from France to England came to such an extent that most Christians felt that the Popes had forgotten their spiritual functions, and become too ambitious for political power. The Papacy's loss of prestige gave way to a nationalist

feeling, especially in England and France. In the 14th century, religious practices and perceptions had changed to a great extent from the Church doctrines that although perfection was the goal of a true Christian according to the established orthodoxies, as Michael Alexander notes, people believed that “the self’s imperfection must be known before the gift of God’s love can be perceived.” (2000, p.47) However, the belief that perfection must be the goal of an individual was a misunderstanding derived from earlier forms of belief. Due to pagan influences, the Christian faith that a true believer has to be humble was ignored.

In addition, these religious changes also came into prominence regarding the perception of women and the attitudes towards women. Pagans understood the world as feminine, and the ruling power for them was ‘Mother Nature’. Conversely, Christian belief has been defined in masculine terms, and the father-son metaphor reinforced the male-male relationship of the two poles of Christian Trinity. Pagan world-views include the bodily sensations as a part of human nature, and sexual acts are ordinary parts of human life. However, Christian ethics turned sexuality into a taboo, and sexual reproduction was regarded as a sin. An example of this understanding, a 3rd century author, Methodius, criticizes sexual reproduction, and claims that virginity is the ideal state of life. Western Church also adopted the Augustinian view that original sin is transmitted by our parents’ sexual act. Hence, women began to be regarded as inferior beings, and as Rosemary Ruether notes, “metaphorical masculinity became tied to intellect and divinity, while metaphorical femininity was linked to the nondivine world of sense and bodily nature.” (2005, p.137) Yet, Ruether also adds that in the 12th century, a separation of the heavenly realm was made and a “gendered dualism” appeared in which Jesus represented “justice”, and Mary “mercy”. This dualism also shows that towards the end of the Middle Ages, man had begun to search for a more “human” religion, and associated the feminine with human. Attitudes towards what is called feminine was changing, and also shaping the social structure of the society in a way which would change the perception of what and how a knight should be.

The word ‘knight’, which is also used to describe Sir Gawain, literally means ‘a warrior on a horse’. The knights were originally not the same as they are described in Arthurian legends or romances. Previously barbarian warriors, the early knights had no clear religious mission or a guiding moral principle. Originally developing

from barbarian Germanic warriors, the class of knights had emerged due to political necessities. As a result of the feudal system throughout the Middle Ages in which land was held by high social classes but production was made by lower classes, royal vassals in control of lands had needed to recruit men for the protection of their wealths and for warrior services. In this respect, it was highly important for these warriors to be loyal to their lords in order to sustain the established mode of production. Since these warriors were originally of barbarian nature, the lords had to find ways to take these warriors under control, and one of these ways which possibly would be effective was to make these warriors believe and feel that they were serving to a greater purpose than just serving to a lord. These warriors' actions had to be refined to become more civilized, and thus the seeds of chivalric knights were sewn. In order to keep these knights together in harmony, the concept of fellowship was imposed upon them. As Alcuin Blamires claims, "if fear of God was the starting point for the Christian life, friendship was of primary significance for ethical behaviour". (2006, p.22) These knights were made to believe that loyalty to their lords was more important than everything else in their lives.

Towards the 10th century, the Church faced the problem of civil chaos and violence against Christians by barbarians and non-Christians. The Church authorities needed to protect church lands and church properties, and the knights would carry a special mission and become the soldiers of Christ for this purpose. These knights would soon be blessed by the Church and in return, they would protect Christian virtues and as a matter of fact, benefits of the Church. Later on, the mission of these knights gained a more spiritual and holy form when they were called to fight against the common enemies of the Christians in the Crusades. Briefly, the manners, chivalry, courtly behaviours, and the nobility of the knights were added in the late medieval world in order to control and bring an order to the originally Germanic warriors. As Michael Calabrese notes, "not until the Church orders and sanctifies powerful violent military men into Christian warriors bound for Crusades do we perceive that odd mix of military and religious identity." (Calabrese in Lambdin; 1996, p.3) However, the religious side of the knights weakened towards the late medieval time, and the social changes left the knights primarily with the courtesy. The knights began to act according to courtly ideals rather than religious doctrines.

Besides, people of the time were seriously questioning both the Church doctrines and the code of chivalry.

Contrary to the common belief that the source of sufferings was religion itself, the fact is that even the aristocrats' and the clergy's actions were based on personal benefits instead of faith, and the main cause for the adversaries covering the Middle Ages was the hypocrisy of the society. No matter how much pressure was put upon individuals, they had not lost their connections with their Celtic roots and pagan rituals. This hypocrisy is what the Gawain poet aims at discussing, and he/she stands on the side of religion. The hypocrisy of the aristocrats and the clergy had caused the society to reject the new faith, and as a result, the newly Christianized population chose to hold on to their former traditions. The changing of attitudes towards religion, women, and the church led to the ordinary man's misunderstanding of Christianity as being the cause of the moral deterioration. This understanding had already appeared when the balance was broken in favour of the courtly tendencies instead of the religious ideals, and the result was the decay of true religious identities. Without religion, the feudal system was bound to collapse. The bond between a lord and his knight was to be broken because of the courtesy taken to its highest. In addition, knights would lose interest in religious affairs, and eventually fight for their own benefits.

The Gawain poet is aware of the possible consequences of following such rules as courtesy without religion, and he/she supports a powerful Church. In this respect, Gawain's fault lies in his strictly following the code of chivalry and his insincerity in following Christian faith from the heart. The author tries to show the importance of purity in life, and my argument regarding the standpoint in the work is that the author's perception of purity is based upon a Christian faith. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a multi-layered text in which the author discusses the dialectical relation among social, political and psychological nuisances appearing due to changes in economic ties between different classes of the society. The rise of commercialism or taking it the way Bright names in her thesis (2003), "the emergence of early capitalism", has led to unfamiliar belief and value systems regarding the clergy, aristocrats and the ordinary men in the eyes of the feudal society. The lately-formed identities have been regarded as a threat to the essence of feudal regime by the author. In the work, these newly established identity forms

constitute the “others”, and due to the struggle between the self and the other, the feudal and the threats against the established orthodoxies, the Gawain-poet has aimed at undermining the potential of new production relations’ results by mystifying the underlying reasons for the social changes. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* presents a world created by the early capitalist trade relations in which there are the others such as the clergy interested in worldly matters, powerful women characters and other nationalities which the British are trying to integrate into their social circle. In order to do so, the other is welcomed into the Arthurian court, which is the most powerful and unified period of the British Kingdom, after it is stripped off from its danger by a process of mystification. The structure of the poem creates the illusion that the threats towards the established orthodoxies do not stem from socio-cultural infrastructure but rather from temporary impacts of supernatural prodigies. The author neglects the emerging changes related with new production modes; instead he/she tries to associate the rise of individualism to the unknown, thus creating an atmosphere of mysticism in which the British society is supposed not to question underlying reasons for the adversities they are facing.

This thesis discusses how *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* takes part in the political sphere of 14th century England, and the author’s attempt to re-formulate the basic assumptions of his/her time regarding the ongoing struggle to overcome the problem of ruling over the Welsh and Scottish lands. As Lynn Arner notes, “a text does not simply reflect the political climate in which it is composed but intervenes in the political terrain and participates in the production of the social formation”. (2006; p.80) In this respect, I will try to show that the Gawain poet tries to justify the assimilation of the Welsh and the Scottish by relating his/her arguments to pre-Christian modes of expression, and by discussing the psychological condition of the society at a deeper layer, the text addresses questions like the role of women in society and its relation with the chivalric culture which the author sees as a devastating digression from the feudal order, and the poet thus participates in the political life by claiming that only a feudal regime based upon Christian ideals can create a unity among different societies which have been under similar threats since the early Middle Ages.

For this purpose, in the first chapter of thesis, I will discuss the relation between chivalry and religion by referring to a historical approach to explain where

the hero is supposed to stand according to the author's point of view. This chapter will demonstrate the changing attitudes of the clergy after the rise of new production systems' influences, and the contrasting elements which are the signs of a secret struggle between a long established and a newly formed set of ideals. In this respect, the clash of varied elements such as the civilized world of Arthur's court, and the wild nature in which the hero sets on his journey, or the contrast between the symbolic items Gawain carries with him during his quest, will serve as the basis for the development of my argument about the changing spirit of time.

In the second chapter, I will discuss the psychological dissociation expressed through myths of a religious nature which Carl Jung describes as a "sort of mental therapy for the sufferings and anxieties of mankind in general". (Jung, Franz, Henderson, Jacobi&Jaffe; 1968, p.68) For Jung, "all mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them". (1991, p.256) These archetypal images have often appeared in medieval literature, and one of these archetypes which has taken its place in the hero myths is the hero archetype. As Joseph Henderson notes, this pattern of the hero myth which we meet in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* "has psychological meaning both for the individual, who is endeavouring to discover and assert his personality, and for a whole society, which has an equal need to establish its collective identity". (Henderson, et.al.; 1968; p.101) In this respect, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a literary work in which both the individual and the society are supposed to discover new forms of identity. In other words, the conflicts in the poem provide a basis for the society an opportunity to face their true identities, and find out the underlying reasons for their anxieties. For this purpose, I will explain the possible psychological background of the work in terms of the Jungian approach, and define the basic archetypal images found in it with a specific focus on the changing role of woman, and its effects on the society's spiritual unity.

In the third chapter, I will discuss the signs of alterations in social life due to economic challenges against the feudal way of life by the rising commercialist traits and early capitalist trends. I will try to set forth that the underlying reason for the testing of Arthur's court, and also the criticized potential calamities awaiting the society stems from economic nuisances in the eye of the author. The hero's adoption of the new values based upon material worth of things brings out the insidious

essence of “the other” economic model which has sneaked into the soul of even the perfect representative of Arthur’s ideal world.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will try to explain that the main reason for the hero’s quest is to amalgamate the British society with “the others”, and integrate new social changes into Arthur’s court, the peak of feudal society. In doing so, the author presents a world in which traditional values and class relations are questioned as a result of the replacement of established production methods and relations with basically commercialist and capitalist ones. By positioning Morgan Le Fay responsible for all the actions in the romance, the author connects the adversaries with magic, and thus combines “the others” with mystery. This mystification process enables a union among the court and politically distinct members of British society such as Wales and Scotland. From this point of view, I will try to show that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a romance which embodies inter-related matters regarding the whole society, and underscores the others by mystifying them. The work aims at integrating the others into the feudal system, and is a warning about the potential threats posed by new value systems derived primarily from economic worth. In this respect, the romance is a defence and celebration of feudalism equipped with purity and Christian values. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* adapts the world of commerce and capitalist actions to the world of feudalism through the lens of Christian principles to help create a common identity and integrate the others into the sphere of established norms which the author feels to be under threat.

2. BROKEN TIES BETWEEN CHIVALRY and CHRISTIANITY

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight embodies three common codes of conduct which are widely seen in romances. These are chivalry, courtly love, and Christian virtues. *Sir Gawain* demonstrates all the three codes: The hero of the text shows the ideal masculinity for a knight according to the chivalric code of conduct as he accepts the Green Knight's challenge against Arthur's court; he also acts according to the commonly accepted norms of courtly love when he rejects the lady's seduction at Sir Bertilak's castle; he demonstrates Christian emblems in his dress and acts like a Christian knight until his virtues are tested seriously. The interrelations among these different codes enable the author to discuss chivalry and its relation with Christianity. Thus, the moral basis of the text is built upon Christian values by showing the code of chivalry as a destructive force when taken to its furthest limits.

Like the other medieval texts such as William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, John Gower's *The Lover's Confession*, or Julian of Norwich's *A Book of Showings*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* presents a moral lesson through the discussion of chivalric and Christian values on which the concept of knighthood is built. In medieval times, the origin of morality was religion, and Church was the only institute which was the one and only representative and interpreter of religious doctrines. However, the social changes towards the end of the Middle Ages brought about an imbalance in the dual nature of the moral basis of knighthood. Regarding the origin of morality, Jesse Prinz discusses the history of morals, and comes to the conclusion that morality is a flexible tool which is constructed by the society; its sources may differ but yet, it can be developed: "If morality is something we construct, then, like other tools, it is also something we can change and improve upon. We can try to reshape moral systems to better serve our current needs, and achieve greater degrees of social cohesion". (2007, p.30) This was the case in the late medieval period when the Christian basis of knighthood was neglected, and there was an increasing

emphasis on the courtly virtues which in time became a preference for courtly, rather than spiritual love. In this respect, the Gawain poet longs for the earlier Christian knighthood rather than the chivalric knight who is after courtly love, and criticizes the weakening of religious values which had once made up the code of chivalry. By brilliantly portraying the future possibilities of what might happen without a chivalric identity based upon Christian values through the clashes between his/her persona portrayed in the disguises of the Green Knight and Sir Gawain, the author warns Arthur and his court about the dangers of any digression from the courtly traditions based upon Christianity. Though declared by the court to have been erected on Christian pillars, these values have lost their connection with religion, and gone in the wrong direction.

2.1. Clash Of Religious And Chivalric Symbols

Throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, some opposing ideas, conditions and sets of rules, such as the opposition between the pagan elements and Christian ones, the familiar atmosphere of Camelot and the wild nature in *Gawain's* journey, or the contradiction between the demands of courtesy and religious preferences which put the hero in a dilemma, are presented not only through the deeds of Sir Gawain, but also in the contexts which the events take place. A closer look at these clashes reveal that the Gawain poet presents the major conflicts and debates of his/her time, such as the struggle between the Papacy and the Kings, the clergy and the aristocracy, and by showing the possible results of certain choices, he/she throws into question the courtly ideals' surpassing religious virtues. The author brings the elements of such ideals with the religious ones on the one hand, and the natural and the spiritual phenomena on the other, and thus shows the "awaiting dangers" for the Arthurian court if they keep their ideals based on religion at the surface level as opposed to the ideals of the Green Knight's court. In fact, both courts share similar traditions in that they try to act according to the customs of chivalry: they both go for hunts; they both are presented as strong unified communities, and women seem to have a powerful influence in both courts. Although Arthur and his knights are supposed to be guided by religious principles, courtesy seems to be ruling principle in the two courts.

The poem opens with a brief history of England, and then moves on to describe King Arthur and the features of Camelot. King Arthur is defined as the "most courteous of all" and his knights are "the most noble knights known under Christ". (p.163) The court is celebrating Christmas, and after describing the organization of the table and the festival held in Camelot, the poem moves on to introduce a surprising stranger who has entered the hall suddenly on his horse. The appearance of the stranger astonishes the court:

There hurtles in at the hall-door an unknown rider,
One the greatest on ground in growth of his frame:
From broad neck to buttocks so bulky and thick,
And his loins and his legs so long and so great,
Half a giant on earth I hold him to be,
But believe him no less than the largest of men, (p.165)

After the poem describes the physical qualities and the greenness of the stranger, it is again the stranger who breaks the silence saying that his name is Green Knight, and he asks for the head of the court and then declares that his intention is not to fight but to find out the court where “courtesy is carried to its height”. (p.167) This knight assures the court that his intention is a peaceful one by saying “you may be certain by the branch that I bear in hand, that I pass here in peace, and would part friends”. (p.167) However, there still remains an inconsistency in the appearance of the Green Knight. Although he declares that his aim is not to fight but on the contrary he has come with a peaceful intention, the weapons he brings with himself constitute a contradiction with what he says. He carries a branch in one hand, a symbol representing peace, and an axe in the other hand, a weapon of war. This duality is also enclosed in the Green Knight’s real identity, since he is in fact Sir Bertilak as this detail is revealed towards the end of the poem. In this respect, the Green Knight embodies the features of both nature and nurture: he is the warring Green Knight representing natural rules, and also an elegant aristocrat, Sir Bertilak, standing for courtly manners. Regarding the duality of the Green Knight, Brian Stone, who discusses the relation between the Green Knight and the myth of the Green Man, associates “the Green Knight’s greenness with the medieval wild man of the woods and the Green Man, a personification of spring and rebirth, whom he understands as a rural deity opposed to Christianity”. (Stone in Frankova; 1995, p.81) Basing her arguments on Stone’s claim, Milada Frankova continues to discuss the connection between the Green Knight and the Green Man, and reaches the conclusion that

The Green Knight is the archetype of death and renewal, a fusion of art and folk ritual, of Roman, Celtic and Christian art and religions, representation of the unity between people and their life on Earth and the notion of

transcendental. The Green Man developed fully in the context of Christian spirituality and emerges as a synthesis of good and bad, inspiration and creativity, the divine and Nature- the archetype of our oneness with the Earth. (1995, p.81)

Although Stone sees the Green Man as opposed to Christianity, the Green Knight, according to Frankova's understanding, has been transformed into a deity in accordance with the Christian virtues. In this respect, this duality becomes the power which enables the Green Knight to put Arthur's court into a test. The Gawain poet deliberately chooses a character with dual personality traits to remind Arthur's knights of their origins; the greenness of the knight both symbolizes his connection with the nature and with religion since the colour green has long been associated with the spiritual or the religious. Keeping in mind the *Green Knight's* words about the courtesy of Arthur's court, the secret aim behind the knight's visit to Camelot becomes visible that he is there to test not the courtesy of the court, but rather to test what he has not mentioned, namely the Christian values which constitute the knightly conduct and which Arthur's court is supposed to be built upon. The author via the Green Knight aims at forcing Arthur's court to face the nature and the natural. In doing so, the poet aims at testing the sincerity of the court's faith when confronted with unexpected incidents and with the unknown. The writer makes Camelot and Arthur's Court face the unknown by using the Green Knight. The intruder knight, at a superficial level in which the only consideration is done in terms of physical qualities and courtly behaviour, seems to be just the opposite of Arthur's court and his knights.

At first glance, the Green Knight seems to have come out of this world; he seems to have no connection with the civilized world, and does not fit into the standards of the highly cultivated Camelotian way of life. Yet, at a deeper level, both sides have many things in common such as the courtesy and the chivalric ideals which will be portrayed in the intruder's other identity as Sir Bertilak. In this respect, William Goldhurst believes that "the major theme of Gawain and the Green Knight is the idea that the primitive and sometimes brutal forces of nature make known their demands to all men, even to those who would take shelter behind the civilized comforts of court life". (Goldhurst in George; 2010, p.31) That the forces of nature

make their demands known is a part of the meaning of the quest which the hero is supposed to find out on his own. At the same time, this is where the Gawain poet presents his perspective about how the relation between man and nature should be. Hence, the author aims at reminding the audience and the court that humans must be the masters of these forces, and learn how to beat their instincts; this is what the Gawain poet expects from a true Christian, and from Gawain as the representative of Camelot.

Shortly after Arthur and the Green Knight meet, the Green Knight proposes a game, and reminds the court that his intention is not to fight since he calls the knights of Arthur's court as "beardless children". (p.168) Through the Green Knight's words, the Gawain poet refers to the immaturity of Arthur's court. The author expresses his/her belief that the naivety of the court has to be overcome and so, he/she tries to teach a great lesson to these "children" by making the *Green Knight* test Arthur's court. For this purpose, the Green Knight challenges the court saying "but if you be so bold as all men believes, you will graciously grant the game that I ask by right". (p.168) The Green Knight's challenge is a beheading game in which an exchange of blows on the neck will take place after "a twelve month and a day" from the first blow. (p.168) The Green Knight's dare does not receive any replies until he blames Arthur's court of cowardice: "Now are the revel and renown of the Round Table, overwhelmed with a word of one man's speech, for all cower and quake, and no cut felt!" (p.169) At first, Arthur steps forward to accept the confrontation, but Gawain claims the trial as his own, asserting that he is the "weakest" of all and his loss of life would be the "least of any". (p.169) Sir Gawain acts in accordance with the chivalric ideals by accepting the challenge and also in accordance with the Christian virtues which demand humility since he claims himself as the weakest of all. However, the hero's indifference to human life which finds its expression in his beheading a man-though half giant-, shows that the hero's main concern is not Christian virtues, but the code of chivalry. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight make a deal to exchange blows, but the terms of this agreement require the hero to search for and find the Green Knight on his own. The Green Knight's labelling the beheading challenge as a game portrays that the Green Knight and thus the Gawain poet's intention is not to destroy Camelot and the values it is built upon, but to test those "beardless children" who claim to represent true chivalric values and perfect Christian virtues.

The Green Knight receives the first blow from Sir Gawain and his head rolls on the floor. To the surprise of the court, the receiver of the blow picks his head up from the floor, and reminding Gawain of the deal they made, he leaves the hall. This motif of beheading game in which the stranger picks his head up and stays alive, in fact, belongs to a common pagan myth. It is believed to represent the seasonal cycle and is seen as the manifestation of harvest and vegetation (or death and life) in nature. Mattison also calls attention to this phenomenon by saying that “this beheading is a reference to an ancient Celtic beheading game as a part of the annual harvest celebration. The crops grow back each year, as did the Green Knight’s head in this case”. (2007, p.10) Similarly, Gawain is supposed to go through a transformation process, and grow in a twelvemonth and a day. However, although as true Christians are thought to pray after they face such an unbelievable incident like the beheading and yet survival, Arthur’s court acts as if nothing has happened, and keeps on having fun. The head of the court tells Guinevere that such “crafts are becoming in Christmastide” and turning towards the table

The Good King and Gawain, and made great feast,
With all dainties double, dishes rare,
With all manner of meat and minstrelsy both,
Such happiness wholly had they that day in hold. (p.172)

The Gawain poet thus brings a criticism to the sincerity of Arthur’s court towards religious virtues, and portrays that these merits are only lip service for the court.

The beheading game also causes a flaw in *Gawain’s* belief system. By accepting the *Green Knight’s* challenge, and cutting his head off, *Sir Gawain* acts in accordance with the code of chivalry which demands courage, loyalty and honour from the members of the court. Yet, contrary to the demands of chivalric code in this situation, Christian virtues require care for human life, and as a Christian knight, *Gawain* is supposed to transform the challenge into a harmless one. As Victoria Weiss points out, “the potential lethality of Gawain’s blow is his first failure, as it demonstrates a patent lack of Christian concern for human life”. (Weiss in Sharma; 2008, p.168) Thus, the Gawain poet presents the contradictory nature of two

absolutist codes, and the impossibility of fulfilling their perfectionist demands at the same time.

The hero's first indifference to human life becomes a contradictory action which shows that even the best knight can act according to different sets of rules under certain conditions. When the subject matter is someone else's life, Gawain does not bother for long to risk the stranger's life but on the contrary, he values his knightly identity and valor over everything else. This discrepancy shows that even the best knight can act according to different sets of rules if his attachment to these norms is at a superficial level. Miriam Alanen interprets Gawain's acceptance of the challenge from a different perspective, but also comes to the point that Gawain's choice can be based upon the two contradictory reasons. Alanen moves from Peter Abelard's intention theory³ of 12th century, and claims that a man's actions should be evaluated in terms of their intentions. According to Alanen, "Gawain's intentions in accepting this challenge could have been to save his uncle from having to behead the Green Knight or be beheaded himself, or it simply could have been an act intended solely for the recognition and fame it would bring him". (2011, p.4) Though Alanen claims that one intention is selfish and the other is virtuous, neither of these intentions leads Gawain towards a better condition spiritually.

The Gawain poet criticizes chivalric ideals which are not fulfilled for the love of God, but rather for some social demands. The reaction of Arthur's court is also a clue for Gawain poet's interpretation of the chivalric code. After Gawain gets prepared and sets out for his journey, the courtiers mourn for him fearing his fate:

His equal on earth can hardly be found;
To have dealt more discreetly had done less harm,
And have dubbed him a duke, with all due honor.

A great leader of lords he was like to become,
And better so to have been than battered to bits,

³ According to Abelard's theory of intention, the moral worth of an action is determined by the agent's intention. See: Peter King, *The Modern Schoolman*, 1995, 213-231

Beheaded by an elf-man, for empty pride! (p.176)

This criticism also shows the Gawain poet's attitude towards the chivalric ideal, and demonstrates that the author finds this code unrealistic and out of reach of human beings. Following the chivalric code without questioning results in an empty pride, which leads Gawain to devastation, and this makes the courtiers sinners in the poet's eyes. As Carolyne Larrington points out, "the pursuit of honour will always need to take account of the pleasures and emotions of the private domain, of that most deeply-rooted instinct in human nature, the desire for self-preservation." (2009, p.21) The author shares a similar point of view and sees the possible consequences of the chivalric code and its contradiction with the basic instinct to survive, and by making the courtiers mourn for Gawain, the author reminds the audience of the fact that a true Christian should have a care for life no matter what any other code of conduct demands. Though chivalry requires the hero to perform such an act, death seems inevitable for him when the terms of the agreement are considered, which Gawain must have considered and have tried to find a moderate solution. It is by no means an agreement of beheading game at first but rather an agreement of exchange of blows which can be fulfilled by hands instead of weapons. As Weiss points out to this common misinterpretation of scholars⁴, "Gawain, in his impetuous desire to demonstrate his knightly valor and to rescue his uncle from a dangerous challenge, fails to see that he can fulfill the terms of challenge and still spare lives". (1976, p.364) Furthermore, Gawain's beheading the Green Knight poses a great contradiction with the mercy the Green Knight portrays at the end of the poem when he refrains from beheading Gawain even if he had a chance to do so.

The Gawain poet also spares a long part for the description of Gawain's clothing before his departure from Camelot. The items Gawain takes with him are also highly symbolic. An important symbolic item in the poem is his shield, and a long passage is spared for its description. The author associates the emblem on the shield both with Solomon and Christ:

⁴ Weiss takes attention to the meaning of the word "bur" as being "strike" or "blow", which can also be fulfilled by hand; thus the choice is up to Gawain, whether to strike a hit by hand or strike a blow. It is Gawain who chooses to chop the Green Knight's head to prove his valor.

Then they showed forth the shield, that shone all red,
With the pentangle portrayed in purest gold.
[...]
It is a sign by Solomon sagely devised
To be a token of truth, by its title of old,
[...]
And all his fealty was fixed upon the five wounds
That Christ got on the cross, as the creed tells; (p.175)

The pentangle holds deep spiritual meanings for a medieval knight⁵. The five points of the pentangle, or for the Gawain poet names it as the “endless knot”, holds varied attributes from the five wounds of Christ to Gawain’s five senses and Gawain is thought to embody all these fives. However, the pentangle as it is attributed to Solomon also carries other meanings beyond Christian values since the emblem has been used in magical practices. Richard Green asserts that “documentary evidence for Solomon’s pentangle in the Middle Ages concerns its use in magical practices that were systematically condemned by the Church”. (Green in Hardman; 1999, p.247) Phillipa Hardman also discusses other possible attributions made to the pentangle, and he comes to the conclusion that a shield has the double function of warding off evil and revealing the bearer’s identity, so “it would seem in principle quite appropriate for the pentangle to be seen both as the cognizance of Gawain, the perfect knight, and as a magical symbol used to ward off evil”. (1999, p.247) Moreover, Larissa Tracy also discusses the possible meanings of the pentangle, and makes a connection between the pentangle and the divine feminine who is in this case, Morgan le Fay: “Intertwined with the residual elements of Celtic paganism, in which there are many figures of feminine divinity, the pentacle may have become a symbol of the pagan Goddess, who occasionally appears in medieval literature as Morgan le Fay”. (2007, p.35) The attributions made to the pentangle make it a complex item which must be examined from varied perspectives. The author chooses this emblem to display that the Arthurian court consists of the attributed meanings,

⁵ The pentangle represents five wounds of Christ on the cross, five joys of Mary, five virtues or five senses. See Gerald Morgan *The Modern Language Review* Vol.74 (1979)

and still has not achieved to sever all ties with their earlier customs derived from their pagan past.

The Gawain poet chooses an emblem which is associated with pre-Christian myths and traditions for the perfect knight instead of presenting an emblem which can be directly associated with Christianity such as the “cross”. Though the pentangle carries magical associations with goddess figures in pagan rituals, and is regarded at the same time as an emblem of truth, the Gawain poet also adds a Christian aspect to this symbolic item. Using the five lines and points of the pentangle, the poet can add the “fives” related with Christian and knightly values such as friendship, generosity, chastity, courtesy, and piety, and thus draws parallels between different religious traditions. In this respect, the unity of the pentangle is achieved only if all the elements are in accordance with each other. However, the poet’s association of the emblem with both pagan and Christian religions result in a broken unity of sincere faith since the two codes demand different values. Similarly, Lenka Adamkova attracts attention to the pentangle in that the stability of the virtues attributed to the pentangle are interdependent; that is to say, one virtue cannot last without the other, and Adamkova thus sees the pentangle as a criticism of the absurdity of chivalric code: “if one side of the pentangle, one virtue, is broken, the sign is no longer endless or united, and that the hero failed to observe the four remaining virtues as well.” (2009, p.43) Taking the possibility of failure in one of the attributed virtues to the pentangle, Adamkova concludes that “the failure of Sir Gawain proved that it is not in man’s power to observe the strict rules at all times, and that the code of chivalry cannot prevail forever.” (p.43) Though the Gawain poet shares the same idea that the chivalric code shall not prevail, his/her rejection is not at the point of following strict rules, but rather he/she tries to discuss where these rules stem from. The emblem is only an “endless knot” so long as the virtues attributed to it come from religion.

The Gawain poet carries the contradictory nature of the emblem a step further by presenting the portrait of Virgin Mary “on the inner part” (p.176) of Gawain’s shield. The natural and instinctive elements of life which are regarded as feminine aspects of humans are introduced into the poem by the mentioning of five joys of Mary:

That all his force founded upon on the five joys
That the high Queen of heaven had in her child.
And therefore, as I find, he fittingly had
On the inner part of his shield her image portrayed, (p.176)

In the medieval world, Virgin Mary was believed to have felt a special sympathy for man due to the loss of her son, and thus the Gawain poet creates a connection between the natural and the spiritual; Mary, as a woman, represents the care for human life, and femininity is linked to the natural, the worldly. On the other hand, Mary, as the Queen of heaven, represents the other worldly and the spiritual. The Gawain poet shows the inappropriateness of bringing together the pentangle and Virgin Mary, and criticizes the need for pagan rituals in the understanding of nature and instincts. The religion gives whatever is needed; both the natural and the spiritual in Virgin Mary's identity.

The contrasting elements are also seen in Gawain's journey to the Green Chapel. Gawain has to undergo the hardships throughout his journey all alone and without knowing where to go. This quest, in fact, is a spiritual one and the hero has to learn that he is responsible for his deeds. As a knight he has to make the choices, and he

All alone must he lodge through many a night
Where the food that he fancied was far from his plate;
[...]
Many a cliff must he climb in country wild;
Far off from all his friends, forlorn must he ride;
[...]
Near slain by the sleet he sleeps in his irons
More nights than enough, among naked rocks, (p.177)

Gawain is now away from the civilized world where he enjoyed the abundance of food and courtly manners. The world outside is alien to him. This journey itself is also a test in which he meets a new world which is unfamiliar to him.

His guiding principles such as his courtesy and bravery are of little help to him. The hero is on the verge of starvation in nature, and it seems as if the lack of food is a retribution for the abundance of food in Camelot. He has to learn to become humble and overcome his natural urges. As Marije Pots notes, “only a year ago, Sir Gawain was celebrating with all the other knights, his king and his queen in the Great Hall, and now it seems that the cold reality of outdoor life has harshly woken him up from that dream”. (2005, p.25) Pots comes to the conclusion that Gawain’s quest for the Green Chapel “shows him what life can also be like”. (p.25) Arthur’s brave knight faces other possibilities of life, but the real expectation of the author from the hero is that no matter how hard the conditions may be, he pray all the time even in circumstances which seem to be desperate.

The Gawain poet shows this expectation when at a desperate point Gawain prays for help to find a harbour:

And therefore sighing he said, “I beseech of Thee, Lord,
And Mary, thou mildest mother so dear,
Some harborage where haply I might hear mass
And Thy matins tomorrow- meekly I ask it,
And thereto proffer and pray my pater and ave and creed.” (p.178)

Gawain’s prayers are immediately answered, and he reaches Sir Bertilak’s castle. Nothing else but prayer can help even in the wildest nature, and only when Gawain prays, can he then find a shelter to fulfil his intention to pray. When the hero reaches the castle, he is welcomed by the courtiers since he is regarded as the representative of the most esteemed courtly manners and courtesy. The courtiers’ expectations are clues of what Gawain is supposed to fulfil, and what is held dear seems to be courtesy rather than faith. The courtiers believe that

Now displays of department shall dazzle our eyes
And the polished pearls of impeccable speech;
The high art of eloquence is ours to pursue
Since the father of fine manners is found in our midst.
With command of manners pure
He shall each heart imbue;

Who shares his converse, sure,
Shall learn love's language true. (p.181)

Gawain is expected to show the true language of love and display a perfect model of courtesy since his reputation as the perfect knight of the civilized world requires. Larrington also notes that “the clear connection between women and courtesy translates into the requirement for the knight to cultivate civilized values in order to secure romantic love, and thus guarantee his heteronormativity.” (2008, p.46) Since the Arthurian court defines itself as the highest representative of courtly ideals, this expectation from Gawain is reasonable but yet, it will soon put him in a troublesome position. The hero is supposed to follow courtly manners, and love talk is an important part of courtesy which the chivalric code of conduct imposes on him. Discussing the role of the girdle, Roy Luizza claims that it “is the proper symbol of Gawain at the end of the poem precisely because it is a conventional sign- like the name Gawain, the emblem of perfect knighthood, its meaning is determined not by what it is, but what it is said to be.” (1989, p.47) In this context, Gawain is said by the courtiers to be the perfect representative of courtly talk and he is supposed to serve his ladies according to the courtly ideals. Cindy Vitto comments on the position of Gawain when he is forced to follow the strict rules of chivalric ideals in the seduction scenes by the lady of the castle: “Although Gawain believes that his quest involves a physical challenge, the real contest is a linguistic one, and without doubt he loses (as any mortal man would; witness Adam and Eve) to the woman, who by nature has a deceiving tongue”. (1999, p.12) Gawain loses in love talk when his codes of conduct are turned against himself; Christian virtues require women to keep silent, and general understanding of women by the church is a negative one yet the chivalric code puts the emphasis on courtesy, and neglects the religious standards. Gawain poet forces the nature of the chivalry to its limits, and shows the possible dangers of such a code without religion.

The poem goes on to describe the seduction scenes in Gawain's bed where he is visited by the lady of the castle after the host, *Sir Bertilak*, and *Sir Gawain* make a covenant in which they agree to exchange their gains through the day. *Sir Gawain* seems to have forgotten to pray as he had promised before he found Bertilak's castle, and after a courtly talk with the host of the castle, he has gone to rest where he will

face the challenge which will determine how sincere the hero is about the codes of conduct the Arthurian court claims to follow. In the seduction scenes, Gawain's behaviours are shaped by a common theme in romances, the courtly love tradition, and this is where the Gawain poet brings his main criticism. The development process of the courtly love theme will help understand what the Gawain poet criticizes. De Rougement gives a brief explanation of the emergence of courtly love:

Courtly love came into existence in the twelfth century during a complete revolution of the western psyche. It sprang up out of the same movement which forced upwards into the half light of our human consciousness, and into lyrical expression by the human spirit, the feminine principle of Shakti, the worship of Woman, of the Mother, and of the Virgin. What makes it intelligible to us today are its historical signs or marks- its literally congenital connexion with the heresy of Cathars, and both its surreptitious opposition and its overt opposition to the Christian conception of marriage. (De Rougement in Jeffrey;2010, p.517)

Medieval marriage, in fact, had nothing to do with love and the main concern of marriage was politics and reputation. Any form of sexual act was regarded as a deadly sin if it was done with pleasure and not as a form of duty. The courtly love tradition developed especially in the secular realm of the courts as a reaction to the Christian understanding of marriage and love. Natural urges were taken for granted as possessing higher redemptive powers than the hypocritical sacramental marriages in Church, and those with the noble heart could achieve this form of love. Lena Petrovic summarizes the condition saying "what began as a defiance of the official religious norm grew into a rival religion itself- Religion of love, from whose spiritual fire the lover received the same nourishment as the lover of God received from the bread and wine of the sacrament." (2000, p.132) In time, this movement turned into a sublimation of women, and their love became dangerous to accept, and at the same time difficult to reject. The theme gained an erotic tone and became a mixture of pagan and Pelagian Christian ideas which were consistent with the movement. However, its paganism and erotic nature raised some problems in the medieval society, and courtly love theme was modified into something more suitable with both Christian and pagan ideals. As Theodore Silverstein notes, as a reaction to the problems raised by this form of courtly love, "one of the countermovements was the

modification of courtly love to something more in keeping with Christian knighthood. Such a knight, while following the social manners and principles of courtly love, might take Virgin Mary as his lady". (1965, p.23) Though the early movement of courtly love seems to have aimed at elevating the spiritual form of love, it resulted in an erotic tone of love between a lady and a lover knight. Loyalty to the lords could be ignored, and though the knight seemed to take Virgin Mary as his lady, the spiritual dedication was not felt deep in the heart but just done as a form of old tradition the meaning and importance of which had long been forgotten. The Gawain poet aims at showing the absurdity of the chivalric ideals on the matter of courtly love, and the incompatibility of the courtly love tradition with a true religious identity.

This is the moral basis of Gawain's condition and he is trapped by his own codes of conduct when the lady visits Gawain to "seduce" him. Visited by the lady three nights, Gawain receives kisses every night although he tries to reject the lady kindly, and on the third night he receives a girdle from her. On the first night, when Gawain rejects the lady, the seductress blames him for not being the traditional knight and reminds him of the chivalric ideals that Gawain seems to represent:

So good a knight as Gawain is given out to be,
And the model of fair demeanor and manners pure,
Had he lain so long at a lady's side,
Would have claimed a kiss, by his courtesy,
Through some touch or trick of phrase at some tale's end. (p.189)

Gawain is confronted with his own code of conduct, and the roles have changed by the lady's blame. Though women are regarded as the subjects of desire in a courtly relationship as Gawain is used to, this time Gawain himself becomes the object of desire, and the lady is located at the centre. Through seduction, the lady reshapes gender relations, and feminine desires assume priority in this relation. Geraldine Heng shares a similar view and states that "by definition, the ideal knight is dedicated to meeting feminine ends and purposes.[...] The object of masculine desire, the Lady's words purposefully suggests, should consist in a willing submission to the female will". (1992, p.112) The lady, by imposing an ideological

trap, makes Gawain obey her rules, and the hero surrenders to her seduction by accepting the kiss.

On the third night, Gawain also fails in one more test. The lady insists that Gawain tell whether his heart is held by another woman, and Gawain explains that his heart is held by the “Lady”. (p.198) Shortly after a brief talk, the lady proposes to give Gawain a girdle which she claims to have magical powers:

For the man that possesses this piece of silk,
If he bore it on his body, belted about,
There is no hand under heaven that could hew him down,
For he could not be killed by any craft on earth. (p.200)

By associating the girdle with magic, the lady achieves to enter into Gawain’s spiritual sphere, and succeeds in transforming the hero’s guiding religious principals into magic and the mystical.

The lady tries to seduce Gawain, and she is finally successful. Gawain does not remember Mary, his “Lady”, but instead he accepts the gift from the lady, and he fails to be sincere in his faith. Gawain’s guiding codes of conduct are put to test, and thus the Gawain poet suggests the impossibility of acting through such high standards. The two codes of conduct, chivalry and Christianity, are arrayed against each other, and Gawain is forced to make a choice between the two absolutes. Furthermore, one choice comes to mean disregarding the other. Not only the two codes are in contrast, but also the chivalric code itself starts causing problems. Gawain can find no way out when the lady demonstrates the attitudes that are not in accordance with any form of courtesy. Regarding the condition in which the hero is, Bill Phillips comments on the chivalric code as being absurd since it puts Gawain into a difficult situation. He also notes that just like Gawain has done, we must ask ourselves “to what extent must the code of chivalry towards women be respected when the lady herself seems to be unworthy of it.” (2004, p.18) Gawain has been put into a test in which he has to make a choice between the true Christian faith and the chivalric ideal, and he fails to act like a true believer. When faced with the lady of

the castle, he forgets his “Lady”, Mary, and his choice is that of courtly love rather than spiritual love. As Lili Arkin puts it, “by positioning The Virgin Mary against Morgan and Bertilak’s wife the Gawain poet points out the conflict between courtly love and spiritual love which he, and other critics of the time, felt had drastically weakened the religious values behind chivalry.” (1995, p.1) The religious knight becomes the knight of the lady when confronted with a true test without realizing where his fault lies.

The romance goes on to describe Gawain’s arrival at the Green Chapel after his acceptance of the girdle, and Gawain’s first reaction towards the chapel is a negative one. He sees the place as a “chapel of mischance” and an “accursed country church.” (p.206) The Chapel is located in a cave covered with grass and sharp rocks, and it makes a direct contrast with the churches of the civilized Christians. In this respect, the chapel seems to be a part of nature, and differs from the man-made churches. In the chapel, Gawain meets the Green Knight, and he receives three blows the third of which leaves a small cut on his neck. The Green Knight explains the reason why the third blow cut Gawain’s neck as Gawain’s disloyalty to their covenant for Gawain did not keep his promise, and hid the girdle from the Green Knight:

For that is my belt about you, that same braided girdle,
My wife it was that wore it; I know well the tale,
And the count of your kisses and your conduct too,
And the wooing of my wife-it was all my scheme! (p.210)

No sooner does the Green Knight explain about the true nature of Gawain’s adventure than Gawain feels a great shame. Perceiving the girdle as a token of his faulty conduct and ensuing shame, Gawain confesses his misdeed. In Gawain’s eyes, the girdle is an item which made him fall prey to a woman just like those who had fallen prey before, from “Adam” to “Solomon” and “Samson” to “David”. (p.211) Though Gawain is in shame, the Green Knight announces him free of sin, and thus the Gawain poet attributes the role of a priest to the Green Knight. From this perspective, Gawain’s confession carries importance only when it comes from the heart. It carries a meaning so long as it is done without a socially organized code of conduct but done for God’s love. The Green Knight makes it clear that Gawain does

not need to feel ashamed, but Gawain cannot grasp the meaning of the test. As Tison Pugh notes, “shame is linked to the failure of masculinity to protect the heroic identity of the protagonist” and this is how Gawain understands the situation. (2008, p.133) He fails to protect his masculine identity, but this is exactly where his fault lies because the Green Knight tries to show that there is no need to prove a masculine identity, and no code can prevail when confronted with the natural urges.

The Green Knight, in this sense, becomes the higher authority who judges and sees it natural for Gawain to place trust in a so-called magical item when his life is in danger. What Gawain cannot understand is that his real fault is following unattainable goals, and that those codes of conduct are the real obstacles against his spiritual fulfilment. In Julie Tomesova’s words, “with the liberation from the constricting rules, with the acceptance of his humanity and with the recognition of his limitations he can cast away his seemingly good false gods and return to the only God, and in doing so he can become a better man.” (2011, p.41) Gawain has to learn that a true believer needs nothing more than his faith. The chivalric ideals, which demand masculine identity to be protected at all times, become obstacles against a sincere faith in God. In order to sustain his courtesy, the hero neglects his religious ideals, and the chivalric code of conduct causes a separation from religious orthodoxies.

In the final part of the romance before Gawain leaves for Camelot, the true identity of the Green Knight and the person behind the whole event are explained to Gawain upon his request:

Bertilak de Hautdesert, this barony I hold.
Through the might of Morgan le Faye, that lodges at my house,
[...]
Morgan the Goddess, she,
So styled by title true;
None holds so high degree
That her arts cannot subdue.
She guided me in this guise to your glorious hall,
To assay, if such it were, the surfeit of pride
That is rumoured of the retinue of the Round Table. (p.211,212)

The Gawain poet presents Morgan as the force behind all the actions, and also the lady who gave the girdle seems to be in control till the very end. However, it is again a man, Sir Bertilak in the disguise of the Green Knight, who decides Gawain's fate, and claims him to be as pure as a pearl. Though the women are seen to be powerful, their impulsive nature is portrayed as evil if the courtly traditions are followed strictly. Gawain feels ashamed for accepting the girdle which shows his newly gained humility, and a male to male bond between Sir Bertilak and Sir Gawain is built upon Bertilak's offer to go back to the castle where Gawain's test had been fulfilled. Though Gawain rejects the offer and decides to go back to Camelot, the Green Knight does not disapprove of Gawain's mentioning of the earlier seductions in the history of mankind, and thus the evil understanding of women are stabilized.

Upon Gawain's return to Camelot, he explains the girdle as an emblem of his false faith and that it reminds him of his lack of a true Christian piety. However, King Arthur offers that all the courtiers should wear a baldric to remind them of Gawain's adventure, and thus Arthur tries to comfort Gawain by turning an emblem of shame into a badge of honour:

This is the badge of false faith that I was found in there,
And I must bear it on my body till I breathe my last.
[...]
The king comforts the knight, and the court all together
Agree with gay laughter and gracious intent
That the lords and the ladies belonging to the Table,
Each brother of that band, a baldric should have, (p.213)

Though the hero still feels shame, Arthur's court fails in grasping the meaning of the test and the possible dangers awaiting them. As Cecilia Liu puts it, the Gawain poet "never intends to present a world where women are powerful, rather, these women constitute a metaphor for other anti-social forces and dangers outside the control of feudalism and chivalry". (2003, p.1) Besides the metaphorical meaning of women as Liu has mentioned, the girdle carries deeper implications than being just an emblem of feminine desire. Though the girdle is regarded as a simple item to demonstrate danger of feminine desire by Arthur's court, it belongs to not

only to Lady Bertilak but to Sir Bertilak and Morgan as well. Bertilak claims the girdle to be his own, in which the case becomes more complicated between Gawain and Bertilak. Moreover, the magical power attributed to the girdle makes it associated with Morgan, and thus the girdle becomes a symbol of all the “others” of Arthur’s court. Ashton, who discusses the queer relations in the poem, sees the girdle as a reminder of all other forms of sexual relations beyond the common norms of Arthurian society, and believes that Arthur’s court cannot see the importance of such an item. For Ashton, “King Arthur’s court laugh at Gawain’s interpretation and collectively renegotiate the green baldric’s sign, never realising that it’s owner is Morgan, [...] one who both seeks to bind and undo” the court’s structuring imperatives. (2005, p.69) Even if Gawain has a sense of shame without really grasping the danger of such a sign, Arthur’s court fail in revealing the implications the girdle carries. The Gawain-poet leaves Arthur’s court without a transformation as “beardless children” since they turn the girdle into a badge of honour by just interpreting it as a symbol of female desire and nothing more than its dangers.

3. ARCHETYPAL IMAGES and THE ROLE OF WOMEN

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan le Fay is introduced to the audience at the end of the work in a relatively short section although it is revealed that she is responsible for all the plotting. However, learning about Morgan as the one behind everything does not create a shocking effect; without losing the flow of the text, the appearance of Morgan is not a surprise at all, especially for those who are familiar with medieval texts and romances. Neither does the dual nature of the Green Knight create a sense of absurdity and chaotic impact. It is as if these characters have long been familiar to the modern society, and they have an impact like somehow all human beings have a connection with them. Deep down inside, these characters make the person feel that they carry a deeper meaning than they seem to have, yet, the individual cannot find an explanation why these figures appeal to himself / herself. The modern reader may find a green creature capable of rebirth nonsense, and claim that a civilized man shall act in a logical way, yet, the plot attracts the reader instinctively, and the reason why seems to be a mystery. The answer is that these mythological figures are remnants of our ancestral past and a part of our unconscious which is a heritage of our evolutionary history. Regarding the dualities in the work, archetypal criticism through Jungian theory is competent to provide further answers to such questions, and thus brings deeper insights in the reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

For Jung, the civilized society has gained a lot like having gained a sense of superiority over his/her spirituality but the price of these gains has been enormous losses, such as having lost connection with instincts, and modern man is still not aware of his losses⁶. Jung makes a comparison between the modern and the

⁶ For an analysis of the gains and losses of modern man, see: JUNG, C.G. et. al. (1968), *Man and His Symbols*, Dell Publishing, United States of America.

primitive man, and sees the primitive as closer to his instincts when compared to the modern man who has learned to 'control' himself. Jung regrets that "in this civilizing process, we have increasingly divided our conscious from the deeper instinctive strata of the human psyche, and even ultimately from the somatic basis of the psychic phenomenon". (Jung,et.al.; 1968, p.36) This civilizing process is the main reason why the reader and modern man cannot explain the aforementioned "somehow".

When it comes to the question of what constitutes these characters that makes them familiar, a deeper look at the Jungian psychology will help explain this phenomenon. Jung describes the main aim of life as reaching the concept of self and developing wholeness. (Jung; 1997) His view of life is not a mechanistic one like that of Freud, and he believes that human behaviour is based not only on past memories, but it also shapes by future goals. Jung defines the unity which embraces all thought, feeling and behaviour as 'psyche', and man try to fulfil the potential of this unity. According to Jungian psychology, the psyche or "the personality is composed of a number of systems that operate on three level of consciousness". (Bailey; 1985, p.111) The ego is believed to operate on the conscious level, the complexes on the personal unconscious and the archetypes operate on the collective unconscious (one of Jung's most controversial but at the same original conceptions). His most important archetype, the self, is responsible for the communication and unity of the mentioned levels of consciousness.

As Edith Whitehurst Williams points out, Jung "reminds us that neither the moral order, nor the idea of God, nor any religion has dropped into man's lap from the outside, [...], but that he contains all this in nuce within himself, and for this reason can produce it all out of himself". (1985, p.47) Jung believes that

The disastrous idea that everything comes to the human psyche from outside and that it is born a tabula rasa is responsible for the erroneous belief that under normal circumstances the individual is in perfect order. He then looks to the State for salvation, and makes society pay for his inefficiency. He thinks the meaning of existence would be discovered if food and clothing were delivered to him gratis on his own doorstep, or if everybody possessed an automobile.

Such are the puerilities that rise up in place of an unconscious shadow and keep it unconscious. As a result of these prejudices, the individual feels totally dependent on his environment and loses all capacity for introspection. In this way his code of ethics is replaced by a knowledge of what is permitted or forbidden or ordered. (Jung; 1991, p.267)

In this respect, the importance of myths and why they have been developed becomes understandable. Similar to the instincts, the collective thought patterns are inherited, and these patterns act almost the same in all of us. The collective thought patterns include primordial images which Jung calls the archetypes, and it is the archetypal images which create the myths. The human mind is organized in a way which makes it possible for the unconscious to make an influence on the whole psyche, and even though one may not respond to the remnants of our ancestral past consciously, these archetypal images of the unconscious still function. These archetypes appear to be functioning under certain psychic conditions, and they lead the self to a crisis by arranging specific circumstances. The archetypes seem to have a therapeutic effect and make the individual question his earlier moral and intellectual level by leading him towards a higher level.

Jung describes many archetypes among which the most important ones are the self, the anima, the animus, and the shadow. These archetypes act simultaneously, and they build up the self. A neglect of the unconscious may result in complexes, and the archetypal images may not function properly. The personality lacks integrity and seems dull if the contents of the archetypes are not interpreted by the individual. In the context of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the Gawain poet presents the testing of Gawain's moral values: Gawain seems to be lacking integrity for he cannot participate in his choices with an established system of his own values. The complex structure of the work finally reaches a resolution not in the plot but in fact, it resolves in Gawain's psyche and his reaction to the spiritual development. The work returns to the beginning at the end, leaving the consequences and a certain resolution to the reader, without giving a hint of Gawain's further spiritual journey. The author creates a sense of development through the hero's shame as a sign of deeper understanding of life but the condition of the court is still left blur due to the laughter presented by the courtiers. Gawain's psyche has gone under some sort of

transformation, which may be carried further, but the court still remains with a feeling of exaggerated pride. In this respect, the resolution comes from inner psychic reactions to the quest through the hero's psyche.

If the characters in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are taken as symbols standing for a spiritual journey instead of being taken as types derived from reality by considering the Jungian understanding of mythological figures as archetypes, the whole Gawain story acquires a deeper sense of interrelation to be interpreted. As the primary source of archetypal images, the contents of the unconscious include common fears, anxieties and provide images for the development of man, which Sir Gawain also confronts in disguise of his dark side, the shadow archetype. As Stephen Manning has discussed in his article, "in the psychological interpretation as the ego's encounter with the shadow, Gawain is the ego, and Bercilak is the shadow, the dark or bad aspect of the psyche". (1964, p.167) The shadow has a dual nature, and embodies both good and bad qualities. An archetype which is derived from the shadow is the trickster archetype, and the Green Knight seems to share a lot in common with the trickster. It is possible to interpret the Green Knight as both a positive and a negative force which creates a crisis for the spiritual development of Gawain. In this respect, Gawain becomes the symbol of the hero archetype who fights against the mythological figures considering the view that "all mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them". (Jung; 1991, p.256)

Joseph Henderson discusses the role of hero archetypes and claims that a common point in the hero myth is the godlike figures which help the hero accomplish his tasks that the hero cannot fulfil unaided. According to Henderson,

These godlike figures are in fact symbolic representations of the whole psyche, the larger and more comprehensive identity that supplies the strength that the personal ego lacks. Their special role suggests that the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness-his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses-in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him. Once the individual has passed his initial test and can enter the mature phase of life, the hero myth loses its relevance. The hero's symbolic death becomes, as it were, the achievement of that maturity. (Henderson in Jung; 1968, p.101)

Gawain is also being tested by the Green Knight, and it is the trickster archetype which forces Gawain to develop his ego-consciousness at first. Like the trickster which has a dual nature, the Green Knight also presents a dual personality. He is the Green Knight and at the same time, he is Sir Bertilak. The duality of the Green Knight is also revealed in the depiction by the Gawain poet that he is “half a giant on earth” and “no less than the largest of men”. (p.165) The trickster is neither an evil nor a good force but instead, it is an expression of the individual’s inner psychic condition, and thus it presents the opposite condition in order to provide a better spiritual integrity. From this point of view, the Green Knight’s appearance in his entrance to Arthur’s court for the challenge also carries the dualism of the trickster archetype. Furthermore, the Green Knight’s intentions seem to carry a double message:

Yet he had no helm, nor hauberk neither,
Nor plate, nor appurtenance appending to arms,
Nor shaft pointed sharp, nor shield for defense,
But in his one hand he had a holly bob
That is goodliest in green when groves are bare,
And an ax in his other, a huge and immense,
A wicked piece of work in words to expound. (p.167)

The Green Knight carries a holly bob and an axe together in his hands, and he does not carry a shield for defence. He also expresses that his intention is not to fight but to offer a game. From this perspective, the axe seems to represent a violent game and war while the holly bob represents peace and tranquillity. This game may be harsh, but the aim is to settle inner peace, and it is the individual who will determine the results of the game. It is Gawain who will play the game and endure the result; he will have to choose between the axe and the holly bob, his reaction to the game will bring him either to peace or to devastation spiritually. The Green Knight’s intention is not to harm Gawain, but to force him make a choice and become a more mature person than he is now.

Besides the physical features, the duality of the Green Knight can also be seen in his actions and personality. The Green Knight shows opposite personality

traits in terms of his two identities as Sir Bertilak and the Green Knight. He even shows different attitudes as a single identity. As the Green Knight, he does not care much for the courtly manners, and his tone of speech is like that of an enemy; he blames Arthur's court for cowardice. However, the Green Knight also shows that he trusts in the sincerity of Arthur's court about the courtly ideals. After Sir Gawain cuts his head off, the Green Knight talks to Gawain to remind him of his promise and shows his trust in their sincerity: "Sir Gawain, forget not to go as agreed, and cease not to seek till me, sir, you find, as you promised in the presence of these proud knights". (p.171) While acting as Sir Bertilak, the Green Knight displays some forms of courtesy, and tries to seem to have established friendship with Gawain. Sir Bertilak tries to make Gawain feel comfortable, shows interest as a host and has a table prepared for Gawain to guarantee he is well-served:

Men set his fare before him in fashion most fit.
There were soups of all sorts, seasoned with skill,
Double-sized servings, and sundry fish,
Some baked, some breaded, some broiled on the coals,
Some simmered, some in stews, steaming with spice,
And with sauces to sup that suited his taste. (p.180)

Although Sir Bertilak tries to show some courtesy and acts in a friendly manner, his so-called courtesy still lacks the required sincerity, and his words and actions seem contradictory. While trying to have Gawain seated next to him, Sir Bertilak catches Gawain from his coat which seems to be rude, but on the other hand, he expresses his gladness for having a meal with Gawain. There seems to be some form of friendship established on the surface, but at a deeper level, the tension between the two can be felt:

The lord catches his coat, and calls him by name,
And has him sit beside him, and says in good faith
No guest on God's earth would he gladlier greet.
For that Gawain thanked him; the two then embraced
And sat together soberly the service through. (p.181)

The archetypal qualities of the Green Knight are delineated in various events throughout the poem. For Jung, “the concentration and tension of psychic forces have something about them that always looks like magic: they develop an unexpected power of endurance which is often superior to the conscious effort of will”. (Jung; 1991, p.219) The unexpected and mysterious nature of psychic events is true for the archetypal images since they are a part of the unconscious. The archetypes contain a form of life energy and the creative forces of the nature inside themselves. These images seem to have a divine power which makes them to be perceived as magical, and man feels that he cannot stand against the power of these symbolic images. The Green Knight shows such signs as power and life energy when he first enters Arthur’s court. The courtiers are astonished by the Green Knight’s ‘magical’ authority and power:

Such a mount in his might, nor man on him riding,
None had seen, I dare swear, with sight in that hall so grand.
As lightning quick and light
He looked to all at hand;
It seemed that no man might
His deadly dints withstand. (p.166)

Besides his physical strength, the Green Knight’s power is associated with the powers of nature like lightning by the Gawain poet. The knight’s colour also links him to nature, and thus provides the Green Knight a power beyond human limitations. The Green Knight can pick his head up and survive after the beheading which can be associated with the trickster’s re-creative life energy. It is this magical authority and energy that Gawain surrenders to and loses all control over his so-called faith in high moral standards. This fact is again exemplified in the reaction of Arthur’s court after the beheading of the Green Knight. Though a magical incident has happened and it seems like a death game which Gawain cannot survive, Arthur’s court acts as if nothing has happened and continues to enjoy the meal. Instead of praying like a true Christian would do, the courtiers prefer to escape from the marvel they have witnessed. In this respect, the Gawain poet also brings a criticism of the sincerity of the court’s faith, and implies that under certain conditions like

miraculous events, religious doctrines may be of no use for those who do not share these beliefs from deep down their hearts.

Besides, when seen from a Jungian perspective, the opposite personality traits of Gawain and the Green Knight are also a part of the lesson the trickster is giving. The shadow, being the source of unknown and unconscious desires which may even date back to animal ancestral past of humanity, is also possible to include savage desires and acts of violence. The dual essence of the shadow archetype, not only by being the other part of a human but also having dualities in itself, is portrayed in the Green Knight. Both the Green Knight and Sir Bertilak, as two different identities of the same person, seem to enjoy life more, and they have a lively character. The Green Knight and Sir Bertilak both laugh a lot contrary to Gawain, who tries to follow the strict rules of courtesy, and they both seem to participate in life actively. Sir Bertilak attends hunts which are vividly described:

And the lord of the land rides late and long,
Hunting the barren hind over the broad heath.
He had slain such a sum, when the sun sank low,
Of does and other deer, as would dizzy one's wits.
[...]
They breached the broad breast and broke it in twain,
And again at the gullet they begin with their knives, (p.189)

The description of the hunt portrays the wild and lively nature of the hunt, and Sir Bertilak seems to enjoy participating in this messy action. The hunt requires a phase of chasing and also some sort of savagery which requires great energy. Keeping the nature of the hunt in mind, it seems that the savage and dark side of the self, the desires of the unconscious are directed towards the mundane world, and Sir Bertilak accepts the wild side in himself; he does not reject to participate in life because of chivalric code of courtesy.

Sir Gawain seems to lack the spontaneity Sir Bertilak has, and limits himself because of his strict rules of courtesy. Rather than accepting his wild side, Gawain is forced by his faith to prefer a secluded life, and become the hunt himself just like he becomes the prey of the lady, as he calls himself. It seems as if the Green Knight is

more human than Gawain. The trickster shows Gawain that there are other possibilities by combining the opposites, yet Gawain keeps on resisting. Gawain's attitude of pressing his wild side and trying to act according to the high standards of courtesy continues until the meeting at the Green Chapel.

The Green Chapel is also highly symbolic, and it is the place where the mystery resolves. Jung claims that "rock caves may be symbols of the womb of Mother Earth, appearing as mysterious caverns in which transformation and rebirth can come about". (Jung,et.al.; 1968, p.348) Thus the Green Chapel becomes a sacred place in which Gawain is supposed to go under a transformation, and by overcoming the crisis presented by the trickster, he can grasp a spiritual and personal integrity. However, Gawain's transformation succeeds to a little extent than the expected. In the chapel, the mystery of life and possibilities beyond a single understanding based upon Christianity are brilliantly displayed by the Gawain poet. After the second part of the beheading game is completed, and the true nature of the quest is explained by the Green Knight, Gawain acts as he feels, as his instincts and emotions tell him, and he ignores the courtly codes. Without considering the courtesy, Gawain expresses his anger towards himself and the Green Knight:

The other stout knight in a study stood a long while,
So gripped with grim rage that his great heart shook.
All the blood of his body burned in his face
As he shrank back in shame from the man's sharp speech.
The first words that fell from the fair knight's lips:
Accursed be a cowardly and covetous heart! (p.210)

Though in great rage, Gawain confesses his misdeed and asks to gain the Green Knight's grace back. The Green Knight, at the same time Gawain's shadow, forgives him of all his misdeeds without any condition:

You are so fully confessed, your failings made known,
And bear the plain penance of the point of my blade,
I hold you polished as a pearl, as pure and as bright
As you have lived free of fault since you were born. (p.210)

The Gawain poet has brilliantly replaced the Green Knight by a priest and made Gawain confess in the Green Chapel. Though forgiveness is expected from a Christian, the perfect Christian knight learns that he is imperfect and is forgiven. The shadow has forgiven Gawain and accepted him as pure as a pearl because the shadow has shown that perfection is out of the reach of man. The trickster has fulfilled its duty, and it is Gawain's duty to interpret what has happened. The girdle has become a reminder of the possibilities beyond the given. However, Gawain can only achieve transformation with the acceptance of his imperfection but he cannot establish integrity and grow up. Gawain, and thus the court, learns that their faith is not a sincere one and easily broken because of their own imperfection.

Although Edith Williams claims that Gawain has achieved his transformation by accepting his imperfection, his learning the fact that "certain types of behaviour (lustfulness, disloyalty, cowardice) would violate the values of his world", bring "shame to them" and this is the reason why the courtiers accept the girdle as a badge of honour(1985), that is not the case when Morgan's role in the poem is considered. It is true that Gawain has learned that man is imperfect, but both the court and Gawain have failed in understanding that their codes of conduct have been the obstacles against their integrity. What is being celebrated instinctively is the return of the feminine principle to Camelot through the girdle. Morgan and her wisdom have been re-integrated into Arthur's court, and a step has been taken towards the integrity of the courteous and the natural, Camelot and Hautdesert. A hidden enemy, an unseen natural power, has proved the Arthurian court that without establishing strong ties between religion and their codes of conduct, their set of values on which the society is supposed to be built upon are open to devastation.

When it comes to Morgan's role in the romance as the organizer of the whole event, things get a bit complicated. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan has turned out to be a positive power at the end, although she is depicted as an evil force in many other romances. Similar to the Green Knight, Morgan has a dual role both as the young and the old lady in the poem. This duality may resemble to that of the trickster archetype, but Morgan embodies much more than the Green Knight as the trickster figure. As a symbol of Morgan, the young lady seems to represent the anima archetype for Gawain. The anima is thought to reflect the feminine side of the psyche, and is associated with feelings and emotionality. A male understands the

female psyche through the anima. If the female aspects of the personality are not expressed, the traits of the feminine side remain immature, and result in a lack of integrated personality. In this sense, the young lady tests Gawain's masculine identity, and provides opportunities for Gawain to express his feelings freely. During Gawain's stay at Bertilak's castle, the young lady forces Gawain to question his courtly ideals by demonstrating the opposite attitudes of a courteous lady. The girdle which the lady gives is also an emblem of the union of the male and the female principles which Gawain fails to see.

Another symbol of Morgan, the old lady has a lot of resemblances with the mother archetype. Morgan shares the dual nature of the mother archetype as the way Jung has described its main characteristics:

The qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. [...] On the negative side the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate. [...] Perhaps the historical example of the dual nature of the mother most familiar to us is the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to the medieval allegories, his cross. (1991, p.82)

Similar to the mother archetype, Morgan has a dual nature in that she both forces Gawain to grow up on the one hand; but on the other hand, she tries to seduce him. Morgan has the magical authority which the mother archetype symbolizes, and her powers are beyond human understanding, and cannot be explained by reasoning. She prepares a great game for Arthur's court to show them their weaknesses just like a fostering mother, but at the same time she ignores Gawain's long and painful journey which reminds of her dark side. Besides all, Morgan is the creator and controller of the trickster, the Green Knight and so, embodies all the dualities of the trickster figure in herself. Since the perfect Christian knight has been given a lesson, and the feminine principle has entered Arthur's court, it may be claimed that Morgan has taken her place besides Mary; the knight of the Christian God has become the knight of the God and the Goddess.

Morgan's special role as the force behind all action, and her embodying many characteristics of different archetypal images from the anima to the trickster and the mother require her to be interpreted at a higher level. Morgan is the unifying power in which all traits of personality are gathered, probably the archetype which Jung calls 'the dark side of the self'. She is the feminine principle, and she is the mystery in which everything resolves. The journey to the Green Chapel is the journey to the feminine principles and integrity. As Heinrich Zimmer puts it

The male hero's compassing of the feminine principle by recognizing and acquiescing to its intrinsic features, signifies a reconciliation and union in him of opposites; and this eventuates in his release from every oneness, as well as from all the consequent fears and desires. The victory amounts to an accession to the wholeness of human consciousness, the winning of a maturity that balances the terms of life-death, male-female, and the other contrarities that split our common expression and experience of the single reality that is life. (1999, p.88)

Jungian theory has shown that the crisis posed by the trickster is usually resolved on the level of the anima. If the hero can resolve the trickster cycle, he can move on to develop his feminine traits through the anima. In the course of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the crisis posed by the trickster remains unresolved because Gawain chooses not to interpret the possibilities and opportunities presented to him: he is so obsessed with his courtly ideals and misinterpreted Christian faith that he cannot interact with the feminine principle to reach wholeness.

However, although Gawain has failed to overcome the absolutist values and doctrines, the Gawain poet has shown that there is a possibility beyond the given, and has heralded the return of the feminine principle. The feminine has been integrated into the Arthurian court as a reminder of the need for purity and true faith by a symbolic item, the girdle. The court turns the emblem of shame into a badge of honour to prove the worth of feudal values and the courtesy which the guiding principles for the society are built upon. The court has learnt that their faith still lacks integrity in that it is not so clear whether these warriors are the knights of God or Goddesses; this spiritual message warns the courtiers to retrieve misdeeds in their hearts and values.

The Gawain poet intertwines Christian and pagan elements, and portrays the common grounds on which both systems rely. The romance brings together the elements of the divine and the nature in Gawain's journey. The author combines Virgin Mary and Morgan le Fay in the same story, and shows the reader that both of them are on the same side. From a Jungian point of view, the poem becomes a spiritual growth story in which great psychic powers are engaged. Drawing on other Arthurian materials in which Morgan is portrayed as an evil force, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been interpreted as a romance about the evil forces of women, and Gawain has been regarded as a hero who has been a prey of women but could rescue himself. On the opposite side, critics⁷ have focused on Morgan's role as a truth-bringer via the Green Knight, and interpreted the so-called evil as a misinterpretation. Both sides of the critics have contributed to a better understanding and interpretation of the romance but again both sides have blamed each other, mainly around the themes of Christianity and pagan rituals. No matter what conclusions the religious doctrinal interpretations may reach, Morgan's role as a psychological phenomenon finally resolves in an elevated spirituality.

Whether the Gawain poet was a supporter of the Lollards or a follower of a theologian like Wycliff is a question out of the limits of this thesis, and the real underlying reasons and impulses why and how the Gawain poet wrote this romance will be no more than mere speculation without some autobiographical information about him. However, it is logical to claim that the Gawain poet believes that there is the possibility of a better organized society in which people, religious and secular authorities share some sort of purity in their beliefs and values. One has to realize and understand "the other" in order to develop a complete sense of identity which, in the case of Gawain in terms of Jungian interpretation, is the changing role of women and the essence of purity.

⁷ Critics quoting mainly from Edith Williams's article in which she discusses Morgan Le Fay's role as trickster have interpreted Morgan's role as a positive one, as a truth-bringer. The trickster, though may have negative and dangerous aspects, opens the way to transformation and finally lead to a better life spiritually.

4. DEFINING THE OTHER FOR A SOCIAL RE-FORMATION

What constitutes a nation and what values stand as the cornerstones of a strong feeling of unity among the people in a society has been a complex issue of investigation for many scholars since the times people have started sharing common lives in common territories under similar conditions. In discussing the medieval times, the question still stands as a complex structure demanding further interdisciplinary research. Yet, some basic assumptions can be made upon the origins and the nature of feudal society whose constituting elements can be observed in romances. As Whitaker notes, “the values of sovereignty, chivalry”, which are derived from and supporting the dominance of existing regime, “and Catholicism were made manifest by means of knightly rituals in a symbol-studded milieu”. (1970; p.206) However, the common grounds on which the authors arose could vary according to their points of view, and there was no common stance against certain conditions regarding the whole society. This phenomenon could also be sensed in Arthurian literary works which depict clashing ideals depending upon the times they were written. In Nicholson’s words, “there was no single ideal of knighthood propounded in the Arthurian prose romances; each author had their own ideas, and it is likely that successive developments reflect audience reaction to previous works”. (2001; p.205) Though audience reaction can be seen as a force in shaping these romances, the major motive behind the mentioned changes can be regarded, on the contrary, as an attempt to shape the society to meet the expected standards of the time.

The norms imposed upon society are seemingly based upon Christian ethics, but the true agencies behind those established values are in fact economic factors and production relations. The underlying substance which forms the society is supposed to be religion and chivalry. However, a deeper analysis makes it clear that blasphemy has taken over the society, especially the upper classes in that they have lost their

sincerity in faith and their own purity. As Bruce has mentioned, “in the romance, as in the actual life of the times, the conversion of the king meant, inevitably, also, the conversion of his subjects”. (1958; p.390) From this perspective, the actions of the aristocracy can be said to have resulted in a change in whole society, and a feeling of alienation to the common grounds of the nation caused reactions against such changes. The author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* portrays such a reaction against the harms brought by the changing economic relations and their results.

In discussing the relation between personal and national identity, the author stands on the side of preservation of the national, and supports the sacrifice of the individual for the common good of the national. Furthermore, the national expectations shape the individual’s character since “for the Gawain-Poet, communal pressures shape individual identity”. (Delman; 2011, p.113) However, the common grounds which constitute the British national identity seem to be destabilized by the rising ideological reactions. The work draws a picture of a time in which the demands of the other brings the feudal system into question. Though Carolyn King Stephens claims that “the sacredness of life was the transcendent value proclaimed in the poem” (2000; p.376), what constitutes a sacred life, the role of individual in preserving this life and what rules are to be taken as guides to such a form of life are still a matter of discussion in the work. When the clashing ideas are taken into consideration from this perspective, we see that the poet goes on a quest to formalize some basic assumptions about what and how the British identity shall be. By juxtaposing the early and the late middle ages, the author claims that similar threats still exist no matter how much time has passed since the adoption of Christian values.

As an individual representing the ideal world of Christianity and chivalry at the same time, the hero has to learn his background and his true identity in the author’s eyes. By weaving together the elements of the religious and the chivalric, the pagan and the Christian, the worldly and the other-worldly, the poet displays a world in which the remnants of the pagan past become visible and threatening no sooner than new social changes appear through developing economic relations such as women participating in trade, the peasants selling their labour which is the early forms of wage labour and increasing number of merchants. The hero, thus, becomes a victim of these forces at the same time, and his failure would not only be a secular, but also a religious one. By putting *Gawain* into a world of chaos, the author reminds

the audience the necessity to re-discover their identities and their true values; he “etches the struggle of human nature competing and cooperating with faith into the image of the Green Knight, a series of contrasting and dissonant parts working towards a unified whole”. (Byrne; 2013, p.8) The wholeness of an individual, for the author, depends on purity and knowing who you are, your true identity which is an integral part of your national identity. The hero has to find out his true self by courageously facing threats towards his court and society.

All the dualities in the poem, whether spiritual or material, serve to lay the foundations of a veiled discussion of identity. The author criticizes the changes due to the rising commercialism, and tries to eliminate the exchange of religious values with the materialistic ones. The relativity of values cannot be a matter of debate for the highest representatives of Christian and chivalric sphere, yet Richard Allen Shoaf argues that the poem is “pervaded by comparisons and measurements, of doublings and tests, of games and covenants; it structures a vision of relativity and relationship in human exchange”. (Shoaf in Coe; 2005, p.97) Even though the relativity of values is displayed in the poem, the author uses these elements to translate the differences of identity into the minds of the audience. The presence of differences makes the author able to discuss what constitutes the “other” from a feudal perspective.

In a time when Black Death, religious debates, and power struggles have left the nation with a feeling of uncertainty, unity among the British is being questioned by the society, and the author aims at building self-awareness with a developed national consciousness. The fellowship proposed by the work is a religious one in that those who do not share the same religious doctrines are regarded as the “other”. During the period of this uncertainty, the question of Scotland and Wales is a sub-theme connected with this discussion of unity. As James Stewart claims, “if Richard could use distinctions of faith to justify his attacks on Scotland as a foreign nation, then religious identity clearly played a central role in constituting national identity”. (2011; p.38) By placing the British identity on Christian doctrines, the author creates a space to discuss various elements of the “other”, and no matter what the other differences are, from territorial to personal, he/she can claim in the hero’s character that a strong group identity can be formed based upon Christian values.

Throughout the romance, the audience realizes that things are not just what they are, but rather they carry a symbolic meaning which makes them more complex than what they are. A kiss is not just a kiss, but on the contrary, it can become a device to lead a whole society to devastation. The author portrays striking events and characters in order to direct attention to simple but at the same time complex events. In a combination of opposing terms, the work warns against the potential lethality of simple choices without deep considerations about values. In his discussion of language and identity, John Plummer claims that “the challenge of the poem is not for Gawain to accomplish something, but to become something, and to become aware of what, or who, he is”. (1991; p.198) That is to say, the hero is supposed to examine his own ideological assumptions, take steps in accordance with his faith and become aware of the awaiting dangers. As for the British, the solution is presented as a strong feudal unity based upon Christian doctrines.

The question of unity and the ‘other’ can be traced all through the work. Even at the very beginning of the poem, after the author describes the courtiers as the “happiest of mortal kind”, the festival in which all the “loveliest ladies”, “many good knights” and the “noblest King” (p.163) are enjoying themselves in a strong sense of fellowship is broken by a green stranger, the Green Knight. The intruder breaks the social interaction among the courtiers without considering courtesy, and stands as the sign of the other at the first encounter. Though the communal -the court- provides the courtiers (moreover the society) with nourishment, a sense of belonging and social unity, a sudden threat posed by a stranger breaks apart all the joy. The communal is broken by the individual; common good is put into danger by the individual desire. The poem shows that national identity is to be broken without common values, and thus criticizes the emerging value sets.

This breaking up of the national identity was not a sudden incident but rather a long process which took place simultaneously with the economic changes. On the transition phase from feudalism to capitalism, Claudio Katz believes that a specific period for England existed:

Marx’s explanation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism delineates an intervening period, neither feudal nor capitalist, characterized by the prevalence of independent peasant cultivators. “In England”, he writes, “serfdom had practically disappeared in the last part of the 14th century. The

immense majority of the population consisted then, and to a larger extent, in the 15th century, of free peasant proprietors, whatever was the feudal title under which their right of property was hidden.” [...] The preconditions of capitalist accumulation, Marx argues, were established by this economy of relatively unfettered commodity production. (1993; p.366)⁸

The specific condition of England is characterized in the search for a national identity in the romance. As a threat to the unity in Arthur’s court, the Green Knight embodies the challenges of a rising commercialist individualist identity. The poet personifies the problems of his time in this intruder as a mechanism to warn his society about the awaiting destruction. The disguised personality traits of an individualist commercialist identity are portrayed as an intruder into the peak of feudal monarch-Arthur’s court- and the struggle becomes the one between the established norms of feudalism and those appearing after the rise of early capitalism. The author uses the elements of magic, mystery, and marvels in order to describe the “other” with regard to the uncertainty, and the strangeness they produce. In other words, by creating a sense of the unknown, the author locates the Green Knight and Hautdesert as the opposite, the other of well-structured, secure Camelot. The slow change of feudal, chivalric, and religious values towards a more individualistic, commercialist and material-oriented value system is shown in a series of tests the hero undergoes.

During the festival held at Arthur’s court when the joy is shared by all the courtiers, the Green Knight’s proposal of a game breaks the integrity of the court. The intruder does not pay attention to courtesy, nor does he show respect to the court as he mocks the courtiers by labelling them as cowards. The stranger’s proposal is not the one derived from the feudal laws, but rather seems to be based upon personal judgements and individual justice:

But if you be so bold as all men believe,
You will graciously grant the game that I ask
by right. (p.168)

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the transition process from feudalism to capitalism in England, see Katz;C.J. *Karl Marx on the transition from feudalism to capitalism*. Theory and Society.1993

This proposal of a game is described as an agreement asked upon right. The Green Knight declares that it is his right to ask for such a game the rules of which depend upon personal judgement. Apart from the feudal laws, this demand resembles the peasants' revolts and their will for separate laws around the time the work was written. The author makes a connection between the revolts and the Green Knight by presenting them as harming the unity of society. Individualism is seen as a destructive value, and it destroys social bonds which the feudal system has built.

The individual justice test-the beheading game- is responded by Gawain, who denounces himself as the "weakest" of all and claims his life as unimportant. (p.169) The hero acts in accordance with chivalric ideals in that he values the communal well-being more than his own life, and he sacrifices his life for his king, his feudal lord. Though his acceptance of the challenge is a sign of his faith in chivalric ideals as the highest principles, during the course of his quest, the perfect knight changes his attitude. He places faith in a magical item rather than his religious devotion to God. This change of attitude stems from an astray in his value system; rather than protecting the honour of the court without considering his life, the hero turns to an individualistic approach by caring for his safety rather than anything else. Contrary to the chivalric duty which he demonstrates at Camelot on his first encounter, Gawain forgets about his religious and feudal devotion, his loyalty to the king and God when the matter is his own life.

The poem also presents the two courts as opposing powers no matter how similar they seem to be. After a long journey in the wild, the hero reaches a castle in which he is welcomed in accordance with the courtesy suitable for chivalric values. The Green Knight's castle is described as "a castle as comely as a knight could own" with "many trees" around it like a "goodly park". (p.178) In opposition to Arthur's court where there is no emphasis on private property but rather on the unity of courtiers, the Green Knight's castle is "owned" by a knight. This description implies that the castle is governed by other rules different from feudal ones, and the "owner" of the castle is not a standard feudal lord, but a merchant instead. As the case was in late Middle Ages when the gentry involved in trade had more land than the lords, Hautdesert is located on a vast amount of land with impressive scenery. It is the

place where threats towards Arthur's court originate, and it is the source of the test in which Gawain's transformation is supposed to occur.

Similar to the celebration held at Arthur's court, Gawain is provided with plenty of food in his new hostage. Moreover, the meals served at Hautdesert are rich of sauces and spices which make a difference from that of Camelot:

There were soups of all sorts, seasoned with skill,
Double-sized servings, and sundry fish,
Some baked, some breaded, some broiled on the coals,
Some simmered, some in stews, steaming with spice,
And with sauces to sup that suited his taste. (p.181)

Though the meals are regarded as suitable for the representative of high courtesy on the one hand, a distinctive feature of the traditions between the two courts glitters on the other. Bennett directs attention to the use of spices which "were imported goods in this region, and the fact that they were not always available or easy to find. Bertilak's personal involvement in trade at the market may account for his ability to obtain spices". (Bennett in Bright; 2003, p.326) In other words, Sir Bertilak resembles a merchant who has the ability and chance to obtain such goods more than a lord; furthermore, spices are known to be the products of trade in the market which can be regarded as the household engaged in commercial relations.

Bertilak's ability in trade also comes across Gawain during his stay at Hautdesert when the host proposes another agreement. The lord of the house asks for an exchange agreement of whatever they both gain during the hero's stay. He tells his guest that:

Whatever I win in the woods I will give you at eve,
And all you have earned you must offer to me;
Swear now, sweet friend, to swap as I say,
Whether hands, in the end, be empty or better. (p.185)

This agreement seems like a trade agreement in which goods are produced for exchange contrary to the production for use. The language they use is also that of a merchant; they describe their covenant as a "bargain", talk about "profit" and "skill"

as a substitute for labour. Their gains in three days are also compared to each other in terms of their exchange values. The host asks his guest whether he has won a “worthy prize” that can equal the prize he will receive in return. (p.191) This trade agreement prepares Gawain for the future benefits he will be persuaded to accept.

In addition to the landlord’s ability in trade, Lady Bertilak, too, shows great skills in mercantile offers. In order to obtain a kiss from Gawain, she forces him to make a truce or else he would be bound in bed:

Now you are taken in a trice- a truce we must make,
Or I shall bind you in your bed, of that be assured. (p.187)

With her skill in trade and tactics such as praising Gawain for his reputation, the lady achieves to convince the hero to accept her kisses. Even more, she uses the courtly love language to serve her interests although she does not share common values, and thus, she succeeds in giving the perfect Christian knight a so-called magical item-the girdle- which becomes an emblem of shame for Gawain. The language she uses in her proposal of a gift and convincing him to accept the girdle instead of her ring clearly shows the lady’s awareness of discrepancy between the use and the exchange of values. Upon Gawain’s refusal of the ring, the lady states that

If my ring is refused for its rich cost-
You would not be my debtor for so dear a thing-
I shall give you my girdle; you gain less thereby. (p.200)

The lady takes advantage of the hero’s situation like a real merchant in that she is well aware of the fact that Gawain cannot accept the ring because he knows Sir Bertilak will recognize that it is his wife’s ring, and this would offend him. By acting like a courtly lover, she gives her girdle instead by telling the knight that its value is much less than the ring. In doing so, she makes a clear distinction between the values of the two goods, even though the girdle would profit Gawain more. The hero is led into the individualist world of commercialist values by running after personal welfare, and the lady succeeds in transforming the feudal hero to the extent that he

will forget about his religious devotion. The chivalric knight hides his new gain from the host, and by breaking the covenant they have made, the hero fails in pursuing his courtly ideals for personal benefit- the preservation of his life.

Even from his early days at Hautdesert, Gawain's transformation occurs step by step without him realizing. The author donates the hero with a world of comparisons and exchanges. Upon seeing the lady for the first time, the courteous hero compares her to Guinevere, and finds her even more beautiful than his queen. What's more, he compares Lady Bertilak and the old lady in the castle in terms of physical beauty and appearance:

But unlike to look upon, those ladies were,
For if the one was fresh, the other was faded:
[...]
More toothsome, to his taste,
Was the beauty by her side. (p.182)

Without a care for courtesy and his religious devotion to Virgin Mary, Gawain feels a temptation to the young lady, and he makes a comparison like valuing two commodities. This comparison pattern also portrays the difference in the hero's personality traits when he rests in Hautdesert. Although the lord is in the forest leading "the hunt", the representative of Arthur's court, "the good knight in gay bed lies". (p.187) The exchange agreement turns the good knight into a passive, open target for the emerging threats posed by the 'hunter'. The final hunt is also highly symbolic in that catching a fox requires great skills and effort-in a way labour- which reminds of the final gift given to our hero is supposed to be a tricky one.

The tricky quest Gawain tries to fulfil is unfamiliar to him. In Camelot, he lives in harmony with the courtiers according to common rules, and they lead a communal life. All the courtiers share the same chapel in Arthur's court whereas in Hautdesert there are "chaplains in chapels". (p.181) Different chapels for the same community signal the absence of unity among the society which the hero is unfamiliar with. Furthermore, the mentioning of "chambers" gives a hint of varied spaces for individuals and private space for courtiers. (p.179) The individuation process becomes visible in terms of religion in this opposing court to Arthur's. When

the time comes to pray, “the lord attends alone; his fair lady sits, in a comely closet, secluded from sight”. (p.181) Due to the changes in values which resulted in a highly-esteemed individualism, people in Bertilak’s castle see religion as an individual relation and personal choice; they prefer to pray in secluded spaces-private rooms-. The lord “owns” a castle; people pray individually, the seduction occurs in a private room; in this respect, Hautdesert stands as the source of privatization.

However, besides the contrasts between the two courts, the author also portrays similarities which bring the two closer. No matter how far the distance between the two societies is geographically, the poet tries to establish a common ground for the two based on Christian principles. Neither Gawain nor Sir Bertilak are faultless; they both fail in their duties partly in that the hero cannot follow his guiding principles under all conditions, and on the other hand, the host cannot achieve to transform his guest’s identity. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, feudal governance under Christian principles is given as an answer to the search for a common British identity. The author presents a world in which the ‘other’ is united under British identity on condition that they share common orthodox Christian faith, and the upper-class realizes awaiting dangers of a neglected ‘other’.

Keeping in mind that an exchange is two-sided, the gift-giving process, and exchange agreements between the two major characters in the poem enable the author present his understanding of ideal community. The hero, as a representative of Arthur’s court, embodies the highest standards of chivalry, which is not only loyalty to his king but also the idea of courtesy. In terms of Christian knighthood and chivalric duty, courtesy requires more than kindness to women and good will. In the hierarchy of feudal order, a good man is supposed to share a ‘brotherly love’ for his fellows, and participate in gift-giving as a social gesture in terms of courtesy. The nobility shall be generous towards the lower social groups in order to sustain unity among the fellows and relieve social tensions. Though the reasons why gifts are given in the two courts differ from each other, the event itself brings the two societies together. Gifts become the emblems of social unity which determine the borders of a social group and identity. The author does not exclude the ‘other’ from the national identity by making it participate in the common traditional exchanges. Those gift-given and gift-givers are seen as parts of the same community.

In addition, the exchange scenes make it possible for the poet to discuss his idea of economic exchange between the people of nobility. Though the nature of gift-giving between Gawain and Bertilak changes towards a commercialist standpoint later, the hero's refusal of explaining where he obtained the kiss on the first day upon his host's questioning implies that gift itself is more important than its value. No one profits more than the other in this type of exchange without a consideration of value. What matters is the continuation of giving without paying attention to the value of the gift, and it is the chivalric imperative to give so as to strengthen the unity among the people in society according to Christian principles and customs rather than individual benefits. From this perspective, the exchange agreement between the host and the guest carries a dual nature like many other structures in the poem. The agreement both aims at leading the hero towards an increased selfish behaviour on the one hand, and on the other, reminds the nobility to bring the two distinct societies under the same principle of sharing.

Taking the message of the exchange a step further, the poem targets the stabilizing social unity through reminding lower classes of the meaning of giving. With an implied reference to the peasants who had started revolts against the established hierarchy, the poet claims that different social groups can at times get more or less, but no matter how much their gains may differ, they still share the same common faith, which makes them a single community sharing the British identity on the grounds of Christian values. In this respect, acting against the established norms of feudal order brings harm to the harmony of a whole nation, which the author also demonstrates by attaching the history of nation to that of Troy at the beginning of his poem. Acting against the unity brings destruction, and in the case of Britain, this act means ignoring Christian faith.

The author's reference to the story of Troy also brings about the question of women's role in society. Just like many other phenomena in the romance, the perception of women is also a dual one. Both the ladies in the two courts-Guinevere and Lady Bertilak- are seated next to their lords in respected status. The women are seen as neither all evil nor all good in total. Although both ladies seem to have strong positions in their courts, they both are the objects of masculine desire; one is seen as the representative of courtly ideals as a lady, and the other is a passive object of a game which her husband has imposed upon her. Moreover, despite the fact that

Gawain's horse has a name-Gringolet-, the lady exists only through a reference to her husband, Bertilak. Yet, in the bedroom scenes, the lady becomes a powerful female figure making the hero an object of feminine desire, contrary to the norms of courtly love. This duality is also seen when it comes to the role of Guinevere. Throughout the romance, the queen never speaks but after the Green Knight's departure, Arthur tries to comfort her first. From this point of view, the lady is both seen as important, and also as an object to be protected by men.

In a broader sense, Gawain's shield also gives a hint of perception of women. Virgin Mary's portrait on the inner of the hero's shield is a symbol showing the expected norms from a lady. A male's adoption of a female religious figure implies that women can be guides to spiritual matters but yet, even Mary can be seen as an object painted in a male's shield, which he turns to in times of need. Even at some point, the Virgin leads the Christian knight to a castle where his loyalty would be tested with a seduction attempt. The expectation from Virgin Mary that she shall assist Gawain in his quest is a clear example of how far the male dominance over females can broaden. As the hero feels he is lost in his search for the Green Chapel, he calls for Mary to help him, and lay her spiritual and holy powers in his service. Similar to the general attitude towards all women, Virgin Mary is also idealized on the one hand and turned into an object on the other.

A further notice on the role of Morgan le Fay demonstrates that women are seen as active players in social life but yet their roles are regarded as evil, especially when they participate in political life. As the force behind all the events in the poem, Morgan plays the role of the 'unknown' and 'incomprehensible', working against the stabilized union of society. She is a strong character with the ability to perform magic, the element of mystery, and she stands as the judge to evaluate Arthur's court in terms of their sincerity. This god-like female carries both positive and negative aspects of life in her presence. Although she is explained as the reason of this testing, her role in the poem is undermined eventually to a few lines. Like the other female figures, she is overlooked by male figures at the end when Gawain and Sir Bertilak part away in the Green Chapel. They both share the idea that women's participation in political life brings destruction, an idea strengthened by a second reference to the story of Troy at the end of the romance.

Upon the hero's return to Camelot, the courtiers decide to wear a green baldric as a token of fellowship in remembrance of Gawain's misfortunate story. Though the hero sees the girdle as an emblem of shame, the court laughs at his story showing that the hero's quest is successful no matter what has taken place, and he is welcomed into the union with a developed awareness of dangers awaiting the court. Just like the ending of the romance in which the author reminds the good days of young Arthurian court, the unity of society is still preserved by faith despite the unknown threats posed by the 'other'. By linking these threats to Morgan, the author aims at undermining the potential of social unrest, and tries to warn all social classes about going pagan due to economic changes. For the Gawain-poet, these economic and social changes are doings of evil, and cannot pose a real danger for the unity of British society as long as they share same religious values regardless of their geographical distances. The emerging practices can be held under religious interpretations with a deepened faith in Christian fellowship since gift-giving is also a part of courtesy and chivalry. The commercial relations can be shaped to suit religious ideals, and the best way to protect national identity is to defend a strong feudal hierarchy in which all classes of society, from the king to peasants, are the servants of God. Accepting the girdle as a reminder of the 'other' on the one hand, and also re-integrating it into the court on the other hand, the author shares his belief that distinct societies can live in harmony with the feeling of belonging to a national identity so long as they have the common religious dedications. The threats posed towards the unity are just temporary nuisances which serve to better stabilize the grounds on which British identity is built upon, and as in the cyclical nature of history, even evil such as those brought by Morgan can be turned into good in times. Purity and a strong faith can change evil into good just as in the case of Gawain's testing which resulted in a higher self-awareness both for him and his court.

5. CONCLUSION

From a dialectical perspective, history is the totality of conflicts among individuals and societies, and of the social, individual relations in terms of economic changes. Due to the interrelated nature of every single part of human life, a simple change in one aspect, through the chain reaction, results in a wider effect on the whole. Human societies consist of individuals who are in relations with nature, and the mode of production methods they adopt determines their lifestyles; from eating habits to religious doctrines. Regardless of an individual's will, in history human beings have entered into periods of different production modes which can be tracked to define the structure (base and superstructure) of a society. In other words, history is characterized by certain production modes which have created certain intellectual and religious trends, and usually the dominant ruling class needs the existence of the oppressed class to continue its hegemony. The struggle between classes finds its expression in events like revolts when certain basic conditions are fulfilled by means of production relations. There is a constant change in social life just like there is in nature itself, and this change in social life occurs as an abolishment of the dominant production mode. The replacement of the old system with the new one can be painful during the transition period due to the inevitable results of social crises and/or upheavals.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight stands as a 14th century romance written during the transitional period from the medieval to the Renaissance period, the era when people still could not name what they were going through. The feudal system was being transformed into the capitalist mode of production which the Gawain-poet interpreted as going pagan as a result of the unfamiliarity of changing value sets. The social standards were being replaced by the newer ones and this shift itself was a real threat to the feudal hierarchy the author is trying to protect. From this perspective, any source of damage to the norms of a chivalric culture would be seen as the

unknown, the incomprehensible, in other words, as the 'other', and it exists in the varied parts of social life; from religion to the role of woman as a destructive force for the poet. Without noticing the inevitability of change, the author tries to defend feudalism by demonstrating the possible destructive consequences of the burgeoning capitalist practices. In order to make the 'other' public and known, he positions the courtier (Sir Gawain) in *Hautdesert* to speak and act on behalf of the 'other', who is finally trapped by feudalism.

Throughout the poem, the poet presents his/her ideal world in terms of feudal governance, and portrays the lethality of blasphemy the British society is ignoring. At the beginning of the romance, the portrayal of happiness and joy in *Camelot* as a perfect society is broken by a complete stranger (the Green Knight), through whom the author tests the sincerity of the aristocratic world by putting them into a test in which their loyalty to chivalric and religious ideals is challenged. The author sends the 'perfect' knight, Sir Gawain, on a quest as a part of this challenge, and this quest serves as the basis for the discussion of further issues regarding the feudal society. Although these issues stem from economic changes, the quest reveals that all aspects of social organization and values are challenged by the developments of the time. The poem, thus, questions its time with a reference to earlier wisdom of its society in a multi-layered context. The author tries to discuss the changes in religion, religious identity, the origins of chivalric culture, the role of women in society, and the protection of feudal hierarchy to sustain a national unity.

The author's reaction to deterioration in religion finds expression in his comparison of the two courts in terms of their religious devotion. We see the echo of a rising individualism in religion which the poet sees as going pagan. As in *Hautdesert*, individual religious practices, contrary to communal Christian devotion, which is presented as the basic principle of British national identity, lead to the loss of the sense of unity. Though the two courts seem to be different from each other, the quest's mood implies that they both share certain similarities which locate them against a true Christian faith. Rather than following a spiritual love, both courts seem to have preferred to follow a courtly love relation without the care for religion. The hero's failure is connected to the disloyalty of Gawain to his court's standards in the romance, and this failure is a warning for the British not to overcome remnants of the past.

The transition process is not only criticised from a religious perspective but also from the changing roles of woman regarded as threat to national identity. New attitudes act as a triggering force of suppressed feelings which cause a feeling of alienation from the society, and these feelings are expressed through the psychological complexes which are revealed as archetypes. The text argues that besides the harms to religion, the emerging models result in a spiritual disharmony, and just like in the case of an individual's facing serious obstacles, the British are left with hard questions that demand spiritual growth. The archetypal images presented in the poem reveal the author's inner desire for spiritual wellness as a conclusion of the troubles the nation faces due to the changing roles of women. The author feels that female participation in politics and emerging practices causes contradictions between the theory and practise of the chivalric values. The inner call for balance is a demonstrator of the poet's disturbance about the alienation common in the whole nation.

The poem is rich of suggestions for the aristocracy and commoners in its implications. The audience are taken on a quest with the hero to question themselves about what really matters. For the Gawain-poet, the unity and national identity can be preserved despite some differences and distances so long as the society shares the same religion. Each social class is taken on this quest for the re-integration of the 'other' into the feudal order, and the poem displays solutions to the emerging threats. Each class has lessons to learn from the quest; the clergy is criticized for the rising individualism and worldliness, the aristocracy for losing their connections with a sincere spiritual authority, and the laymen for breaking the feudal order. What lies at the heart of all nuisances is the changing economic system which can be seen as the early step of capitalism, and the author tries to stand against the inevitability of the changing of time. For the Gawain-poet, the emerging values mean going pagan and losing national identity, and the only solution is the struggle to re-establish a truly Christian feudal reign by remembering the ideal world of *Camelot*.

In this struggle for unity, the poet claims that the 'other' can be integrated into the English identity through Christian values. All exchanges can take place in accordance with religious doctrines, and the threats to the system are just the evil happenings connected to magic. With the attribution to magic element-Morgan- in the poem, the 'other' is mystified instead of real troubles related with the Welsh or

the Scottish, the peasants' condition and the role of women in society. In this struggle for union against the anti-religious 'other', *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* proposes that despite the geographical distances and class differences, the British may live together in harmony under feudal order if they achieve integration through remembering the true essence of Christianity.

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